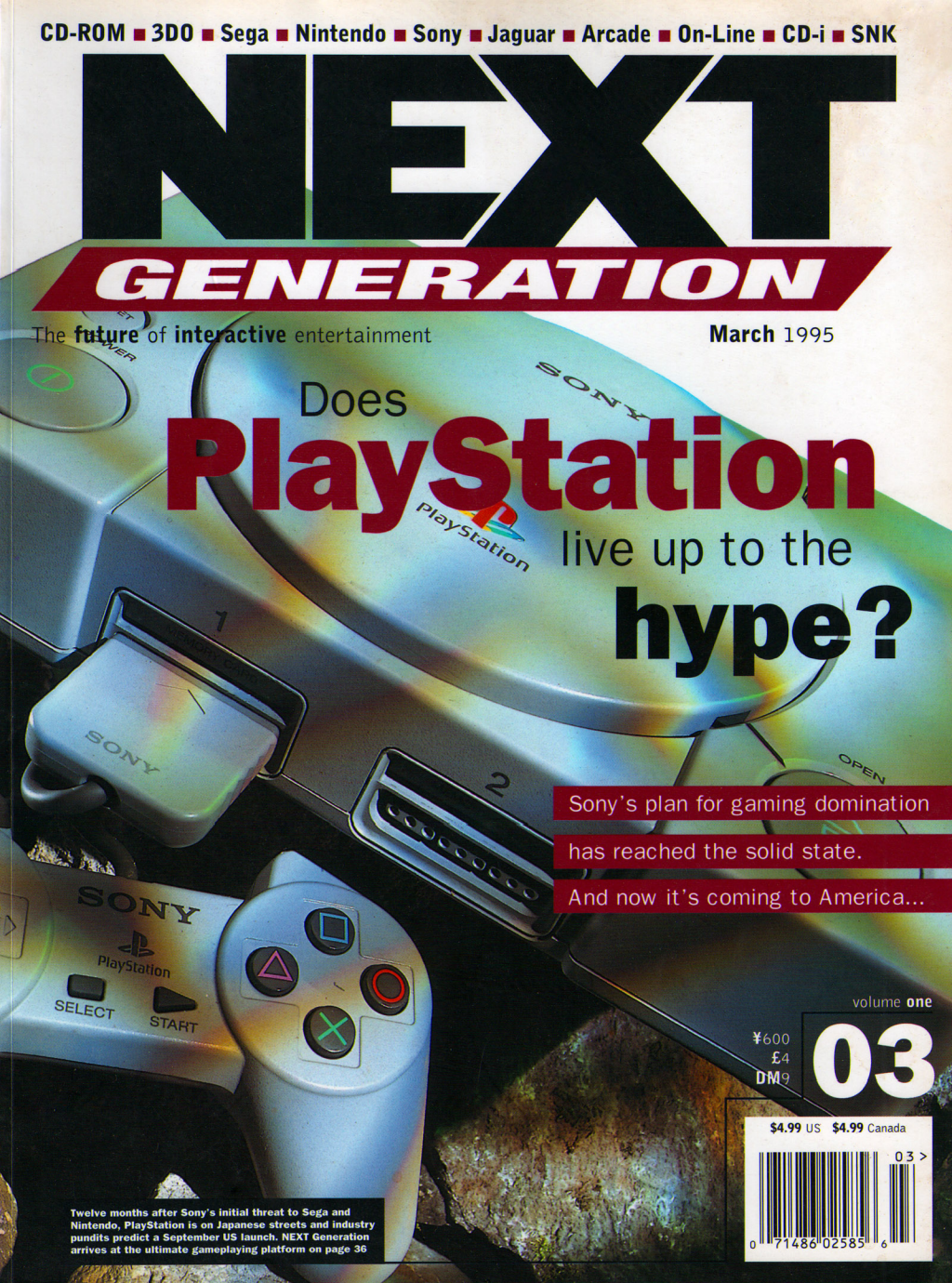
CD-ROM ■ 3DO ■ Sega ■ Nintendo ■ Sony ■ Jaguar ■ Arcade ■ On-Line ■ CD-i ■ SNK

NEXT GENERATION

The **future** of **interactive** entertainment

March 1995



Does PlayStation live up to the hype?

Sony's plan for gaming domination has reached the solid state. And now it's coming to America...

Twelve months after Sony's initial threat to Sega and Nintendo, PlayStation is on Japanese streets and industry pundits predict a September US launch. NEXT Generation arrives at the ultimate gameplaying platform on page 36

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Winter CES: The calm before the storm/**p 14** • **Virtual Boy:** Nintendo's new 32bit machine/**p 20** • **Saturn and PlayStation:** Sega and Sony sell their dream machines/**p 22** • **Video CD:** High Density CD (HDCD) attracts big names /**p 27** • **Sega is still on top of Japanese arcades:** *Virtua Fighter* confirms Sega's position in the arcade arena/**p 30**



The hottest global news affecting the games you play

WCES: the calm before the storm

The world's largest game show is still too soon to sort the winners from the losers...

With its incessant ringing of slot machines, indigestible 'all you can eat for $2.99' buffets and culturally bankrupt (allegedly) nightlife, Las Vegas is the undisputed hedonist capital of the world. It's also the unlikely annual venue for the Winter Consumer Electronics Show, which took place in early January at the city's colossal Convention Center.

The game industry's part in the Consumer Electronics Show has grown over the last few years from 15% to almost 30%, with many exhibitors



Las Vegas CES: The greatest (gaming) show on earth



The US's fastest growing city, and home for six days



Nintendo securing the largest single booth and boasted that worldwide, *Donkey Kong Country* grossed more revenues than all Saturn and PlayStation business combined

Highlights

The show stoppers:

1. ***Toh Shin Den***
2. **Sega's ham croissants**
3. **The NEXT Generation party's bar tab**
4. **Seven chips on '23'**
5. **Delphine's *Flashback 3***
6. **Rocket Science taking it in good sport**
7. ***Virtua Fighter 2***
8. **Shigeru Miyamoto doodling Marios on NEXT Generation party invites**
9. **Penn & Teller (& Id)**
10. **Teasing *FX Fighter***





"Is this *really* a Nintendo product?" seemed to be the standard response from conferences at the Virtual Boy stand. The jury is still out on Nintendo's chances of making it mainstream with a product packing merely novelty value

Virtual Boy's display featured just two semi-completed playable demos

What is it?

Perfected in 1948, this invention not only had a profound impact on computer technology but revolutionized the electronics industry as a whole. Without it, home computers would have remained an impossible dream

relegated to taking hastily-erected space inside tents at the rear of the center. This year's show, while notably quieter than the summer event in Chicago, was perhaps the most disappointing of recent years. Whether this signals a period of stagnation or merely a calm before the storm in the international game community is open to debate.

Next-generation hardware lurked in the shadows far from the prying eyes of journalists and retailers, while new and exciting games were genuinely hard to find.



Big space exhibitors Sega and Nintendo were conspicuously devoid of big-name titles. FX2-powered *FX Fighter*, the laughable lovechild of an ill-advised union between Nintendo and GTE suffered in every department and even *Starfox 2* — Nintendo's attempt to maintain interest in the SNES — didn't make up for it. Somehow, despite a wider variety of play mechanics, the prototype game seemed to lack the immediate appeal of its predecessor, relying instead on free-roaming levels (à la Argonaut's aging polygon shooter *Starglider 2*). And those Super FX polygons are unlikely to draw too many gasps. Another unimpressive Super FX game was *Comanche*, converted from the PC game and using the same Voxel-based graphics. Sadly, the low resolution

NEXT Generation spoke at length with NOA chairman Howard Lincoln and was assured that the system (Ultra 64) was on schedule and would still meet the target price of $250





Sega's stand was compact yet busy (top). Nintendo, however, dominated the floor nestling many of its third parties under its wing (bottom)

CES isn't held just for videogame journalists, it's mainly for game producers to show and sell their products

breaking

made for an extremely chunky graphic display on the SNES.

Sorry Nintendo, but you've only got yourself to blame: After raising the stakes with *Donkey Kong Country*, it's impossible to go back.

Nintendo's only hardware on show was the Virtual Boy which had been previewed at the Shoshinkai show (see page 20). Unlike the Japanese show, Nintendo chose to make the Virtual Boy accessible by appointment only. A long line of expectant delegates queued to enter a room where new software projects were previewed on large screens with the aid of a cardboard viewer held to eyes. They included a 3D wireframe shoot 'em up, a racing demo, a side-on Mario game, and a version of *Gunhead*. Encouragingly, the system's 3D graphics abilities were far better demonstrated by this new crop, with effective use of depth used in 2D titles, especially the ability to traverse different layers of the screen. The system proper could be played in another room, but with only two titles, *Telero Boxing* and *Space Pinball*.

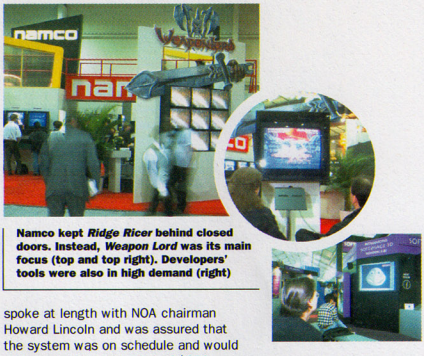
it is...

The transistor. Smaller and more efficient than the electron tubes (valves) it replaced, the transistor paved the way for the development of integrated circuits, which allowed huge computing power to be packed onto tiny pieces of silicon

The Ultra 64 was typically cloaked in secrecy. Despite claims that the chipset had been completed this month, the company's only gesture toward the creation of its next-gen platform was the announcement of a 'Dream Team' of development partners including SGI, Alias Research, Rambus, MultiGen, Rare, Williams, Acclaim, Paradigm, Spectrum Holobyte and DMA Design. **NEXT Generation** spoke at length with NOA chairman Howard Lincoln and was assured that the system was on schedule and would still meet the target price of $250.

This is contrary to rumors of internal wrangles between Nintendo and SGI over the price of the chip (SGI has allegedly set a price of at least twice what Nintendo is prepared to pay). SGI certainly wasn't talking: When will Ultra 64 be released? "No comment"; will there be a CD-ROM drive? "No comment"; Any news of a joypad design? "No comment"; how about networking capabilities? "No comment." You get the picture...

Sega was naturally geared up to pushing its fledgling 32X format as well as a 16bit line-up. The announcement of Neptune (a 32X/Genesis combo, as reported in NG 2) confirmed that Saturn wouldn't be the only other new piece of Sega hardware arriving in 1995, although the selection of titles on display (*Space Harrier, After Burner, Motocross*, etc.), did little to spur interest in the currently

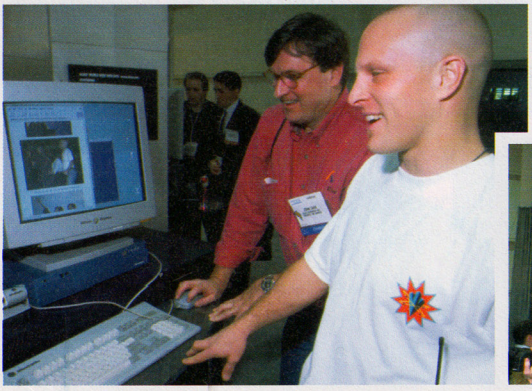


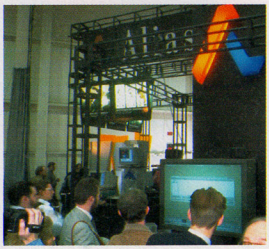
Namco kept *Ridge Ricer* behind closed doors. Instead, *Weapon Lord* was its main focus (top and top right). Developers' tools were also in high demand (right)

Character assassination

Want your new game character to stand out from the crowd? Want to endear your pixellated pal in the hearts and minds of gameplayers the world over? Well here's NEXT Generation's post-CES guide to descriptions we've all heard quite enough of already...

1. Zany
2. Wise-crackin'
3. Streetwise
4. Wacky
5. 'With-an-attitude'
6. Screwball
7. Off-the-wall
8. Side-splitting
9. Offbeat
10. Goofy





Alias was coolly showing off its latest creation: a software package that enables computer animators to accurately create computer-generated, rendered hair. Big deal? When was the last time you saw a game character with a decent hairstyle? Hats off to Alias...



While Nintendo can't be accused of resting on its laurels (Virtual Boy is new), it *can* be accused of gloating. 94's *DKC* was loud and proud (above)







Seemingly the eye of an electronic entertainment storm, Acclaim's offer of a *real* ball with a *real* hoop was hard to resist (above and right). Even NEXT Generation won a T-shirt

unproven format. To try and bolster **NEXT Generation**'s confidence in the format, Sega granted a sneak preview of 32X development work undertaken by the talented developing group Scavenger — if anything, the results showed that the format has potential when used properly.

Sega emerged slightly more willing to talk about the Saturn this time around. At the back of its private suite, a Japanese machine played *Virtua Fighter*, and the surrounding walls were decked with reminders that the rest of Sega's coin-op lineage was also Saturn-bound. Curiously though, on the first day of the show the solitary Saturn was seen side by side with a Sony PlayStation running the 3D shoot 'em up title, *Crime Crackers*. A few hours later, though, it had disappeared. Presumably, the rival system was whisked away after someone arrived with a copy of *Toh Shin Den*, suggesting it would have made for a fairer comparison.



Nintendo's new *Dr. Mario* proved that you can't keep a great game idea down

The rivalry between Sega and Sony continued offsite on a completely different level. At the Alexis Park Hotel — traditionally Sega's own CES

breaking

playground — newly found Sony Computer Entertainment checked into schmoozing suites with every intention to make their upcoming rivals feel more welcome than usual. Huge balloons adorning the slogan 'Sony welcomes Sega to WCES' were suspended above the swimming pool (in which a Sonic took an unintended swim) and SOA's president Tom Kalinske was delivered a complimentary drink on a serviette reading the same. Of course, such tomfoolery was taken in good spirit by Sega, but quite rightfully, Kalinske insisted that Sony would have to watch their backs at the upcoming Summer E3 show in Los Angeles...

While Sony's show presence was limited to a tiny booth occupied by Sony Imagesoft, the audio and video division made a highly technical demonstration of its (and Philips') new DVD high-density CD standard (more next month) to the press at the showbusiness hotel Bally's. With the help of some proprietary development hardware the results were remarkably impressive, approaching Laserdisc quality and reaffirming **NEXT Generation**'s doubts over the future of Video CD (see page 27).





Atari, whose presence at CES has grown over the last few years, was focusing on introducing new software and also previewing its CD drive for the Jaguar, which goes on sale in February. Despite some impressive video footage that almost approached MPEG quality playback in software, the most glaring omission was any worthy software. ATD's *Battlemorph* was apparently too incomplete to get the go ahead, while their other project, *Blue Lightning*, did make it out but failed to set the show floor alight. Once again, Jeff Minter's



Sega did three things very, very right: 1) Crammed two *Virtua Fighter 2* arcade machines into its booth (above). 2) Offered visitors ham croissants to die for; 3) Turned off 32X and turned on the 49ers vs Bears playoffs Saturday

Data stream

Marketing budget for *Magic Carpet*: **$307,600**
Marketing budget for *Donkey Kong Country*: **$3.76 million**
Percentage of targeted US adults and children who are expected to have seen the *DKC* ads three times: **70%**
Marketing budget for Microsoft on updating its image: **$9.23 million**
Percentage of CD-ROM sales accounted for by Microsoft: **11.41%**
Number of formats *Rise Of The Robots* is to be released on: **22**
Number of units 3DO claims to have sold: **500,000**
Present value of the videogame market: **2.076 billion**
Projected value of the videogame market by year-end 1995: **$20 billion**
Growth in the videogame market over the last 15 months: **67.5%**
Increase in videogame sales caused by half-term holidays: **20%**
Estimates of annual cost to industry caused by piracy: **6.15 million**
CD-ROM access time required to comply with MPC2: **400ms**
Typical hard drive access time: **11ms**
Price recently offered for 156,931 aging game carts: **$307,600**
Dimensions of a 35 mm film screen: **20x35ft**
Dimensions of an IMAX screen: **80ftx100ft**
Number of IMAXs in the world: **115**
Number of PlayStations available at launch: **100,000**
Number of defective Saturns that have caught fire: **10**
Cost of a single game of *Virtua Fighter 2*: ¥200 ($2.10)



Atari's Jaguar display remained busy throughout, a giant video wall displaying Jaguar's latest titles — *Val d'Isere Skiing and Snowboarding* was the surprise pick of the bunch (left)

efforts paid off, though, and his *Virtual Light Machine* which comes packed into the Jaguar CD's hardware unit delivers a psychedelic enough experience for any audio CD-playing, Jaguar-owning hippies.

The cartridge software line-up for the Jaguar was depressingly ordinary, though. More than anything, (*Doom* and *AVP* aside) Atari's games simply didn't look any different from most of the other 16bit console games.

Behind closed doors, Atari unveiled a prototype model of an all-in-one Jaguar and CD drive. Suffering from the American school of consumer product design, the system looked more like an 1980s set of bathroom scales than a console (perhaps to accompany the apparently toilet-inspired CD add-on itself), but then the Jaguar wasn't exactly blessed with flattering lines...

In all, a disappointing show — a show hampered by an abundance of people keeping cards far too close to their chests. But, not to fear, Los Angeles' E3 (the Electronic Entertainment Exposition) later this spring should see a different story unfold. And **NEXT Generation** will be there with a full report. ng

What is it?

Perfected in 1948, this invention not only had a profound impact on computer technology but revolutionized the electronics industry as a whole. Without it, home computers would have remained an impossible dream



The Jaguar CD failed to spark spectacular interest, but some killer games are 'promised' for launch...



SNK happily showed off with Neo Geo CD...



...while back at Sega, 32X's CD-capabilities were shown for the first time. The industry's transition to CD is almost complete

Nintendo pins hopes on Virtual Boy

But the ill-advised 32bit VR system simply makes gamers see red

it is...

The transistor. Smaller and more efficient than the electron tubes (valves) it replaced, the transistor paved the way for the development of integrated circuits, which allowed huge computing power to be packed onto tiny pieces of silicon

The November unveiling of the Virtual Boy in Japan signifies an important change of direction for Nintendo. Either it has gone completely mad or it deems the future of videogaming to be crude, red and likely to induce headaches.

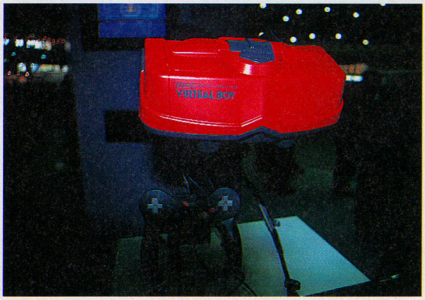
That was the opinion of most delegates who attended the Shoshinkai festival at the Harumi Center in Chiba, Tokyo. Shoshinkai is an annual event for Nintendo's distributors and was the chosen venue for the Kyoto company's revelation of its '32bit VR system.'

Virtual Boy was shown in two forms. Playable versions of the unit itself were installed on a trio of circular stands, and a giant enclosure was where a dramatic (ie 'is this really it?') presentation of the system's graphics and sound took place, with cardboard goggles distributed to anyone brave enough to enter.

Nintendo's hardware resembles a Viewmaster rather than a VR system, with the player looking into the eyepiece to see the stereoscopic image. Just as the Game Boy screen was yellow, Virtual Boy's is red. And it's not much more impressive, either. The hardware uses a 32bit RISC CPU to generate the twin images, with 'two high resolution, mirror-scanning LED displays.'



The Harumi Center in Chiba, Japan, was the venue for the Shoshinkai show. The promise of Nintendo's new hardware proved a big pull to gamers



The Virtual Boy hardware is red and blue. A joypad with elongated handles is attached via a lead, but the face-hugging display requires a fixed position

This technology comes from a Massachusetts company called Reflection Technology Inc, which specializes in virtual display hardware and was formed by a team of MIT scientists. Nintendo Of America's press release which was distributed at the show reveals that 'Nintendo has obtained exclusive worldwide licensing rights within the video game market to Reflection's virtual display technology,' and that the present Virtual Boy is only in its 'initial application.'

The graphics are very crude. While the technology used is presumably advanced for the cost, its potential for videogames is all but invisible in the first crop of titles. Nintendo unveiled three prototype games at Shoshinkai, all in playable



Nintendo chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi put on a brave face



NCL officials demonstrated the Virtual Boy to show delegates. Few were impressed with the crude monochrome display and lack of genuine portability

But who will buy it? It's awkward to use, it's 100% antisocial, it's too expensive and the 'VR' (i.e. the 3D effect) doesn't actually add to the game at all: it's just a novelty

form. First up was *Mario Bros VB* (no, really) — imagine a static screen and Mario hopping from platform to platform. Another was *Space Pinball*, a standard pinball game with the 3D effect allowing the ball to travel beneath the table. *Telero Boxing* is just plain weird. Needless to say, all three were extremely early versions.

Ironically, Nintendo is expecting great things from the Virtual Boy. The company has stated that it plans to sell three million hardware units and 14 million game cartridges in Japan alone in the period from its launch in April 1995 to March 1996. The system will retail at ¥19,800 ($207), and three games will be available at launch, costing between ¥5000 ($52) and ¥6000 ($62) each.

Specs

CPU: 32bit NEC V810 @ 10MHz

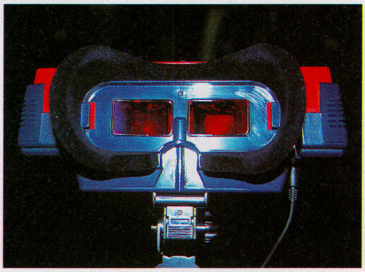
Dimensions: 217x254x110mm

Power: 6 AA batteries

Weight: 760g (body only)

Accessories:
AC 100V adapter
Battery charger

Screen Color
Any color you want (as long as it's red)

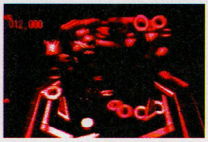


Looking through the goggles of Virtual Boy is like duct-taping two red Game Boys to your face. The 3D effect is nominally impressive, but — so far — adds nothing to the game itself









Virtual Boy as captured by the NEXTGen-cam. Title screen complete with zooming letters (top left). *Mario Bros VB* — possibly the 'flagship' title (top right). The slick, but ultimately underwhelming *Space Pinball* (bottom right). *Telero Boxing* — hardly a threat to PlayStation *Boxer's Road* (left)

But who will buy it? It's not portable. it's awkward to use, it's 100% antisocial (unlike multiplayer SNES/Genesis games), it's too expensive and — most importantly — the 'VR' (ie 3D effect) doesn't add to the game at all: it's just a novelty.

Next month **NEXT Generation** quizzes Virtual Boy's designer, Gumpei Yoi (also the creator of the Game Boy) in Japan, and asks: Just what is Nintendo up to?

ng