

# One tricky racing sim: Assetto Corsa Competizione is now on consoles

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- Day or night, rain or shine, we race on.
- The cars and tracks are all modeled from the real world—specifically the 2018 and 2019 GT World Challenge series.
- That display on the steering wheel features live information.
- The interiors of the cars are highly detailed, but the game only runs at 30 fps.
- If you want more particle effects, you need to spring for a PS4 Pro or Xbox One X.
- This is not the easiest sim to get to grips with, and once cars start to slide, you better be fast if you want to catch it.

On Tuesday, sim-racing options for the Xbox One and Playstation 4 just got a little more diverse with the release of *Assetto Corsa Competizione*. The game is a companion of sorts to the well-established PC racing sim *Assetto Corsa*, developed by Italian studio Kunos Simulazioni. First released on the PC in 2019, ACC is a much more narrowly targeted game than its older sibling—this game is focused on a single category of racing, called GT3, which uses modified versions of exotica you might see on the road (or reviewed here at Ars) like Lamborghini Huracáns and Acura NSXs.

ACC is also the official game of GT World Challenge, a collection of race series held around the world by an organization called SRO. That kind of hyperspecific demographic makes sense in the PC world, where most hardcore sim racers live, but the people at Kunos have ported their game to both the PS4 (which we tested) and Xbox One—consoles that have traditionally been better served by more accessible driving games.

I've heard good things about the fidelity of *Assetto Corsa* over the years, so I was eager to try out the franchise's console debut to see how it stacks up.

## Tricky tires

In a briefing last week, Kunos said that it's done a lot of work with both the aerodynamic and tire modeling of ACC, which (unlike its earlier game) is built using the Unreal Engine. For the tire model—arguably the most important part of any racing sim—the studio worked closely with Italian tire company Pirelli, which is the official tire supplier for SRO's various GT3 championships. (Turn 10 did something similar with Pirelli for *Forza Motorsport 4* back in the day but then abandoned that in favor of doing its own tire testing for subsequent games.)

I haven't had a chance to drive a car on Pirelli's GT3 racing tires, but if you catch an actual race car driver in an unguarded moment, they'll often have plenty of complaints about the Italian rubber brand. That may well be why the cars in ACC feel so sensitive to drive: once you start to slide, you have to be extremely fast to correct it without losing control completely. That means this is a game where you need to be precise all the time. If your approach to driving games is to mash controller buttons, you will not enjoy ACC much.

In fact, if your preferred (or only) way of playing driving games on consoles is with a controller, ACC isn't the game for you, either. Kunos said it spent a lot of time making sure the

game works with a gamepad, and the game technically works in this mode. But unless your name is Jacques Villeneuve and you won the 1997 Formula 1 World Championship, you really, really shouldn't play this without a steering wheel. (Also, if you switch between a gamepad and a wheel, you may need to reset your wheel settings in the game to avoid some weird handling problems.)

## **The cars and tracks are pretty accurate**

There's a good deal of attention to detail in the simulation of the racing cars and tracks in ACC. Each of the real-world tracks (there are 11, plus another four available in a DLC pack today for Xbox players and in a couple of weeks for PS4 players) has been built up from accurate lidar scans, along with dynamic lighting and different weather conditions. The 24 different race cars are also accurately rendered, inside and out, including multiple real-world liveries for each of the teams that have contested the SRO's GT3 series in 2018 and 2019. Even the multifunction display on each car's steering wheel accurately reflects the data that a real racing driver would be presented with (complete with multiple pages of data to scroll through).

On a PS4 or PS4 Pro, the game runs at 1080p, but the Pro version has improved draw distances, anti-aliasing, and better particle effects, as well as an option to run it at 3200x1800. For the Xbox One, ACC runs at 900p, with the Xbox One X running at 4k along with the other features just listed for the PS4 Pro. However, the game's frame rate has been capped at 30 fps on all variants of both consoles. Kunos said this was done to maximize processing power for the game's audio and physics simulation, but when the PC version can reach higher frame rates with more powerful graphics cards, that may well leave console players feeling like they're missing out.

# Driver rankings

If you spend any time listening to professional drivers who race GT3 cars, you will quickly hear complaint after complaint about driver ratings. Because ACC is heavily focused on online multiplayer racing, it too judges your driving (both in online multiplayer and single-player races) in order to rank you into competitive online matchups. The game does this by tracking six different attributes, which it begins calculating during your first hour or two of gameplay. (Either as you start in career mode, or in my case, if you spend a couple of hours lapping a track you know in order to get a handle on how the tire model behaves.)

These are as follows:

- Track Competence, or how well you know your way around each circuit. Set more clean laps and this number increases.
- Car control—pretty self-explanatory: it goes up if you drive clean and don't spin out.
- Consistency, which again is self-explanatory.
- Pace, which measures how close you are to the fastest lap times for each circuit's leaderboards, as well as how you rank in the special events.
- Safety is determined by how well (or poorly) you avoid colliding with other cars. You won't be able to participate in some of the game's multiplayer sessions unless your safety ranking is high enough.
- Racecraft, which is determined by how well you can overtake or defend against other cars on track.

Enlarge / This is what your driver-rating screen looks like. Some of these scores will take a long time to build up. For example, after a few hours of play for this review, my track competence, car control, and consistency scores are all in the 60-70 range (on a 100-point scale). But pace and safety are only in single digits, and race craft has yet to get a numerical score.

## **Race on your own or with other humans**

As usual, Ars got access to the game a few days before its launch. That means most of my gameplay has been single player because the servers aren't heavily populated. Single player

has a few different options. There's the championship mode, which lets you cycle through either the 2018 or 2019 seasons, presented in the same order of tracks as they were in the real world. There's career mode, where you start off with a series of 10-minute test sessions (during the day, then in the rain, then at night) before running through a championship interspersed with other test sessions. And there are some special events which change every so often—these are challenges like hot lapping a particular circuit or completing part of a race.

ACC also provides some online multiplayer options. You can weight preferences for servers to Quickjoin based on tracks you like, weather conditions you do or don't want to experience, and so on. You can scroll through a list of active servers and pick a particular one. And if your driver ranking is high enough, you can also enter some of the competition servers. (Private lobbies are on the list of things to be implemented in time.)

Enlarge / An example of the Special Events menu.

## Gameplay

As a hardcore sim, *ACC* replicates many of the things you'd experience as an actual GT3 racing driver. Each race begins with a rolling start, so you have to drive in double-file order before the lights go green and you can begin overtaking (or getting passed). You'll want to take part in practice and qualifying sessions before each race to determine which position you start from. And races feature pit stops, which have to be performed within a specific window during each race.

To help you out, you have a race engineer who gives you

information and acts as a spotter, telling you if there are cars in close proximity that you can't see. There's also a useful radar-like display that appears on the screen when you're in close proximity to other cars. And the game has a bunch of different driver assists like automatic windshield wipers, headlights, and pit-lane speed limiters to help manage what can be a hectic workload while also trying to race at over 100mph. In my experience, some of these are buggy—the automatic pit-lane speed limiter didn't engage in at least half my races, which means I could either accept a 30-second penalty for speeding in the pit lane, or I could restart the race from the beginning. Also, either the UI is broken or I'm too dumb to work out how to give my pit crew instructions using a on-screen menu that appears frozen during those pit stops.

Don't be afraid to use driver aids like traction control and ABS—these are present on real GT3 race cars, which are designed to be accessible to amateurs. Like other racing sims—and even more “simcade” games like *Gran Turismo Sport*—you can and may have to tweak these on the fly, so memorizing which buttons or dials on your steering wheel do what is probably a good idea. Kunos could also have done a better job informing players about some of these—for example, each car has different engine settings or maps, which you'll switch between if you need to save fuel or it rains. Thankfully, because *ACC* came out on the PC, other people have done the hard work to figure out some of that stuff.

## **It's not perfect**

Although *ACC* is now available on three different platforms (PC, PS4, Xbox), there is no cross-platform gameplay. Console players hoping to join friends who are already playing the game on PC are out of luck. There are bound to be technical reasons for that, but it means your pool of competition is going to be restricted. And for a game as narrowly focused as

this one, with as much emphasis on esports and online multiplayer, that seems like a problem.

In fact, I'm at a loss to understand why Kunos spent the time and effort to port *Assetto Corsa Competizione* to consoles rather than the broader *Assetto Corsa*. That series at least offers a wider range of cars to drive, which would appeal to a wider audience. As a console racing sim, ACC is satisfying to master but less so than *Project Cars 2*, which in my opinion has a better tire model and definitely has a much bigger array of tracks and cars to choose from, as well as robust online communities for each platform. And most players looking for a hardcore sim will go straight to the PC anyway, where you have your pick of *Project Cars 2*, *Assetto Corsa*, *ACC*, *iRacing*, and more.

## The Good

- Highly accurate real-world race tracks and GT3 race cars
- Faithful simulation of the 2018 and 2019 GT3 racing season
- Some helpful driver assists and aids

## The Bad

- Only 30 fps
- No cross-platform multiplayer
- Very limited appeal to casual gamers
- Don't bother without a steering wheel
- Once the tires start to slide, you're probably not going to catch them

## The Ugly

- Trying to play this game with a controller
- Bugs that need fixing
- No private lobbies yet

**Verdict:** Try it if you want a hardcore console race sim and really love GT3 racing. Most other players should probably pass.

*Listing image by 505 Games*

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