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Chris Sawyer's Locomotion Interview - 21 September 2004 00:01 - [John \[JCal\] Callaham](#) [User Comments : 0](#)

In a game industry filled with titles that are costing millions of dollars, UK based Chris Sawyer has been making bestselling games nearly all by himself, such as the Rollercoaster Tycoon titles for publisher Atari. Recently Sawyer and Atari released his latest game called Locomotion, a sort of remake to his earlier Transport Tycoon transportation sim game. HomeLAN got a chance to chat with Sawyer about Locomotion and other topics.

HomeLAN - First, what made you want to go back to the game territory that you originally created for Transport Tycoon?

Chris Sawyer - I've always wanted to go back to Transport Tycoon, in fact I've been working on and off on a sequel to it ever since Transport Tycoon Deluxe was published in 1995. The early plans for a sequel were dropped when I started focusing on creating RollerCoaster Tycoon, and although I did do some work on a Transport Tycoon sequel between RCT and RCT2 I didn't really get started on Locomotion until RCT2 was complete.

HomeLAN - How hard was it to get all of the gameplay ideas you had for Locomotion into the actual game?

Chris Sawyer - I don't think I was particularly ambitious about the gameplay ideas for Locomotion, I just wanted to create something which had the gameplay of Transport Tycoon but in a larger and more detailed world. That created its own challenges programming-wise though - When you increase the scale and the detail, designing the AI for the competing companies becomes vastly more complicated. I'm lucky that the processing power in even low-end modern PCs meant I could get the competing companies playing really well, in fact I actually had to slow them down considerably from the early test builds as they were monopolizing the entire map within a few game-years.

HomeLAN - What are the main differences between Locomotion and Transport Tycoon, in your opinion?

Chris Sawyer - The gameplay is fundamentally the same, the differences being in the detail, the scale, and the presentation. There were so many areas of Transport Tycoon that I was never satisfied with, and I really wanted to get these right in Locomotion - Things like the detail and animation of vehicles, the 'character' and AI of the competing companies, and the head-to-head two player game (which never worked all that well in Transport Tycoon).

HomeLAN - Why did you decide to use the Rollercoaster Tycoon engine and user interface for Locomotion?

Chris Sawyer - In fact the game engine was originally intended for Locomotion rather than RollerCoaster Tycoon. The story goes something like this - Before RollerCoaster Tycoon, I started work on a sequel to Transport Tycoon, creating a graphical engine and world data structure purely for that game. When my plans for RollerCoaster Tycoon came along I adapted the game engine for that project. Between RCT and RCT2 I again started work on a sequel to Transport Tycoon, this time using an updated version of the RCT engine as a starting point but re-written and fine-tuned for the new game. This project also got postponed, and much of the game engine was transferred back to RCT2. Finally when RCT2 was finished I continued work on Locomotion, using the RCT2 game engine for what it was originally intended - a transport, constructional, world based game.

HomeLAN - How hard is it to balance a game like Locomotion so that it's both fun to play as well as challenging to make all the transportation systems work for the player?

Chris Sawyer - It's been an uphill battle to get the game reasonably well balanced - It's such a free-form game that you can't easily predict how the game will progress or what style of gameplay the player will use, so catering for all styles and scenarios is very difficult. It's

not like most games where there's only one way to play and one way to win, you can play in so many different ways depending on what particularly interests you or you find particularly fun, and the challenge for me was to make sure that most players could achieve satisfaction and enjoy playing in their own particular way. In some ways it's quite an easy game to play, and it's quite difficult to completely 'fail' at the game even if you play badly – There's usually a way to recover from a bad situation given enough time and patience.

HomeLAN - The game has now been out for a little while now. What has the reaction been like so far?

Chris Sawyer - I think it's been quite a quiet start for the game, but I always expected that – Locomotion doesn't have the flashy 3D graphics of most modern games and it's much easier to advertise and promote something good looking rather than something which plays well. I expect interest in the game will build as time goes by and people appreciate the depth and richness of the gameplay – Remember that RollerCoaster Tycoon also had a quiet start and look how successful that became.

HomeLAN - Are there any plans for you to create add-ons for Locomotion at some point?

Chris Sawyer - There are all sorts of possibilities and the game was designed to be expandable, but it really depends on the success of the game and whether we can come up with an add-on design which players would really appreciate and enjoy.

HomeLAN - What is your relationship to the development of Rollercoaster Tycoon 3?

Chris Sawyer - I'm an executive producer on the project, which basically means I'm involved with the game as much as I want to be and am available as a consultant when Frontier Developments (RCT3's developer) need help. I've been working on and off with Frontier Developments and its founder David Braben for about 15 years now so we know each other well, and when it became apparent that I couldn't take on such a large project as RCT3 myself Frontier Developments became involved.

HomeLAN - For your next stand alone game, what plans do you currently have?

Chris Sawyer - At the moment I'm still 'winding down' after finishing Locomotion, and in fact there are still some exciting developments spinning off from the Locomotion project which may or may not come to fruition. As for another new stand-alone game, we'll have to see – Games are getting so large and so complex nowadays that I'm not sure I'll be able to create another game virtually single-handedly like I've done with all my games so far. But then again if I find a new subject which really inspires me as much as roller coasters and transport have, I might create something completely new.

HomeLAN - Finally is there anything else you wish to say about Locomotion?

Chris Sawyer - You could say that Locomotion has been in development for nearly 9 years, so it's been a great personal relief to actually finish it! I'd like to personally thank the fans of my old game Transport Tycoon for being so patient in waiting for a sequel, and it's been fascinating to see how many still play a game which is so old. Perhaps the real test for Locomotion is to look back in 2013 and see how many people are still enjoying the game then.

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