



## Chris Sawyer - Interview

There's no denying that **Chris Sawyer** belongs to the most **creative** people in the industry. Titles like **Transport Tycoon** and **RollerCoaster Tycoon** have had an incredible impact on how we look at gaming and especially the latter showed the world that although cutting-edge graphics are a major selling point, you don't need them to have a **successful** game. **Gameplay** is what's **selling** RollerCoaster Tycoon and in that, the game shines like no other. We interviewed Chris about past, present and future.

**Gamers Central:** Transport Tycoon has sold extremely well and is still incredibly popular. It's one of the games we still play ourselves, 5 years after its release. Did you expect it to do this well when you started work on it?

**Chris Sawyer:** Yes, when I started creating Transport Tycoon, I had high hopes for it. At that time, Railroad Tycoon was a successful game, and I hoped that my game would perhaps move the genre forward a bit with the 3D-isometric graphics, multiple transport types, and visible opposition companies. However, my 'high hopes' for the game were that it would sell a few thousand copies, when in fact it's sold well over 600,000 copies world-wide, and is still selling in small numbers now.

**Gamers Central:** After its release there were a few addons and a deluxe version but then it became very quiet around you. Were you already programming on RollerCoaster Tycoon at that time?

**Chris Sawyer:** After the release of Transport Tycoon Deluxe at the end of 1995, I spent a long time playing around with various ideas and directions for the next game. Most of 1996 was actually spent working on brand new code for Transport Tycoon 2, but this project was abandoned (or perhaps just postponed?) in August of that year. The code didn't go to waste though, as much of it went into the project which later became RollerCoaster Tycoon. Serious work on RollerCoaster Tycoon started around August/September 1996, and I worked on it full-time from then until publication in March 1999.

**Gamers Central:** I understand that another company, MD Studios, is doing a sequel to the game. How come you're not involved in that project?

**Chris Sawyer:** At the last count, I think there are at least 3 Transport Tycoon-type projects underway by other companies, and of course there have been other imitators as well over the years, including Industry Giant and to some extent Railroad Tycoon 2. I haven't been involved in any of these projects - If I were to create a sequel to Transport Tycoon I would do it independently of other developers.

**Gamers Central:** RollerCoaster Tycoon is an even bigger success than Transport Tycoon and that in a time where many non-3D-accelerated games tend to have a very difficult time. What is, in your eyes, the reason for its success?

**Chris Sawyer:** A combination of three things - First, the game is all about 'building' things, which is something which appeals to most people. Second, the detail and atmosphere created by the game draws the player into the game, and makes him/her want to 'nurture' their little park, keeping it running smoothly, and keeping 'their' little people happy. And third, the subject matter itself - Amusement parks and roller coasters are all about people having fun, and in the current climate of games full of killing and violence, here's one game where the objective is a good one, to build a successful park where everyone enjoys themselves!



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**Gamers Central:** How did you get the idea for doing a game like this and did you know Bullfrog would come with a similar game when you started the project?

**Chris Sawyer:** I expected Bullfrog to produce a sequel to their game, after all it was a very successful game. RollerCoaster Tycoon though was designed around a very different focus, the construction and running of detailed true-to-life roller coasters in an amusement park environment. When I started the project, my objective was to get the roller coasters working, make them easy and fun to build, and above all fun to watch in action - I wanted to create something which was fascinating to watch as well as play with. The other elements of the game, the other rides, the guests, and financial aspects, were all secondary, although I now realise these elements have made the game into the 'complete' game it now is.

**Gamers Central:** Transport Tycoon was published by Microprose. Was it an obvious choice to go with Microprose/Hasbro because you worked together before?

**Chris Sawyer:** RollerCoaster Tycoon was actually signed to Hasbro Interactive before they took over Microprose, so it wasn't originally planned to be a Microprose title. Hasbro Interactive were chosen for the game as they were part of a 'toy' company, and I hoped this would mean they had more experience at selling a game which in many ways plays as a 'toy'. When Hasbro took over Microprose it meant we could use the 'Tycoon' brand for the game, resulting in the game being called RollerCoaster Tycoon.

**Gamers Central:** The 'engines' of Transport Tycoon and RollerCoaster Tycoon 'look very similar but I understand that much has been changed to make it possible to create RollerCoaster. What kind of changes were necessary?

**Chris Sawyer:** There's no common code between the two games at all. Transport Tycoon's game engine was already stretched as much as it could be, and so I started totally from scratch for my next game. However, the 'next game' was originally planned as Transport Tycoon 2, and so the game engine was actually designed with this in mind. The project only migrated to RollerCoaster Tycoon after about 6 months work, but the kind of features and flexibility I had designed into the game engine for TT2 also suited RollerCoaster Tycoon very well. Probably the most fundamental difference between the two game engines is that RollerCoaster Tycoon had to be able to allow objects (tracks, paths etc.) at multiple levels on the same square of land, and this required a totally different data structure to the single-level Transport Tycoon map.

**Gamers Central:** How does one create the ultimate ride in RollerCoaster Tycoon? What's the secret? ;-)

**Chris Sawyer:** There's no single 'ultimate' ride in RollerCoaster Tycoon. There are plenty of things you learn though as you gain experience building the roller coasters, like keeping the forces below certain levels, using the scenery, using tunnels, getting the 'pacing' of the ride right, and using all these elements to create an 'adventure' which the little riders go through as they ride.

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**Gamers Central:** We've played the game for hours and hours and although there were many funny moments in the game, nothing compared to turbo-boosting the speed of the standard Shuttle Loop and watch 'm fly. Have you ever tried this yourself? ;-)

**Chris Sawyer:** Yes! But that's not as bad as when I first tested the Observation Tower ride during development - Instead of the circular cabin rotating gentle up to the top of the tower, it blasted straight up, popped off the top, flew off and crashed on the ground!

**Gamers Central:** Any idea what your next game will be?

**Chris Sawyer:** Yes, but I never announce or discuss my plans until the game is virtually complete. Things always change a lot during development, and it's highly likely my plans will change depending on how things go.

**Gamers Central:** Now that you're no longer doing research (or are you?) after new rollercoasters, what does an average working day look like for you?

**Chris Sawyer:** Yes, I still do 'research' (any excuse to ride roller coasters!). However, my work is much more mundane usually, and involved a fair amount of programming, testing, CD burning, phone calls, and emails. Although the expansion pack for RollerCoaster Tycoon is finished, there's still further work to be done, including several new language versions.

**Gamers Central:** At the end of each interview we do, we always give the opportunity to the interviewee to say whatever he or she likes. So here's your chance to say something that will secure your place in gaming history. ;-)

**Chris Sawyer:** Creating computer games is a bit like painting a picture or creating a sculpture. The great artists had their own unique style for their paintings, and it's this which makes their finished articles so much more enjoyable and stand out among all the others. In the computer game industry there's a great deal of pressure to follow the latest trends in hardware and gameplay, to do the 'same thing' but better. Sometimes it's better to ignore this and do things differently, creating something unique, and in many ways this is how RollerCoaster Tycoon came about. Although there are many games developers creating some great games using the latest 3D accelerated hardware, and in well-trodden games genres, we need more developers who are prepared to take the risk of trying something different, ignoring the trends, and follow their own instincts of what makes a good game, even if it seems like a backward step to everyone else.