

## Tony Hawk's Project 8

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It's winter, the streets are ice and slush and you can't step outside without your Gumballs turning into Sergio Sliders. Just thinking of pushing chaps your cheeks and, even if you did go outside you would have to shovel the walkway just to get to the street. So, what are you going to do? How about playing a video game? We got a chance to review Tony Hawk Project 8 this week and here is what we think.

This is the next installment in the THPS series, ported to the PS2 by Shaba Games for Activision. The game has some of the aspects of the next gen game consoles but a few things are missing. None of these affected game play on the PS2.

The game follows the basic outline of the earlier THPS series. The game seems more like THPS 2 or 3 than like American Wasteland; little time is lost with plot. No long, drawn-out cut scenes and no real story line, other than accomplishing the goal of being on the elite Team Tony Hawk is putting together: Project 8.

The levels are decent-sized and you get used to where things are quite quickly. There are the classic goals as well as additional goals on each level; some involve contests, combos, performing tricks on call, secret areas and grind, manual and height contests. One of the biggest improvements is the return of the contest, you compete to be qualified in a class (am, pro, sick) then you compete for the top slot in that class. I would have preferred to see heats, but it's still an improvement.

The classic goals are all the basic things that were in the first few THPS carts. One thing that's drastically different from the most recent THPS games is that this one can be played without topping out all the goals. If you place in amateur in the goals you still get to advance in levels which is good, because this game is really hard at some points and without a proper walkthrough I had to beat it the old fashioned way, pure brainless tenacity.

The game rewards you with videos to watch of skaters, too. I'll be honest, I skipped over most of them past a certain point which is nice 'cause the interface to call them up is very unobtrusive. After burning myself out, I went back and watched them. The footage from Mike V., Daewon Song and Njah Huston were easily the most memorable. They were all short and well-edited displays of what I'll never be able to do but am more than happy to be entertained by. Oh yea ,and just one question: how does Rodney Mullen keep being one of the most insane skaters? Dude's just sick! You also get to hang out with Jason Lee, although I don't think I saw him skate.

You also get free decks as you move up the ranks of sponsorship and receive 'tokens' (I'm not even kidding) which you can use to buy special tricks. I would personally like to see tricks be earned by the frequency of related tricks performed. Either way, both the decks and tokens really don't effect game play, so no worries there.

Now, there has been some comment on the internet about some minor modifications to the way the controls work. I actually got to the last level without really noticing that I was playing any differently. Now you can initiate a manual by hitting square and pushing down makes you push with the up arrow, giving you a boost if your special is blinking. While these seem as detractions, I believe in evolution and have thumbs so it doesn't bother me at all! Actually, the minor changes to the skater's stance and footwork really impressed me: the skater now footbrakes and can tic-tac when turning short distances. It's not much, but did increase the realism to me.

They also have 2 modes of focus. One is engaged by pushing down L3 and it just sends you into a focus mode for the duration your special allows. This only bothered me because it wears out. Even if you keep pumping out huge combos there's a limited duration and you may find yourself back in real time and bail the trick if you don't watch it. The

second focus mode is "nail the trick", you get it by either running into a nail in certain goals or pushing L3 and R3. In this mode, you can manipulate your feet with the analog sticks to do kick and spin tricks. Cool idea, and it takes a bit of getting used to, but I bet we'll see more of it in future versions. Once I got the hang of it, I actually found the Nail the Trick goals to be some of the easiest in the game.

The controls when you are on the board are still a little less than surgical but, that comes with the territory. You have a better control of speed now and the focus modes help to even out the general speed of the game.

There is some multiplayer in the PS2 version but it's just limited to trick attack, horse, and graffiti as well as free skate. The create-a-skater function is limited to a few general stereotypes but this doesn't really bother me--if I wanted to go skate, I would go skate. I can tell that when they were deciding what to focus on they chose to use the space for videos and levels instead of a million different choices for characters, which is quite fine by me.

All in all, I was far more impressed by the game than I expected to be. I really enjoyed the first few THPS games and just loathed the most recent versions. I don't need a plot, I just want to skate! Life is all the plot I need, thank you very much! Although I would never recommend sitting on your couch wasting time when you could be skating, if you were into the first few THPS games this would be a good way to get reacquainted with the series. It's got a short learning curve and is hard enough that it may keep you entertained for a while. Soundtrack isn't half bad either. Check it out, and after you're done, GO SKATE!