

r(Fact)or¹ + *rFactor-(Pro)* = *r(Fact)or²?*
(ISI) (Hoyle)



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SPECIAL REPORT

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disc

Gjon Camaj on what next for Image Space Incorporated

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SportsCar GT, F1 2000, '01, and '02, F1 Challenge '99-'02, GTR, GTR2, GTLegends, RACE, RACE07, STCC, GTR Evo, Turismo Carretera, ARCA Sim Racing ... if anyone sits down to write the definitive history of simulated-racing in the first decade of the twenty-first century (a sure-fire best-seller if there ever was one), ISI's supremacy over the scene would need to be a central tenet. It's no exaggeration to state that this pint-sized development house not only breathed but virtually sustained the genre's life, particularly during those dark years between 2004–2006 when it appeared as if they were destined to be the last sim-code writers left standing.

imploded in February, and SimBin's *GTR*—using an older version of ISI's code and released that March—was no 'real' competition for ISI's newest and bravest.

rFactor—by virtue of its own prowess, and the competition's near-death experience—was the King of the Road in the winter of 2005: ISI had massaged its physics code (last-seen in EA's 2003's *F1 Challenge '99-'02*) to a tasty new sheen, and they'd gone to town on the new graphics engine (gMotor2) now available in full-technicolor-like-DX9.

What *rFactor* lacked—licensed content—was touted (providentially, as it turned out) as a positive: *rFactor* was

be transformed into any racing series, track, or car with comparative ease by a network of thousands of modders all of whom were ready, able, and willing to create scratch-built content for a pittance—and usually far less—which meant that commercial clients (and they are a significant part of ISI's bottom-line) could be quickly satisfied with high-quality mods.

ISI's office in Ann Arbor, Michigan, runs with only a handful of essential staff including studio leads Gjon Camaj, and Joseph Campana, the two having founded ISI in 1992. Indeed, ISI have always been not so much secretive as introspective: They've been designing

“...we have character animations, a ghost-car trainer, dynamic weather, and some new types of racing in our current version ...”

And then there was *rFactor*, ISI's finest moment, that is now visibly showing its age. Old news in itself, of course, considering this venerable sim's last update appeared way back in September of 2007—that's over 440 days ago for those of you who are counting (and if you *are* counting, the time has come to cease that meaningless pursuit because there will never again be another update for *rFactor*). The sim that spawned and the sim that launched a squizillion offspring, a host of sim-development companies, a handful of careers within the industry has reached retirement age, and is now sitting on a creaking porch watching the sunset gather yonder in the gloom.

In its days of glory (2005), though, *rFactor* was *the* sim to own, a circumstance helped considerably by the fact that the competition was by then ostensibly dead-in-the-water: Papyrus had gone under (with no redemption in sight), EA had abandoned the sim-racing scene for good (in all senses of that term) after *NASCAR Sim Racing* had

designed to harness the talent of the community, enticing them to create the content *they* wanted with a platform that functioned (that is, shifted units) on two distinct (and enmeshed) levels: As the most evolved sim for the PC at the time, and as a complete modding platform for a community that had taken its first baby-steps with ISI's *Sports Car GT*, grown-up with *F1 Championship*, and come of age with *F1 2002* (the sim that spawned Ian Bell's 'GTR 2002' mod that spawned SimBin that spawned Blimey!Games that spawned ...).

ISI's decisions—whether led more by contingency or sheer brilliance—were spot-on: The company had trimmed itself down from its heyday producing content for EA (who lost its Formula One license and so would no longer come calling) into a development-house that sold its own content over the 'net while fostering close relationships with a customer base who doubled as ISI's contractors for content development and generation. Moreover, with its chameleonic personality, *rFactor* could

simulators for twenty years, some say: Others say the company started life designing military software, and yet others allude to the fact that their 'base'—fifty kilometres from Motortown—suggests a close relationship with Detroit's car industry. Whatever the truth, the company is generating somewhere between one and five million dollars (according to Cortera.com), which proved a good place as any to begin our interview with ISI's Vice-President, Gjon Camaj.

rFactor: 31/08/2005
NASCAR Thunder 2004: 16/09/2003
F1 Challenge '99-'02: 24/06/2003
NASCAR Thunder 2003: 19/09/2002
F1 2002: 07/06/2002
F1 2001: 28/09/2001
F1 Championship Season 2000: 06/12/2000
F1 2000: 31/03/2000
Sports Car GT: 30/04/1999



AUTOSIMSPORT: Can you tell us a bit about sales of *rFactor*?
Gjon Camaj: Sales have been good, but not great. It would be very difficult to keep a development effort going on sales of the consumer version alone. This is why we continue to work on other projects, and why you see some other companies release products more often. We do other projects that generate income, while many other companies release products more often—EA produces a game per year for each of their sports titles, and for many others products too, in some cases multiple titles per year, like for *The Sims*. The easiest way to explain the types of projects ISI develop is to take a [glance at this](#): This is how *rFactor* is used for marketing events, training, or bundled with new hardware. Some of the other projects {ISI work on} are engineering simulation tools, but typically we are under NDA when working with these companies. And every once in a while we do some 'out there' projects too, but not many of those anymore—our team is just too small nowadays.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Looking at the last three years, is there anything you would have done differently? By this I mean—the whole gamut of the way *rFactor* was created, marketed, and so forth ...

Gjon: Yes I'm sure there are plenty of things, but to be honest, I try never to think that way. I have been surprised that even now, three years later, *rFactor* continues to bring new people into the community. I am also surprised how many small groups and leagues have formed and generally keep to themselves.

LEFT: "We don't have employees—we are all 'gang members'. There are six in our office in Ann Arbor ..."

AUTOSIMSPORT: You added licensed content after release with *rFactor*: Was this deliberate, or the way things just developed? Can you talk a bit about what the licensed content did for sales?

Gjon: We never set out to specifically to include licensed content. We do this as it makes sense to a specific project or type of racing.

AUTOSIMSPORT: How similar was the code of *rFactor* in comparison to your previous sims? Was it a whole new engine?

Gjon: We never create all new engines. We have been doing both vehicle simulations and 3D graphics for almost twenty years, and while the technology has changed, many of the algorithms and concepts have not as they are based on real-world equivalents.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Was there a genuine attempt at creating some sort of 'quality control' of the mods, or was the game-plan always to allow the community to patrol the

quality of mods?

Gjon: There are some formats and conventions that we try and maintain, but we do not have a concept for restraining, controlling, or judging content created by the community. We don't condone or accept anything that is illegal, unethical or insulting but outside of that, we don't place any constraints on the community's ideas of what is worth racing

AUTOSIMSPORT: Did you see any spikes in sales with the release of certain mods? And if so, which?

Gjon: In general, the only obvious sales spikes have come from the release of our many updates. I think the commitment to maintaining the product along with the new features and content always attracted new members. Other events, like the release of mods, major races, or our own marketing efforts have not had perceivable instantaneous results. This has surprised me. However, I do firmly believe that the cumulative effect has sustained *rFactor* these many years.

“Certainly if there were many other products doing exactly the same thing, then it would reach a point that the share would be too small to sustain us, but we do not require an ever-increasing community base, nor do we have any debt to slow us down.”

AUTOSIMSPORT: Are you able to talk us through the mods that you felt were important moments in the evolution of *rFactor*?

Gjon: Well, it's like talking about which of your children you like best—probably better to just say we love them all. I personally like the mods that find creative ways to extend the options available in *rFactor*.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Where to next for *rFactor*? Have we reached the end of development for *rFactor*?

Gjon: Effectively yes, we are not planning any more *rFactor* updates. Our development environment is the same for all our products so everything that we are now working on will benefit ... whatever it will be called. ... I predict it will be called ... *rFactor2*.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So there is an *rFactor2* in the works?

Gjon: Oh yes, we are always working on new things, whether it's finishing up current features, adding new ones, assimilating features from other projects, or just generally playing around. We had a goal this past summer to have a working prototype of a new general format, but that has yet to be completed. As for other features, we have character animations, a ghost-car trainer, dynamic weather, and some new types of racing in our current version. What actually makes it into *rFactor2* has yet to be decided, but my guess is it will happen similar the first release of *rFactor*. One day we buttoned up what we were working on, the unfinished or untested features were banished to the .PLR file, and shipped it out the door. The next day most people came in and continued on where they left off. Of course, it wasn't this black and white ... but close!



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AUTOSIMSPORT: Will we be seeing the introduction of gMotor3 with DX10 for *rFactor2*?

Gjon: My guess is, no. I say this because it's not currently an option on my version.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will we be seeing a more integrated and serviced Race Cast?

Gjon: That is getting overhauled as we speak.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will we be seeing any sort of integration with RealFeel for FFB?

Gjon: Yes

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will you have the licenses for *rFactor2* that you currently have for *rFactor*?

Gjon: Probably not.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Could you tell me any differences between *rFactor* and *rFactor2* in terms of content? Will we have licensed content right off the bat? And tools for modding?

Gjon: Licensed content is never a priority but always an option. We don't have any signed right now. My guess is our tools will improve, and our goal will be to release anything new {that we have worked on in that regard}.

AUTOSIMSPORT: How many employees are there at ISI??

Gjon: We don't have employees—we are all 'gang members'. There are six in our office in Ann Arbor, another six full-time around the world, and a handful of part-time and contract people.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will you be inviting a select group of modders to work on *rFactor2* before launch so that we have content ready to go at release?

Gjon: Yes, that is my goal.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will we see a further development of the actual physics engine? There was a big overhaul between *rFactor* and what came before from ISI—can we expect a similar development between *rFactor* and *rFactor2*?

Gjon: Yes, we are working on a few projects, *rFactor Pro* included, that allows us to rewrite the whole structure. So yes, although it's not a 'rewrite'—and it almost never is for any system of ours—it is undergoing a decent overhaul.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Will content from *rFactor* be convertible to *rFactor2*?

Gjon: Drag and drop, no. But convertible, of course....anything is convertible.

AUTOSIMSPORT: So if I were to ask you as a marketer—what would inspire me to go from *rFactor* to *rFactor2*, what would be the main point(s)?

Gjon: Interesting question, one that deserves an answer ... but I look at both development and marketing in two parts: One for the current group of simmers, and one to bring in new people. Our focus right now is concentrating on the core group, for them the main focus is more, better, deeper ... and for the mod fans, it's a more organized structure for developing and deploying mods. For the second group ... it is ... TBD.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Inevitable question—and inevitable answer, so let's narrow it down a bit! Release date? 2009? 2010?

Gjon: Dunno— The plan is for 2009 but it always looks so far away until you get there.

AUTOSIMSPORT: Looking at the sim-racing scene over the last three years, how has it changed, and where are we headed?

Gjon: I would think you, or many others, would have a better idea of where the sim-scene is going: My actions and interests are fairly limited to *rFactor* and a subset of that. I certainly think there is plenty of market for sim-racers and sim-makers. For ISI, we have positioned ourselves in a small niche and contract and expand along with the community. Certainly if there were many other products doing exactly the same thing, then it would reach a point that the share would be too small to sustain us, but we do not require an ever increasing community base, nor do we have any debt to slow us down. We'll never be able to buy our own race team, but we do get to move in the directions that interest us, and nobody at ISI ever misses a family event. Will it last until 2012? I think so, but I'm certainly not spending that money now.

AUTOSIMSPORT: With SimBin now perhaps considering producing its own engine, has this hurt ISI financially, and how does this impact the future?

Gjon: I really don't think these products significantly affect either sales or support of *rFactor*.