

The console scene is going ape at the moment. The PC Engine CD-ROM player was revealed last month and looks stunning. Now we've got the 16-bit Sega, the newest and hottest addition to the console market. Julian Rignall puts it through its paces and finds himself more than impressed.



Sega are dominating the console market in Britain at the moment with the Master System, and their new 16-bit machine looks like it'll consolidate (no pun intended) its position when the unit is released later on this year.

The machine appeared in Japan at the end of last year, and sold out instantly. Some may find this surprising when you consider that at the moment there are only three titles currently available — *Altered Beast*, *Thunderblade* and *Space Harrier II* — but the new machine also accepts all old Sega Master systems titles (although you do need to buy

a special adaptor). This is certainly an intelligent way of boosting the new Sega's library — especially as many of the 8-bit games are very good!

Oh yes, while I'm on the subject of add-ons, Sega will be releasing a CD-ROM unit in Japan later on this year — which should definitely be worth looking out for, especially when you consider what's already been done with the PC Engine CD-ROM!

Right, onto the machine itself. As you can see, it's of an unusual design — very stylish — and the hand controller is also unusual. It's ergonomic, and fits in the hand beautifully. In fact, even those who don't



# MEAN MACHINE 16 — BIT SEGA



# AW MACHINES A STUNNA



like the Japanese-style joypads grudgingly admitted that these were pretty good. The Sega controllers feature three buttons, and the control pad is very responsive, with none of the stiffness usually associated with this type of controller.

A novel addition to the machine is a headphone socket and volume control — mind you when you hear the stereo eight — channel sound chip at full whack through 'phones, it's easy to appreciate why — the sound is absolutely incredible! In the case of *Altered Beast*, the music, effects and speech were better than the arcade version!

The machine might look fabulous and sound even better — but it's the software that counts. So how do the first three 16-bit games fare? Well, first impressions are very favourable. *Altered Beast* is exceptionally good, with looks, sounds and playability that are indistinguishable from the coin-op. The graphics are simply gorgeous, with six-level parallax scrolling landscapes and beautifully

drawn sprites. There's plenty going on and barely a flicker in sight. And when you consider that this is a first release for this console, the future looks very good — it's well on a par with the finest ST and Amiga releases.

*Thunderblade* and *Space Harrier II* are of similar quality, with smooth 3D update and wonderful graphics that put the majority of existing 16-bit titles to shame. Personally I don't rate *Thunderblade* as a particularly good arcade game, but as a conversion it's again identical to the original. *Space Harrier II* is also an excellent interpretation of the coin-op and is both highly addictive and playable.

Overall, the new Sega looks like a machine to be reckoned with. The graphics and sound potential is without doubt superb, and with the strength of Sega's arcade licences behind it, it's a machine to look out for.

