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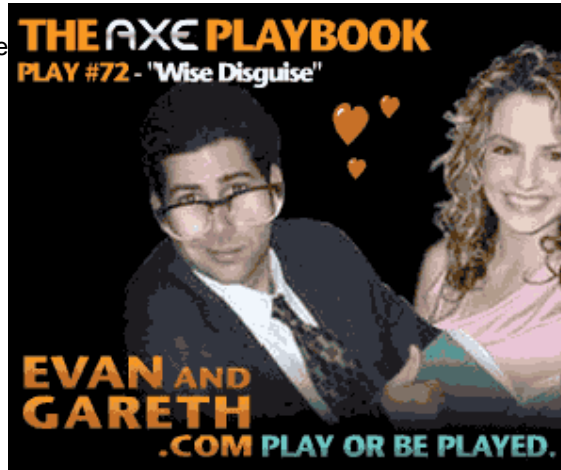
GEAR INFO

Type	Steering Wheel
Platform	Xbox
Manufacturer	Fanatec
Price	TBA
Availability	May 2005

Hands-On: Forza Steering Wheel

We burn some rubber with the Speedster 3 Forceshock.

April 26, 2005 - There is only one week to go before the release of Microsoft Game Studio's racing simulator *Forza Motorsport*. We've already provided a multitude of impressions, touching on everything from the online mode and the drivatar, to the subtle A.I. tweaks that have been applied since the release of the demo. Throughout this coverage there have also been frequent references and comparisons to Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* series. Widely recognized as the king of racing simulation, GT has set an impressive benchmark in graphics, sound, realism, content, and any other category the genre can be judged by.



To go up against *GT4*, a racing sim needs to deliver all of the options found in the PS2 game and some extras of its own. One of the features racing fanatics are sure to expect is the support of a force feedback steering wheel. *Gran Turismo 4* was paired with the Logitech Driving Force Pro wheel. Aside from some early bugs when used with *GT4*, this was an extremely competent piece of hardware. Earlier this week we received the Xbox's answer to this peripheral in the form of the Speedster 3 ForceShock wheel. In anticipation of *Forza* we decided to take the Xbox wheel for a test drive and in the process, compare it to the Logitech hardware to see if *Forza* has an extra edge.

Design wise, the Fanatec wheel looks and feels like a quality product. Setting it up is made easy due to the incredibly large clamp that attaches to the bottom of the device. This vice grip can be attached to face either forwards or backwards and can attach to table as thick as three inches. This easily bests the clamp system of the Logitech wheel which consists of two small clamps that only extend about an inch from the base. Amazingly, Fanatec's product easily hooked onto our curved, odd shaped desks here at the office so it should easily adjust to anyone's home setup.

Additionally, the wheel can also comfortably rest on a gamer's lap. There are two curved flaps that fold down on the bottom of the device that come down on the outside of your legs. The clamp is shaped to be squeezed between the knees and when combined with the outside panels, the wheel actually remains stationary when set down on a player's lap.

Both of the steering wheels include all of the buttons for their respective systems, but the Fanatec version has a few perks. The shifting paddles behind the wheel are analogue and can also function as the gas and break. When they are fully depressed, each one clicks, which indicates a gear change when used in this capacity. This is helpful for people who tire of using the pedals on the ground.

The A, B, X, and Y button are close to the center of the wheel and within

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thumb's reach. Annoyingly the Y and X buttons are moved to the left side for easier access. This is logical spatially, but it can be difficult to think of hitting one of these face button with your left hand. Closer towards the center are the black, white, right and left analogue click buttons. In the very center of the wheel there is a directional pad surrounded by the back, start, setup, and tuning buttons. The Logitech setup has the D-pad within reach of the player's left hand which makes menu navigation much easier.



The Back and Start buttons are self explanatory, but the tuning options are unique to the wheel. The wheel runs on three motors that can be adjusted independently for different tuning settings. Below the base of the steering column on the right there is a two-digit LED display. There are six variables that work together to influence how the wheel will respond. The first of these is the dead zone. This determines at which point turning the wheel will cause the car to react. Sensitivity decides how much movement is needed to force the car into sharper turns. This can be adjusted to make up for the lack of a large turning radius on the wheel. The force feedback has three setting that change intensity and another four that decide when the feedback becomes engaged. There are also degrees of vibration and steering resistance that can be adjusted from this menu.

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Hands-On: Forza Steering Wheel

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Since these settings must be changed from game to game, it is highly appreciated that the wheel includes four save slots for specialized configurations. There is also a communicator port on the right side of the base which is ideal for a game like *Forza* with such excellent Live support.

One drawback with the Fanatec wheel is that the turning radius is nowhere near that of the Logitech design. On the GT device, gamers are able to spin the wheel a full one and a quarter revolutions in either direction before hitting a stopping point. Comparatively, the Fanatec wheel only turns about a 1/4 turn in either direction. This may disappoint racers who enjoy performing spinouts or wicked donuts.



IGN Xbox's Dave Clayman's Impressions

The Speedster 3 is comfortable where it counts, but has a few flaws that will annoy hard core racing fans. The shifting pedals behind the steering wheel are well designed and responsive, but they are not complimented by a stick shift. The Logitech Driving Force Pro has a small stick just to the right of the wheel that has an up and a down function. It's simple, but it causes the player to have to take their right hand off of the wheel when changing gears. This is something that people will want to feel when using certain cars in a simulator. The pedals also feel a little loose when compared to Logitech's hardware. They are closer to the *Steel Battalion* hardware than the solid feeling DFP.

The Speedster advertises full force feedback, but something about it doesn't feel quite right. Instead of pushing against the turns, the wheel feels more like a glorified rumble pack in that it simply vibrates and jerks from one side to the other. This is a different overall feeling from playing GT4 with the Logitech controller where tight turns and spin outs will damn-near throw a player's hands into the air.

The price of the wheel has yet to be announced, but on the official Xbox website there is currently a Sweepstakes where gamers can win both the wheel and the game. The site claims this is \$199.99 retail value, meaning that the Speedster 3 has an approximate retail value of \$150 dollars. This is a bit steep for a racing peripheral seeing as the Logitech Wheel went for an MSRP of \$99.99 when it was first released. Hopefully the price will be lower when the product officially shows up at retailers.

IGN Gear Editor Chris Roper's Impressions

Chris reviewed the Logitech Driving Driving Force Pro Wheel when it was released.

The Speedster 3 ForceShock carries somewhat of a contradiction between its

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name and the features on its box. The box says Force Feedback + Vibration, but the product's name of ForceShock is a far more legitimate and accurate descriptor than the Force Feedback feature highlight printed on said box. The problem is that the wheel doesn't seem to actually use Force Feedback, but rather simply a version of the rumble feature found in the Controller S; hence, ForceShock.



It may seem like somewhat of a cheap tactic, but it's certainly better than nothing. While the wheel won't kick hard to the left when you smack into a barrier on the right, and it won't ever give you the subtle nuances of tire friction (or lack thereof) on the road, it's far better than simply having a loose wheel with which to steer your high-powered vehicle into an onslaught of oncoming traffic.

The comparisons between the Speedster 3 ForceShock and Logitech's Driving Force Pro will be nearly as common as those between *Forza* and *Gran Turismo* themselves, but they're very legitimate comparisons. The Driving Force Pro is currently the best wheel you can buy for any console, and coupled with *GT4* it's a driving fan's dream come true. As Xbox fans eagerly await *Forza* to hit shelves, they want to know whether their alternative to the DFP will provide the same realistic driving experience.

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In a word, no. But it's pretty decent. Again, the problem is the lack of true Force Feedback. I'm not even knocking it for not having 900 degrees of motion, which as I mentioned in my [Driving Force Pro review](#), wasn't that big of a deal.

With Logitech's wheel, you're getting feedback on exactly what sort of terrain your wheels are on, how tight they are on the road, how locked or loose your steering wheel is and more. With the Speedster 3 ForceShock, you're getting a bit of shaking here and there.

Still, the wheel itself is pretty decent. Physically, it feels very comfortable. It's nice and large and the wheel's rotation is very smooth. The pedals are slightly flimsy, but once you get into any given race then you likely won't notice.



The wheel is also very responsive as well, at least after it's been tuned to a specific game. I've only ever raced a few laps in *Forza* up to now, but I managed to find myself a nice driving line and easily win a few races with this wheel. When I first picked up the game with the Controller S, things were much more difficult. Of course, I was driving a Ferrari F50 with no practice or driving assistance, so that was probably part of the problem.

After driving with the Speedster 3 ForceShock for a bit, mainly with *Forza*, I'd say that were I to buy *Forza* then I'd probably pick up the wheel as well (assuming the TBA price is reasonable). That's not to say that it's perfect as it's far from it. But the wheel is very accurate and works a hell of a lot better than any gamepad would with a racing simulator.

Look forward to more info on *Forza Motorsport* including an in-depth review on IGN Xbox in the coming days.

-- [David Clayman](#) and [Chris Roper](#)

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