

the digital life



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▶▶ BITS & BYTES



Powerhouse star of big screen arrives

Big need for speed

Speed Racer is one of the big summer movies of 2008 in America (winter in Australia) squarely aimed at the teen and preteen audiences who, once they get home from the cinema, can pop the *Speed Racer* videogame (pictured above) into their Wii, step into *Speed's* Mach 6 and live out their freshly-stoked stunt racing fantasies.

Unlike many movie tie-ins, *Speed Racer* doesn't re-tell the plot of the film. Players simply pick a racer (who comes with a set car) and drop straight into a simple championship mode, where they earn points for placing and causing Car-Fu damage to other racers.

You can offer Car-Fu immunity to (and accept offers from) other racers. Taking allies out earns you a penalty. Winning championships unlocks more events and drivers. Single Race and Time Trial modes are also available.

The game recommends you use the Wii Wheel but I played fine with a regular Wii Remote.

Tilting the remote to steer takes getting used to but shoving it left and right to shunt other drivers is a blast, as is hefting it to jump your car.

Game play is simple, yet fun. You can drive fast, try to hit speed zones, pass or shunt other drivers.

Managing your health and boost-fuel brings a neat tactical element to the game but getting penalised for smashing allies didn't seem to hamper my races at all.

Visually, the game will keep youngsters' eyes glued to the set. The tracks are gravity-defying with jumps, tubes, loop-the-loops and the like and the presentation is psychedelic to say the least.

Audio is serviceable and the film's three leads voice their characters. But the music seems like the same two or three remixes of the film's soundtrack.

Still, kids probably won't notice. Is it worth the \$80 price tag? Maybe not for grown-ups but like the movie, the kids probably won't shut up about it for weeks.

Speed Racer is available at all Nintendo Wii dealers around Cairns.

— Rob Farquhar

Acer has created an entertainment dynamo, writes **STEPHEN FENECH**

If you're in the market for a new laptop, the real trick is finding the right model to suit your needs and wallet. Some users look for a workhorse, while others may opt for a lightweight, durable model.

Providing entertainment is another demand placed on laptops and Acer has come up with a new model that will easily meet the challenge. The Acer Aspire Gemstone 8920G is an entertainment powerhouse.

Sporting a massive 46.7cm full high-definition 16:9 widescreen display, the Gemstone 8920G is as much a portable home theatre system as it is a computer. It has the biggest screen we have ever seen on a laptop and also one of the best.

And what better way to enjoy the device's large full HD screen than with a Blu-ray Disc movie courtesy of the internal Blu-ray Combo + Super Multi-drive. During testing the incredible sound quality of the Gemstone 8920G was impressive, thanks to its Dolby Home Theatre enhancement with sound expander technology. There are five speakers positioned above the keyboard as well as Acer's Tube CineBass Booster, which acts like a home theatre subwoofer for low frequency effects.

The Gemstone 8920G can even handle high-definition audio such as Dolby TrueHD, which is found



on most movies on Blu-ray Disc.

The result is a movie that sounds like it was coming out of a dedicated set of speakers.

What enhances the experience is a touch-sensitive control pad that acts like the system's remote control to navigate the movie and special features as well as adjust the volume.

Just a glide of the finger easily turns the sound up and down and

a trail of blue LEDs also change in time to indicate the exact volume level.

It's also possible to experience Blu-ray on a display that's even larger than the Gemstone 8930G's screen using the HDMI out port to connect the laptop to a flatscreen TV.

The built-in NVidia 512MB GeForce 9500m graphics card ensures fast response and smooth

rendering when playing the latest PC titles.

The Gemstone 8920G, running the Windows Vista Ultimate operating system, is powered by an Intel Core 2 Duo T8300 processor. Inside is a 320GB hard disk drive (expandable to 500GB) along with a generous 3GB RAM, which is expandable to 4GB.

On the outside is a rich blue lid with an Acer logo that glows when the machine is switched on.

With so much room inside, there is not only a full-size keypad but also a numerical keypad on the right side.

But it lost some points with the mouse trackpad, which is far too small for the large screen. It took three swipes across the pad to move the arrow from one side of the screen to the other.

Users are given a wide range of connectivity choices with four USB ports, an Ethernet port, modem port, a 6-in-1 card reader slot and a microphone-in jack.

Hooking into a wireless network is also made possible with the 802.11a/b/g and draft N wi-fi compatibility. The Gemstone 8920G also has a VoIP phone.

Now while the Gemstone 8920G has a multitude of features, it is not for everybody.

For a start, the device is big and heavy. It weighs 4.1kg so it's not ideal to lug around.

Just finding a laptop bag big enough to fit it in will probably be a challenge. But on the upside, it's also quite reasonably priced at \$2699. The Acer Aspire Gemstone 8920G is a real heavyweight when it comes to entertainment but it's built for comfort not speed.

The Acer Aspire Gemstone 8920G is priced at \$2699 and available by calling 1300 366 567.

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