

# Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts

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Things were a lot different 10 years ago. Microsoft was too busy working on Windows 98 to care about computer games, and the two hot consoles were the Nintendo 64 and the original Playstation. The superstars of the gaming world didn't star in first person shooters or sandbox titles. Instead, platformers, utilising the newly realised 3D technology of the current generation were the latest hot topic. Mario, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro, Rayman, Croc... the market was flooding with these cute characters, and gamers lapped them up. Fast forward 10 years, and the market is much changed. The platformer has become a stale genre, and despite the best efforts of publishers, they are now much maligned. And so, when granting new life to their much loved Banjo-Kazooie series, Rare had to get with the times, and the result is a great new direction for a much loved series.

Still, it feels like the bird and the bear have never been away, despite the 8 years that have passed since Banjo Tooie, and this much becomes clear in the wonderful opening to the game. Whilst the humour and characters scream Rare at you, the added power of the current generation, and indeed, the financial power now behind Rare, is soon apparent. Banjo has always been a cut above other somewhat mediocre platformers, and even now the series focus has changed, the whole title just feels a cut above any of its rivals. Everything is bright and vivid, the visuals are crisp, and the areas are unique. The story is simple, but has great humour and is expertly executed, and at the heart of all this lies an exceptional core gameplay, the much touted new vehicle creation tools. The storyline is charming and quite different to anything else out there. When the story begins, we see our two heroes on Spiral Mountain. With Grunty gone, they've had little to do, and Banjo is a fat tub of lard, whilst Kazooie spends all her time playing her Xbox 360. Gruntilda soon appears, just as she was at the end of Banjo Tooie- She's a skull. They prepare to fight but a new character intervenes to stop the embarrassing confrontation. The Lord of Games, known as L.O.G, has them transported to the games hub world, the epic Showdown Town, and restores the two heroes to their former glory (though not their previous moves) whilst giving Grunty a mechanical body. The two also receive new rides, though whilst Banjo and Kazooie's resembles the old bangers Westwood gets on Pimp My Ride, Grunty's looks more like the pimped end product. Still, it's a starting point. In Showdown Town, L.O.G explains how he has created a series of worlds, each with several levels and challenges, and that our heroes must play through them, collecting Jiggies to unlock more levels and challenges, in order to win the game, and reclaim Spiral Mountain. We also meet Mumbo Jumbo, who for some reason is now a mechanic, and who introduces the new gameplay features; the magical wrench, which can be used to fight and pick up items, and, of course, the vehicles. Vehicles are not just a gimmick that Rare have slapped into this game, they are central to everything that you do in Nuts and Bolts. Banjo is overweight and moves slowly, and so you will almost always be travelling in a vehicle of some sort. The vehicle creation section of the title is extremely robust, and using a simple grid method, you simply click new sections onto your design to make your vehicle. You are actively encouraged to be creative in each mission, and design a vehicle to tackle the obstacle that confronts you. These generally leave plenty of scope for you to complete the mission how you wish, and it is easy to become engrossed in creating new and exciting vehicles when you should be focussing on the task at hand. Your creations can be land, sea or air based, there are available weapons and you can alter things such as speed, weight or manoeuvrability. Aside from the scope for great creativity and large number of options, the whole system features a great control system, and is grounded in excellent physics to make the whole thing realistic. You can also test your creations at the 'Test-o-Track' area, or send pictures to your friends over Xbox Live. When playing Nuts and Bolts, you may initially think it may be aimed at a younger market. The depth this system offers is the resounding response that this isn't child's play. The scope of the title dwarfs the previous N64 offerings considerably. There are over a hundred Jiggies to collect, thousands of musical notes (used here as currency to buy vehicle parts or jiggies) throughout the worlds and over one thousand vehicle parts for your vehicles. Refreshingly, the linear aspects of the previous titles have been dropped, and you are free to complete challenges at your whim. You may choose to see all that Nutty Acres has to offer before moving onto the next world, the LOGbox 720, or come back to any of the challenges at a later point. Worlds not only possess main challenges that result in Jiggies, but also the Jinjos, another returning element of previous titles. They offer their own challenges and you are rewarded with Jinjo tokens which can be redeemed at the Jinjo Bingo for new vehicle components. The option to do what you want when you want is a great choice on Rare's part, and when you consider that you don't need nearly as many of the Jiggies available in the game to tackle the final level shows the high levels of replayability, and options to keep you playing long after you've condemned Grunty to a lifetime's work in L.O.G's videogame factory. Another change from the previous titles is the addition of a comprehensive multiplayer mode, both online or offline. You can either participate in one of the many available races, or play a sports themed game, such as football, where the object is, obviously, to score more goals, to basketball, where you must get a ball into a high hoop. These are not only inventive and a lot of fun, but another testament to the vehicle creation mode. Outwitting your opponent is key, and designing a vehicle perfectly suited to each of these tasks is paramount to success. In basketball, where the hoop is high above the ground, you may design a plane that can lift the ball, and fly over the hoop to drop the ball in. You may design a land-based vehicle with springs, so you can go under the hoop and propel yourself through it. The options are limitless, and I have no shame in admitting that Banjo's multiplayer experience rivals many I've played on the 360 this year, not only in terms of fun, but also in terms of the polish. This is yet another element of the title where a great amount of effort has gone into providing a really solid product. Other excellent online features include a series of leaderboards, and the option to upload anything, from pictures and blueprints of your vehicles, to videos of you completing the challenges. You can find an inspired design, or one that you can tweak just to your liking, or show off your pride and joy for everyone to enjoy. My personal favourite design so far? A Turtle. Aside from the novelty of the vehicle itself, it's irresistible charm, it features some clever design, such as

being able to work on land and water. It's an example of exactly what everyone can and should aim to achieve in the title, and how creativity can be combined with intelligent thinking. It's almost a travesty that Nuts and Bolts will inevitably be overlooked in favour of some mass marketed FPS or the latest sports title that differs little from the previous year's offering. Hell, I haven't seen a single other person on my friends list playing the title, and it's really a shame. Back in the day, Banjo-Kazooie titles were huge, rivalling Mario 64 on the trusty N64, and if you didn't have it, you meant nothing on the playground. Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts will not be a Christmas bestseller, and it won't make any Game of the Year polls, but for those who take a risk and play it, they will find a title bursting with depth, humour, quirky design, replayability and, most crucially of all, fun. I can't recall the last time I had so much genuine fun on my 360. I was fascinated in Lost Odyssey's storyline, but I didn't have a smile on my face. I was engrossed in the gameplay of Fable 2, but I wasn't in a great mood even after turning off the console. The feelgood factor is staggering, and you will have a great time throughout your whole adventure. And at the end of the day, isn't having fun what gaming is supposed to be all about? At least Rare remembers that. Discuss this in our Forums