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## Video game review

# Need for Speed franchise Shifts into another gear

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Last year, Electronic Arts (EA) disappointed race fans with the release of *Need for Speed (NFS): Undercover*. It may have looked like the downfall of the *NFS* series but with the release of *NFS: Shift*, it seems as though EA has brought a new era of racing into the *NFS* franchise.

*NFS: Shift* brings a combination of elements from the best of its past games and creates a game that sticks to its *NFS* personality with the vast amounts of exotic, tuner and muscle cars. However, the game also now joins the ranks of *Gran Turismo* and *Forza Motorsport* in the category of a driving simulator video game.

With a whole new concept of gameplay and an upgrade into the driving simulation competition, *NFS: Shift* is bound to lure players into endless hours of racing.

The objective of the game is to earn enough stars to enter the *NFS* World Championships. Along the way, players will race in multiple racing events that range from a regular circuit race to a manufacturer race. In conjunction with racing, players will create a racing profile that tells the player what kind of racer they are while on the track. The player can either be a precision driver, who rarely bumps other cars and makes each turn flawless or an aggressive driver who is willing to put a few scratches on their car for the sake of winning. Either way, players will create a reputation for themselves that will reflect their performances on the track.

Like its predecessors, *NFS: Shift* has a wide variety of cars at the player's disposal. The vehicles range from the well-known Ford Focus to the notorious Bugatti Veyron, which is arguably the fastest car in the world, to the rare Lamborghini Reventon, of which only 21 were manufactured. In the game, the cars come in different tiers. The number one tier holds common cars from BMW, Infiniti and Ford. The fourth tier is the top tier and holds the fastest cars in the game.

No *NFS* game can be complete without a variety of racing events. Races can be a regular circuit race, but sometimes players can get an invitational race where racers can have a manufacturer race where all the players compete with the same car. Others types of races include a time trial race, drift and car battle, which is a race between two cars to see which is the best.

For those who constantly argue that their favorite car is faster than their friend's favorite car, this race is the proving ground to settle such arguments.

The first thing that this reviewer loved about the game is the visual aspect of the game. Each car is beautifully crafted and each race track is reconstructed to the slightest detail. Unlike *Gran Turismo*, this game has car damage. Every hit or sideswipe is displayed on the car. This reviewer has damaged a Nissan 350 Z to the point that the trunk door is barely on the car and the engine hood is gone. A cockpit view has also been added. The interior of each car is stunning because it represents the interior of its real world counterpart, which gives the player a sense of realism.

While the visuals get high marks, the gameplay seems as though it may need a tune up. When playing, this reviewer stumbled on the fact that this game became too easy. In about an hour, the second tier of cars was already unlocked and numerous races have already been won. The large amount of money won from each also makes it easy for players to purchase the fastest car in each tier. Also, the steering can be very sensitive. More than often, players will encounter a turn and the slightest movement of the analog stick will cause the tires to turn dramatically. While there are sensitivity settings at the main menu, it will barely make a difference on the track.

However, the heart of the game lies in the setup of each car. The reason that this game separates itself from its predecessors is because it adds a sense of realism that was not in previous *NFS* titles. For the first time ever in a *NFS* series, players can tune every single aspect in their car, from car weight, brake power and gear timing. This addition puts the game into a new level of racing for the series.

Overall, this is a game that every racing fan should have. *NFS: Shift* has raised the standards in video game racing. Each race is adrenaline rushed and the scenery is beautiful. Every single car is fun to drive and some car can perform in ways that even surprised this reviewer. The realism factor is very constant in the game and it puts this game in the same category as driving simulator games. With *Gran Turismo 5* coming next February and *Forza Motorsport 3* coming next month, *NFS Shift* is the game that will set the standard for the driving simulation world.

