

Video Game Review: Hit the Slopes with Flawed but Fun ‘SSX’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 12, 2012 - 10:52am

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CHICAGO – Pick your favorite rider and coolest board and hit the mountains of “SSX,” an attempted reboot of a hit snowboarding franchise from the last-generation of consoles. How has the concept aged and how has EA adapted for a new age demographic for whom the name “SSX” might not mean anything? Put on your snowsuit and find out.



As is often the case with reboots and remixes, the new “SSX” falters by virtue of adding too many bells and whistles to what worked about the franchise in the first place. “SSX” was about tricks and speed. That’s it. Create well-designed mountains, upgrade the graphics & sound, and give us some new tricky maneuvers and fans would have been satisfied. And those basic elements of the game totally work. There are times when your boarder strings together enough killer moves at such a breakneck speed that the game totally connects on a visceral level. It looks great. It moves fast. It gives you that adrenalin rush you want from a larger-than-life snowboarding game.



SSX
Photo credit: EA

And then there are the other times. There are the completely unnecessary additions to the gameplay. There’s the realization that the mountain designs are a too repetitive. There’s the nagging sensation that, after about two hours, you’ve seen everything you’re going to enjoy about the game. There’s too much fun with the basic foundation of “SSX” to dismiss the game entirely but the initial rush of the experience gives away to regret and desired changes. I loved many parts of “SSX” but also kept thinking of ways I would have done it differently.



SSX

Photo credit: EA

When it was announced, “SSX” had the unusual name of “SSX: Deadly Descents” and there are elements of that focus still in place here. I don’t think anyone who ever played “SSX” or “SSX Tricky” would associate the word “Deadly” with a franchise that pumps in Run-DMC’s “It’s Tricky” during its most exciting moments. “Goofy,” “Silly,” “Fun,” but not “Deadly.” And the idea that EA was somehow trying to make a more “realistic” game built around snowboarding tricks that defy the laws of gravity and mountains with rails built in just the right place to grind was a misguided one from the minute someone put it on a drawing board. And it’s those elements, the additions to “SSX,” that can be truly frustrating.

It all starts incredibly promisingly. The core mechanics of the game feel very familiar (and you can even use the classic control structure) as you speed down mountains, jump on rails, and alternately use a boost/trick meter. Even basic tricks like grabbing the nose of your board or hitting a jump off a mogul fill a meter. You can use that meter for boost or wait until it fills for two stages of amplified play. In the first, you have unlimited boost. Complete enough tricks during that timed period and enter Tricky mode, where you can do your signature tricks which are the only way to really compete on the tracks in which the rider with the most points wins.



SSX

Photo credit: EA

At first, the excellent animation, the level design, the blend of speed and tricks — it gives you that visceral rush that one hopes for from a title like this one. And then things get cluttered. The developers start adding new elements. The first, a wingsuit that helps you glide over larger chasms on the mountain, works relatively well. I’m OK with that one. But then it gets funky. Another mountain requires you to carry an oxygen tank with a limited supply that you have to use by tapping a face button repeatedly WHILE you’re trying to do tricks. It’s annoying. Then suddenly you’re on a mountain that’s too cold and you have a solar suit that keeps you warm but, of course, you have to stay in the sun. Now this is just getting silly. Wait, what do I need ice picks for? And then there’s the avalanche, which turns the game around from a different perspective and, quite frankly, is just plain stupid.

So, how does one judge “SSX”? The old stuff totally works. It’s like a great old car with a new paint job and new engine. It hums. But the bells and whistles are annoying and can sometimes be pretty loud. I loved the fact that there are dozens of maps to play with from the very beginning and the game really employs the Autolog social function of the “Need For Speed” games in that you can track and compare yourself to your friends and even see their ghosts on mountains. As for level design, some are great but they get a bit repetitive and there is a bit of memorization fatigue in that it is simply impossible to complete some of the later runs without multiple restarts — “Oh, there’s a giant gap there that I can’t jump over. Better restart and try again.” I wanted fewer chasms that plunged me into bottomless fog and more silliness like the old game — more tubes, more rails, more unexpected surprises. And less avalanches.

Ultimately, “SSX” is still a fun series. But they need to take a step back if there’s going to be a next game on this generation of consoles. Don’t go for realism. Don’t worry about the elements. Just give me deep customization (and, to be fair, there are a lot of board, suit, mod options here), fun character design, adrenalin-pumping mountains, and cool tricks. Leave the oxygen tanks at home.

“SSX” was developed by EA Canada and released by EA on February 28, 2012. It is rated E (Everyone). The version reviewed was for the PS3 but the title is also available for the Xbox.



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