

Microsoft Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 Joystick

Reviewed by Ken Herbig

Computer games have come a long way since I started playing them. Remember when you downloaded a shareware game to play in DOS? Everything was controlled with the keyboard and/or mouse. As the programs became more sophisticated, so did the gaming devices. I have been using a Sidewinder 3D Pro Joystick for quite a while and thought that I would never need another, until now!

I'm sure that many of us have played games that said that they were Force-Feedback-compatible. Let me tell you, we didn't know what we were missing! Playing a game such as *MS Midtown Madness* or *MotoRacer 2* with the **Sidewinder Force Feedback 2** is a whole new experience.

You need to load the driver, which comes on a CD, before plugging the joystick into an AC outlet and your USB port. The joystick has a 16-bit 25-MHz on-board processor that delivers 100 different forces to your fingertips. There is a throttle lever on the side and the handle can be turned to operate as a rudder controller. There are 8 programmable buttons and an 8-way hat switch that can also be programmed, to give you a total of 16. The handle has been set up so that all the buttons and the trigger are all convenient to your touch. It also knows when you are ready for action, through a photo-optical beam that is interrupted when you grip the stick. The base of the device is large and because of the motors inside, it has weight to it. This makes it more stable than other joysticks. In the heat of battle or just crashing into things, you won't feel like you have to hold it down. Instead, you will feel every gun or missile fired, every bump or crash, all through the handle of the joystick.

I tried it out on a few games that I had played with my old joystick to get a true comparison. From the first jump in *MotoRacer*, I knew that I was in for a wild ride. All of a sudden, instead of just seeing and hearing, you are adding in another sense—touch. It's like you are riding the dirt bike in the race. As you land, you feel the impact in the joystick, just as you would on the



bike. The normal joystick functions seem to be improved too; the bike reacts to your movement smoothly and more quickly.

When I took-off in *MS Combat Flight Simulator*, it was like nothing I have ever experienced in a game. In my first dog fight, the vibration of the guns firing and feeling the impact of the bullets as they penetrated the windshield was as real as I want it to get.

This was lots of fun. I guess the next step would have to be virtual reality.

MS Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 Joystick

(www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/deices/FFB2/default.htm)

Street price: \$ 70 - 100

System requirements:

- Pentium 166 MHz or higher
- Windows 98 or 2000 Professional
- 16 MB RAM, 25 MB HD space
- Quad speed or higher CD ROM drive
- Super VGA, 256 color monitor
- Microsoft mouse
or compatible pointing device
- USB port
- DirectX 7.0a API or higher 