



IMPROVED VISUALS BUT AT WHAT COST?



NONY KHONDAKER

Asphalt 9: Legends
Developer: Gameloft Barcelona
Publisher: Gameloft
Engine: Jetengine
Release Date: July 25, 2018
Platforms: iOS, Android, Windows 10

From the ancient Java/Symbian era to the current smartphone era, the Asphalt franchise has been the definitive racing experience for mobile gamers. Most noteworthy among the Asphalt games is Asphalt 8 (2013), a game that pushed the limits of smartphone hardware while providing a gameplay experience many believed had no more room for improvement. However, the developers Gameloft Barcelona are apparently not among them as they have recently released the next entry in the series, Asphalt 9.

If you launch the game for the first time, the first thing you will notice is the improvement in graphical quality. The

level of lighting, textures, shadows and reflection in this game was unprecedented even in console racing titles a few years ago. However, I personally felt like the game overdoes certain visual effects such as the purple motion trail a little bit.

The game introduces a new control scheme called TouchDrive and tries to force it upon the gamers. In TouchDrive mode, acceleration and steering are handled automatically and the player is left with the trivial task of choosing the path at intersections. As you may have suspected, this takes a lot away from the experience and is definitely not going to sit well with the long-term fans of the franchise. Thankfully, the developers completely understand that and they have kept the classic "Touch to Steer" and "Tilt to Steer" controls as well. The game introduces the ability to perform 360-degree spins during races and it is a lot of fun to take down other racers with this move.

Unfortunately, despite the gorgeous

visuals and enhanced gameplay mechanics, I had a lot of grievances with the game. Asphalt 9 is easily the most demanding mobile game ever and what it means is that if you have a mid-range phone, it is very unlikely that you will get constant 30fps, even at lowest settings. The optimisation seems to be a lot better in iOS devices since I could play the game smoothly on a battered old iPhone 6. Most of the races are ridiculously short in length – taking only between 20 to 30 seconds to complete. The longest races in the game are 90-120 seconds long but sadly they are very few in number. The Windows version of the game suffers from terrible internet connectivity. The game needs constant internet connection even for single player events and it keeps losing connection to the servers every now and then. The game also implements a "fuel system" which restricts you from playing more than 5 races at a stretch unless you wait for your car to "refill" or watch an ad. The

fuel system coupled with the overheating and battery issues of your phone is bound to make prolonged sessions a challenge.

My biggest gripe with the game is that it gets rid of the traditional car upgrade and customisation mechanic and replaces it with a shameless copy of the controversial "blueprint" mechanic used in *Need for Speed: Payback*. The "blueprint" mechanic makes way for a host of microtransactions, to the point that you need money to even paint your car.

The biggest strength of the game is its visuals but its weaknesses also derive from the same. I believe the game is held back by its freemium approach and I really hope we get a paid version of the game at some point of time.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert who complements his non-existent social life with video games, Netflix and a whole lot of ice-cream. Send him memes and cat videos to cheer him up at fb.com/NonyKhondaker