

An auto-racing game you can really lap up

By Edward J. Semrad

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The game: *Pole Position*



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Holds Interest — *Very Long*. Graphics — *Excellent*. Level of Difficulty — *Average*. Audio — *Very Good*. Overall Rating — *Excellent*.

Pole Position as an arcade game has been out for some time now, and if you were as impressed with it as I was, you probably couldn't wait until it became available for the home game systems. The wait is over, because Atari has released the game for its 2600 and 5200 systems and Vectrex owners. There even is a version available for your system.

For those of you with home computers, Pole Position, on the AtariSoft label, was shown at the winter Consumer Electronic Show for the following systems: Atari, VIC-20, Commodore 64, IBM-PC, Apple II, and the TI 99/4A. The computer versions should be available shortly.

Atari did an outstanding job in translating the arcade game to the 5200 system. They are almost identical except the 5200 game doesn't have the voice synthesis and there aren't any names on the billboards. In fact, in one way the 5200 copy is better than the arcade version because you have the option of selecting from four different types of tracks. In this respect, Atari was actually giving us a preview of what was to come in the arcade sequel — Pole Position II. If you like racing games, this one is a must. I recommend it highly.

Before you can compete in any one of the races you must first qualify for one of the eight starting positions. You have 90 seconds in the qualifying run, but you have to complete the lap in 73 seconds or less to qualify for a race. If you don't qualify, you continue driving for the remainder of the 90 seconds and then the game ends. The faster you qualify, the better starting position you will have, and if you finish the lap in 58.50 seconds, you will get the pole position.

75 seconds to do lap

Now you are ready to race. You have 75 seconds to complete the first lap. If you finish in time an additional 60 seconds is added to your remaining time and you get another lap. Each lap up to the maximum of eight gets harder because more cars, spaced closer together, appear on the track.

Points are awarded throughout the race. For every five meters you drive you get 50 points. When you qualify, you get bonus points ranging from 200 to 4,000 depending on your lap time. At the end of the race you will get 50 additional points for every car you passed and, if you complete all of the selected laps, you will get an additional 200 points for each second left on the clock. When you are able to complete four laps on the Atari Grand Prix, consider yourself an excellent driver. If you can finish all eight laps on the same course think about being a professional race car driver.

Is Pole Position the ultimate home video racing game? Before you answer, let's review the competition. First, there are the 2600 games — Enduro and Pole Position. Because of the limited memory, the graphics are blocky but the games are still enjoyable. Second, the Vectrex system has its own version of Pole Position, but it isn't very colorful and the game just wasn't designed for vector graphics. Third, the Intellivision system has several good games, includ-

ing Coleco's version of Turbo, but again the graphics aren't spectacular and the controller does present some problems.

An expensive game

Finally, there is Turbo for the Colecovision and Super Turbo for the Adam. The game is expensive (\$70 list), but you get a steering wheel and an accelerator pedal along with the game. The steering wheel is a real plus but the pedal may be overdoing it. After 500,000 points, your foot gets tired. The graphics are outstanding and almost to the point of distraction.

All that's left is Pole Position. There is no elaborate scenery to distract you, the road fills most of the screen and the cars are large and detailed. In addition you do have to qualify before you race and the "over the shoulder" perspective makes you feel like you are in a race car.

But is it the ultimate game? To me the ideal game should have the steering wheel from Turbo, the four-speed gear selection from Hyperchase (Vectrex), and the graphics and race track from Pole Position. Until then, the 5200 version of Pole Position will remain the best.

Don't forget to enter the video game trivia contest. The first prize is an Activision game and the second prize an Activision key chain. The questions were in the Feb. 18 column. The deadline is March 9, 1984, and winners will be announced March 17. One final hint about the contest: Many of you are having problems with question nine. Go back and reread the column of Dec. 19, 1983, to get the correct answer.