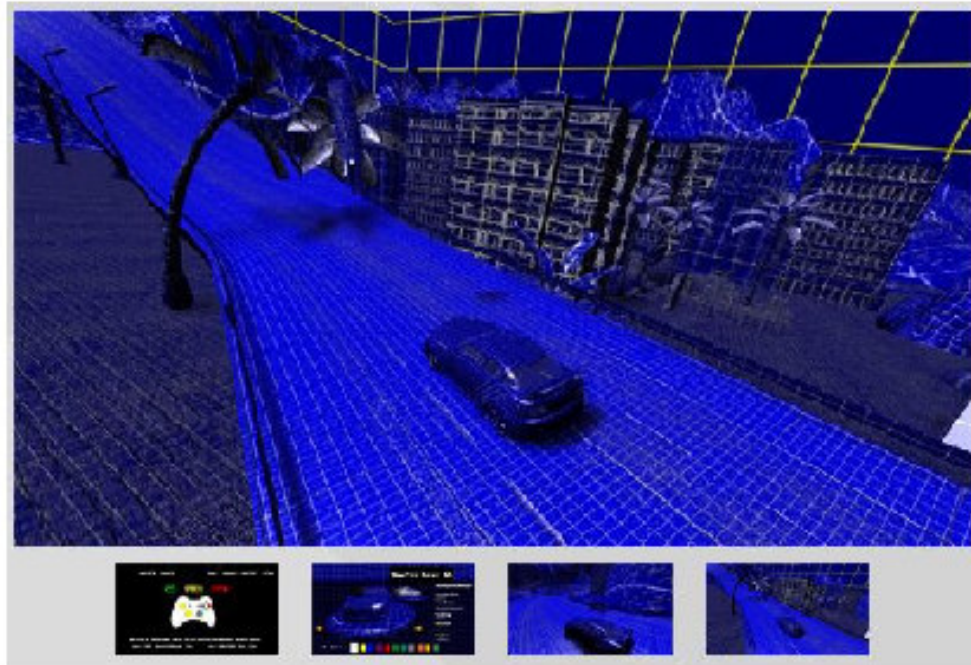


Overall score:

7.7

Graphics: 8.5
Sound: 8.0
Gameplay: 8.0
Replay Value: 6.5
Fun Factor: 7.5



Arcade racers come and go, yet very few have staying power like Burnout Paradise. The one place there are very few arcade racers is in the downloadable arena of XBLA and XNA. Now we're all used to racing games with tons of scenery, action, and a sense of speed. Blueprint Racer 4D on the XNA Community Games service literally takes the racing experience to a whole new dimension, and it's a pretty good one too.

Blueprint Racer 4D, from developer Anchor Games, was built from the Racing Game Starter Kit from exDream Entertainment. From the scenery to the track itself, the whole game is one big blueprint that you race your car on. While at first, the idea sounds just a little weird, but after playing for awhile, I realized that the concept is rather brilliant. In a way, it's like a test track for you to try out cars on. Looks like someone's been thinking out of the box.

When you first start the game, you can choose from one of three different blueprint cars. While at first the cars almost look exactly the same, each car does have different characteristics. The characteristics vary in Max Speed, Acceleration, Car Mass, Braking, Friction, and Engine. You can also choose what color you want for your car as well. I would suggest you not use blue because if you're not paying attention, you might get lost in the blueprint itself. Each car handles well on the track since the game's controls are tight and responsive for a simplistic racer.

Once you've chosen your car, then you must choose the track to race on. There are a grand total of three tracks each with varying difficulty (Beginner, Advanced, Expert). Each of the tracks' design are almost like a roller coaster type of experience with plenty of twists, turns, banking, and loops. The one thing you don't have to worry about is falling off the track since there are rails on both sides. I can honestly tell you that no matter how easy or hard the tracks are, each one is quite unforgiving at times so you'll find yourself hitting the rails often.

Although Blueprint Racer 4D is called a racing game, the only person you're really racing is yourself. You would think that since this is a "racing" game, you would have more cars on the track to race against. This is a big disappointment and it certainly hurts the game's replay value. Since this is only a one player game, you'll be timed on how fast you finish each lap (each race only has three laps). As you finish a lap you'll see a ghost car that you can race to get a better time.

Graphically, the blueprint design for Blueprint Racer 4D is pretty cool. As you can imagine, the entire game uses only the color blue, except you can change the colors of the cars. The scenery looks fantastic as you'll notice trees, buildings, mountains, and even an artificial sun. As for the sound, the game has a techno soundtrack that pretty much plays only one song. After awhile you'll either grow annoyed of the song, or you'll be too busy racing to even notice it so it's not a big deal.

Blueprint Racer 4D may not have all the features of your typical arcade racer, but for what's there in this test course kind of game, it's still worth the 200 Microsoft Point (\$2.50) asking price. It's fun and entertaining as long as you play in short sessions. I would suggest downloading the demo first before making a purchase, but as I've said before, the game is pretty good. Hopefully down the road, the gang at Anchor Games can make a full-fledged racer or maybe even expand on this game since it has quite a bit of potential.