

Pokémon Violet and Scarlet's Switch 2 update is as good as it looks

I recently did something sort of unusual: I went to a preview event for a game that's been out for almost three years.

I've played around 400 hours of *Pokémon Scarlet*, according to my Nintendo Switch, since it was released in late 2022. It's safe to say I know the game pretty well. And yet, when I was invited to preview *Pokémon Scarlet* and *Violet* on the Nintendo Switch 2 ahead of the new console's launch, I gladly took the opportunity to see three-year-old games I already own. I wanted to find out just how much they'd improved.

I have a high jank tolerance with games – it builds character – but I'm well aware of *Scarlet* and *Violet*'s shortcomings on the original Switch. There's lag. The frame rate is... inconsistent. There are online connectivity issues. For a lot of people, performance problems overshadowed what was otherwise a great new generation of *Pokémon* games. With the release of the Nintendo Switch 2, and the accompanying free performance update for *Scarlet* and *Violet*, that might finally change.

Starting up the demo of *Pokémon Scarlet* on the Switch 2 at The Pokémon Company International's office in Bellevue, Washington, I knew immediately where I wanted to go first: Casseroya Lake, sometimes called "Lag Lake," where the games' graphical issues are most apparent. On the original Switch, the game *really* chugs when you're on the lake; the frame rate takes a dive, and it struggles to render more than a handful of pokémon in your immediate vicinity. Exploring the liveliest

open areas and encountering the pokémon that populate them is one of *Scarlet* and *Violet*'s biggest strengths, but on the Switch, Casseroya Lake is dull and empty at best and impossible to navigate at worst.

Playing on the Switch 2, however, Casseroya Lake ran beautifully. There were far more pokémon in view (and I was immediately accosted by a torpedo-like Veluza, same as it ever was), and the lag and stuttering I'd come to expect were nonexistent. I battled that Veluza with no problems. I stumbled upon a Slowpoke outbreak and sent out my Clodsire to auto-battle them – no lag. I found a wild Tera Pokémon and watched the Tera animation play out, looking sharper than I'd ever seen it. (I was playing in docked mode at a station set up by TPCi, so maybe that last one could be credited to the TV. But still.)

It was the same case everywhere I went during my 30-minute demo: a stable and smooth frame rate, significantly faster load times, and far more pokémon populating the world. The Switch 2 update is not a complete overhaul of the graphics themselves – the grass textures looked just as unremarkable as always to my eye, for example – but it does seem to eliminate the performance issues that have dragged *Scarlet* and *Violet* down for nearly three years. It's a noticeable improvement in the world, in battle, in Tera raids, and even in menus.

Is it praiseworthy for a game to simply run well? Maybe not. I don't pretend to know how games are made on a technical level, or really any level, but I know they're not *easy* to make. And I had enough fun with *Pokémon Scarlet* to play for 400 hours without the performance issues bothering me much. But it did feel bittersweet, briefly, to think how much more these games could have shone if they'd run well in the first place.

Then, in the last five minutes of my demo, as I waded in a different body of water to confirm that it too ran smoothly, I saw it: among the pods of Buizel dotting the shore, a shiny.

A good portion of my 400 hours in *Scarlet* were spent shiny hunting, because even though the alternate-color versions of pokémon are not quite as hard to find as they were in previous games, I get excited every time I see one, without fail. It's the perfect encapsulation of the kind of joy *Scarlet* and *Violet* have to offer: exploring a lively area and finding something special. I caught the shiny Buizel despite knowing that it wasn't my save file and not mine to keep.

The Switch 2 update is arguably arriving a bit late for my *Scarlet* save file, depending on how many hours you think are reasonable to spend playing this game. But I also own *Violet*, and I have played about two hours of that version total. Looking at the shiny Buizel I didn't get to keep, I realized I was really excited to have a reason to play *Violet* finally – to rediscover what I liked most about these games, in a state that does them justice.

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