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Moto Maniacs

Hello, Moto

Platform: J2ME
Developer: Morpheme

WGR SCORECARD

Overall: **8.6/10**

Graphics: 8.5
 Sound: 7.3
 Gameplay: 9.3
 Innovation: 7.0

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Review

Hello, Moto

by [Steve Palley](#) Posted: Thursday, 5 February 2004

Morpheme's new motocross game Moto Maniacs is a fantastic mobile adaptation of Dirtbike, a Mac shareware classic whose name I just barely rescued from the clutches of amnesia. I am more than pleased to see that venerable title brought to the Very Small Screen with such élan; Moto Maniacs is a down-and-dirty tire-squealing blast served up with a myriad of challenging tracks – and the first in-game level editor I've ever seen on mobile to boot.

Outside of jello wrestling and tossing the caber, Motocross is just about the coolest sport known to man. Powerful dirtbikes, kamikaze riders and huge jumps combine to produce a sort of Gestalt mechanism of kickassery; there's no complex thought involved, only an elemental, lower-brain response that slackens the jaws and glazes the eyes. Moto Maniacs captures this animal joy by keeping things extremely simple. You are riding a dirtbike on a two-dimensional track; you can lean forward or back, accelerate and decelerate; and the objective is to cross the finish line first.

It's funny how these few parameters can result in hours upon hours of entertainment. Morpheme seems to have a talent for producing uncomplicated yet extremely addictive games; they managed the feat in Balloon Headed Boy, and they've done it again here. Though Moto's controls are simple, it takes a while before you begin to get the hang of keeping your racer on his bike. You must lean back just the perfect amount over bumps and while landing jumps, or your bike will fall to pieces like a mechanical Enron. At the same time, leaning back slows you down – and if you do it an iota too much you'll crash, tacking precious seconds onto your finish time. The physics engine seems almost perfect, although there's a slight bias towards your bike's front wheel. It feels like you may rotate forward more than is strictly accurate going off jumps, and your front tire will fall off at the slightest provocation.

These minor issues quickly receded after I saw how much polish went into Moto Maniacs. The in-game graphics are boldly presented, with scrolling backgrounds and fluid animation; even the menus appear to have been worked over with a microscope. The sound is sparse but high-quality, including revving engine sounds, a trick bonus chime, and bass-driven title screen music. When you eventually defeat the provided tracks – which are arrayed in a three-tier difficulty system – you can move to the in-game editor and create your own. This feature is not without problems: you can only save one level at a time, and the interface is pretty clunky. Nevertheless, Morpheme gets points for even trying it on a mobile game.

To sum up, Moto Maniacs is a very slick title that no racing fan should be without; it plays just as well on my N-Gage as it did on my Quadra 630. Hopefully Morpheme will take a couple more cracks at the level-editor challenge in later versions – it's the last piece this game needs to become a true mobile immortal.

Handset used for review: [Nokia N-Gage](#)

Mobile Entertainment Analyst

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