

How to... accessorise your N64

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HOW TO... accessorise your N64

by Tim Weaver

With Christmas coming up, your N64 will be busy compiling its letter to Santa. Here's N64 Magazine's pick of the plastic peripherals it's got to choose from.



CONTROLLERS

To get the most out of your N64 you need the best possible controller. And, if you're in the market for a bit of multiplayer *Mario Kart* or *GoldenEye 007*, you'll need four of them. But three extra Nintendo controllers will set you back £90, and the offerings from other companies are a mixed bunch. Study our guide and you can't go wrong.

• When testing controllers we've examined: the analogue joystick (how sturdy and precise it is), the Z-trigger (how easy it is to reach), the design (how comfortable the pad is and how nice it looks), the pad's response (how well it performs overall) and its price.

Spook Pad

THE Games • £30

A horrendous-looking spawn of Satan, Spook's offering is monstrous. Its buttons feel like they've been glued in with half-sticky Pritt Stick while the finger placements on the handles have all the game-playing comfort of a kitchen knife in the leg. Add to that the most rancid analogue stick in the world and a Z-trigger you need a scientific microscope to find and you've got the worst pad of them all. Tat.



Sharkpad Pro

Interact • £30

If a controller was judged purely on its joystick the Sharkpad would come out top. The buttons all work really well, too, and the clear design would no doubt be viewed as 'trendy' by many. The Sharkpad's only real downside is its shape: having had its prongs chopped off following Nintendo's ruling, it's rather bulky and uncomfortable to hold.



WHY THE FUNNY SHAPE?

If you're wondering why controller manufacturers insist on meddling with Nintendo's perfect original design, it's because Nintendo have patented their three-pronged arrangement, and won't let anyone else copy it. A few early third-party controllers do feature three prongs, but after threats from Nintendo most manufacturers have gone back to the drawing board and come up with alternative designs that vary from elegant to lumpyish monstrous.

EXTRA BUTTONS: WORTH IT OR NOT?

Many controllers add extra functions like rapid fire and slow motion. Are they worth having? In our experience, no. We've never found a game that benefits from rapid fire, and slow motion buttons just simulate 'Start' being repeatedly pressed, which does admittedly slow the game down but also makes menus flash all over the screen. Given that these extra buttons generally add £5-10 to the price of a controller, we'd advise you to either save money by going for cheaper, pared-down versions, or get an official Nintendo controller for the same money.

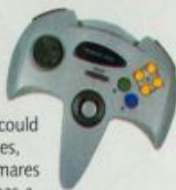
ANALOGUE STICK	
Z-TRIGGER	
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Trident Pad

Spectra Video • £20 •

Also available with auto fire and slow motion. Although it has edges that could induce 999-style emergencies, giving Michael Buerk nightmares in the process, the Trident has a tidy, clean-cut look and a flexible, accurate analogue stick. Its D-Pad is grotesque but the action buttons feel pleasant enough, while the Z-trigger sits comfortably like Nintendo's own. For the money, then, this is well worth your attention.



LX4 Controller

LMP Ltd • £25

Gah! The most horrendously designed pad of all comes crashing into your local Virgin at £25 more than it should do. No handles, possible dismemberment via the finger-trapping underside and an analogue stick with a movement radius of several miles. Just play *GoldenEye* to see how bad this is – the sights move around even if you're not touching the stick. Absolute piffle.



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Arcade Shark

Interact • £60

A pleasantly surprising, if overly huge, addition to the joystick family, Interact's Arcade Shark is perfect for *ISS64* (the joystick is superbly intuitive) but a nightmare for *Mario Kart* (with the L and R buttons impossible to reach). The Z-trigger's also badly placed, and at 60 notes you're looking at something that'll make the same dent in your wage packet as a new game. A ticklish problem, then.



ANALOGUE STICK	
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Official Nintendo Controller

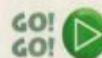
Nintendo • £30

Think about it: Nintendo, who make the Nintendo 64 games console, also make this, the official controller. Thus, it won't take a genius to conclude it should be the best of the bunch. By a fair old margin. Which it is. By a fair old margin. A beautifully weighted analogue stick, nice lodge-free buttons and silken shoulder pads mean that that extra expense is definitely worth it. (And, you're onto a winner if your partner/parents are buying.)



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Christmas 1997

N64

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VIBRATION PACKS

Is it worth having a Rumble Pak?™ people keep asking us. And the answer is that there is no answer. Do you need your controller to vibrate when you crash? Exactly. It's hardly an essential item then, but it does add a certain something to games that're compatible with it (and pretty much all new games are). Other console manufacturers are also frantically building 'vibration devices' into their joypads, you'll notice.

• We've tested the following aspects of each pak: how well it rumbles, its design, its weight (you don't want half a ton bearing down on your wrists), slotability (you'd be surprised how many barely fit into a controller) and value.

Official Nintendo Rumble Pak

Nintendo • £15

Hmm. While, like everything that emanates from Nintendo of Japan, the official Pak is a top quality, perfectly fitting, brilliantly responsive piece of palm-sized kit, it has its faults. First, it's very, very heavy. Secondly, it requires batteries (unlike most of its third-party competitors). And, thirdly, it's expensive at £15 – especially if you want all four *Lylat Wars* players to feel the benefit.



Gamester Pak

LMP • £13

Although you'd wager this might not perform – this is, after all, from the same company as the LX4 controller – the Gamester Pak, actually, isn't bad. It never quite has the same full-on *brrrrr* as Nintendo's, but it shimmies away nicely at the right time and weighs next to nothing. It also produces its rumbles without batteries and is therefore a better bet in the long term.



BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED

While Nintendo's own Rumble Pak requires two AAA batteries before it'll do its stuff, many alternatives from other manufacturers seem to manage without. How come? The N64 actually supplies sufficient current from its controller sockets to power a vibration pack, so batteries aren't strictly necessary. And there doesn't seem to be a problem even if you have four packs jiggling away at once. (We tried it.) We're a bit baffled as to why Nintendo chose to run their pack off batteries, as are the manufacturers we've spoken too.

TremorPak

Interact • £10

The fact that the TremorPak requires batteries would, you'd wager, make its rumbling a good deal more powerful than that of the non-battery-requiring assortment. Instead, you'll find Interact's effort to be only half-interested in making any shake-style movement. Rather, if you hit a wall in *Top Gear Rally*, it feels like you've skimmed across a grass bank. A bit disappointing at the end of the day, despite a battery saving switch and the price.



ADAPTORS/CHEAT CARTRIDGES

You can plug more than just carts into the top of your machine...

Ultra 64 Universal Game Adaptor

Fire/Blaze • £15

If you want to play the Japanese and American games we review in *N64* Magazine and you've got an ordinary UK N64, you'll need an adaptor. These are constantly evolving as Nintendo modify their games to try to outwit them, so don't be surprised to find yourself having to buy a new one every so often. Fire's is currently on its third version, and is the best we've tried. It seems to have a dangerous quirk, though – it confuses games into saving data onto the UK cart you've got plugged into the back as a 'key', rather than the import cart, wiping over your *Mario Kart* times or *Lylat Wars* medals. So be careful. And the picture can be a bit unstable on some TVs, too.



8/10

Game Killer

Datel • £30

Hmm. For more than half the price of a new game, Datel's Game Killer will write data to the cart's back-up chips and offer you up all the stars on *Mario 64*, all the gold medals on *Pilotwings* and all the challenge points on *Shadows of the Empire* (plus a host of other titles) without you having to put any effort in. The point? There is none. Unless you have no interest in playing a game you just bought. For 50 quid.



4/10

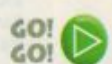
Action Replay

Datel • £50

Working rather more subtly than the Game Killer, Action Replay makes temporary changes to the actual code in the game. So *Mario's* fist can be bigger, or you can have limitless fuel in *Pilotwings*, or infinite lives in just about any game you like. The cart comes with codes built-in to cover the first few N64 releases, and Datel are supplying cards containing more codes as further games are released. It does exactly what it's supposed to, but it's the price of a whole game, and most games are more fun played the way they're designed to be played.



7/10



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LEADS

As if you didn't have enough of a tangle of wires around your telly already, there are plenty more available.

S-video leads

The essential buy if you've got the relevant socket, an S-video lead provides the best possible picture you can glean from your N64. Spook's effort (£7, 9/10) is the best value. Fire/Blaze (£10, 6/10) also chip in with an effort but at three pounds extra – to quote the N64's fair-to-middling TV advertising campaign – there really is no contest. If you've got a UK N64, don't accidentally put a lead designed for an import machine – the picture will be too bright.

SCART leads

Spook, once again, take the honours when it comes to the funny-shaped pin-thing with their



composite/SCART all-in-one job. A SCART picture is generally of a high quality and the Spook alternative (£8, 9/10) reflects this nicely. Fire (£10, 7/10) also try their damndest with a marginally more expensive one – minus the composite plug – and, similarly, Spectra Video (£8, 7/10) whose is virtually the same but a little cheaper.

RF units

Fifteen of the best is money enough to pay for any peripheral, let alone one you get with the N64 anyway. But, we suppose there'll be those who'll carelessly mislay their vital machine-to-TV transfer, and so have to seriously consider Fire's (£15, 8/10) and LMP's (£20, 6/10) offerings.



They both do the job with some ease but, it's worth remembering you can get a better picture through a SCART or S-video lead. For less money.

Controller cable extensions

An unusual but ultimately pointless idea, especially as most joypads give you far and away enough distance to play with. Still, there are those who like to sit out in the garden while their N64's are upstairs and, to that end, will find both Spook's Cable Extension (£7, 6/10), Spectra Video's Extension Cable (£5, 8/10) and Fire's X-Tender (£8, 7/10) particularly satisfying additions to their peripheral collections.



LUGGAGE

If you like to get out-and-about with your N64, but don't want to risk scratches to its charcoal-grey casing, you'll have to spend yet more money.

N64 System Carry Case Deluxe

Nintendo/THE • £30

Is this necessary? Especially as, for a little more you could have *GoldenEye 007* nestling on your games shelf. Still, there's no denying it's well made gear and there's space inside for your machine, cables and six carts and memory cards. And there're moveable velcro strips so your N64 doesn't slip about. And an extra zipper pouch to slip your copy of *N64 Magazine* into. Expensive then, but attractive.



8/10

N64 Control Pad Carry Case

Nintendo/THE • £13

Complete and utter cobbles this. While it's made of the same plush material as the Deluxe case, this more than either of the other bags, has to beg the question why? Who in their right minds, is going to fork out thirteen nicker for a case in which to put their controller? Yes, yes, there's an extra pocket for your controller packs but honestly. Get an extra controller for seven quid more instead.



4/10

N64 System Carry Case

Nintendo/THE • £15

For half the price of the Deluxe bag you can pick up the standard carry case with no separate pockets or extra zips or even cart or memory card pockets. But crucially, there's enough room for an N64. However, it does look a bit guff, not to say cheap, with its shiny plastic all-over sheen and slightly rubbish Nintendo logo that can be scratched off with a good fingernail. So, recommended? Nah, not really.



5/10

Game Multi-Case

Spectra Video • £20

Gross to look at – it's like something Robbie out of Grange Hill used to take to class – but a veritable Aladdin's Cave inside, the Multi-Case is a near-essential buy – as long as you don't mind looking like a throwback to a time when grey-flecked trousers and luminous socks were in. Vinyl, indeed. Its inside has too many pockets and compartments to count on two hands and, at twenty notes, it's brilliant value for money.



8/10

EXTRAS

Nintendo Mouse Mats

Nintendo/THE • £6

Pleasant little additions to your PC's immediate vicinity come in the shape of these highly colourful, good quality mouse mats. The actual surface may be a little bit too shiny to start with but mix a bit of soil into them and they're fine. The actual pictures comprise Mario, Bowser, Mario and Bowser, the N64 logo and Mario Kart. All look fairly good next to the old 'puter.



7/10

Nintendo Wrist Pads

Nintendo/THE • £7

If the vast, misty drop from the spacebar to the desktop gives you vertigo or you suffer from particularly sore wrists, then this invention from THE is likely to be a bit of an essential. If not then it'll be the most pointless load of old tosh you'll have ever seen. Still, they're made well enough (from the same material as the mouse mats) and might be of some use to some. Weirdos.



3/10