

# F-Zero GX Very Hard/Master Mode FAQ

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F-Zero GX: Very Hard/Master Mode FAQ

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Version history:

1.0: Completed the guide in its initial revision.

1.20: Added a strategy for Long Pipe and updated contact info.

1.3: Added a treasure trove of new strategies sent to me and updated the contact info.

Table Of Contents

I: Introductions

II: Strategies

III: Story Mode

IV: Master Mode

IV-I: Ruby Cup

IV-II: Sapphire Cup

IV-III: Emerald Cup

IV-IV: Diamond Cup

IV-V: AX Cup

V: Acknowledgements & Contact Info

I: Introductions:

As great a game as F-Zero GX is, its reputation as one of the hardest games the Nintendo Gamecube has to offer is well-deserved. The purpose of this FAQ is to give you a more in-depth look at the game's two biggest challenges, Very Hard in Story Mode and Master Mode in the Grand Prix.

This guide will assume that the reader is experienced enough in the game to have unlocked these modes: Very Hard mode on any Story Mode level is unlocked by beating the Hard setting, which is previously unlocked by beating the normal setting. Master Mode is unlocked by beating the first four cups in Expert mode, which while difficult, is not deserving of its own FAQ like Master Mode is.

II: Strategies to know:

Snaking:

Snaking is generally considered an advanced-level technique, but it's not hard at all to learn. Using it effectively and steadying it, however, is another story. Set your balance all the way to acceleration beforehand, and once you're up to speed, hit R and right on the control stick simultaneously. Then hit L and left simultaneously, then repeat the process. You should see short flashes of red sparks from your machine's underside if you're doing it right. Try to get a wave motion going. The result: you go much faster than normal or even when

boosting. Crashing into sides or objects is very easy, so focus is required at all times to excel with this technique. This extra speed is incredibly advantageous in some stages, allowing for a margin of error where a non-snaking run would allow nothing short of Wavebird-smashing perfection. More about its downsides later, though...

Rival-killing:

Your rival is the racer with the closest amount of points to you if you're in first, and the first-place CPU racer if you're not (Thanks to Distant\_Rainbow for the correction). Killing rivals widens the points-gap and allows for more leeway in case you underperform.

An honest warning:

Snaking consistently is an incredibly strenuous task, both mentally and physically. The grip and continuous strain almost required when snaking for long periods of time - IE, the usual period of restarts upon restarts that some of these stages will put you through - can cause serious physical damage if used in excess, including Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Please, take breaks if/when your hands start to hurt from snaking.

So, I hope to include two different strategies for stages where snaking is a viable option: one with, and one without. This guide seems to have its fill of snaking strategies, so if you have a strategy that doesn't involve the technique, I encourage you to send it over via email.

III: STORY MODE

CAPTAIN FALCON TRAINS

The rundown: Falcon is tirelessly training on Mute City in hopes to claim another championship victory. On Very Hard, that entails collecting 35 capsules on the Sonic Oval course within a minute.

Strategy: don't be fooled by this being the first stage; on very hard, the supposed training mission will feel like anything but. With an item-to-time ratio that requires an average of more than one capsule collected per second, you'll be forced to confront this with nothing short of surgical precision, with your route for all three laps planned out in advance. If you so much as hit any wall and lose much speed, you might as well just restart, so you might as well crank your max speed to its fullest in the status screen before the run. You won't be needing many moments of acceleration when you're forced to remain at a high speed throughout the oval.

I'll do a point-by-point rundown of the route I formulated and used, rather than a paragraph block, for easier reading.

FIRST LAP:

-As you're picking up speed on the first straightaway, use L to tilt to the left and grab the first capsule. Straighten out afterwards and hit the boost plate.

-At the pack of five capsules ahead, head for the one that's second from the left, then slam L with some control stick maneuvering to grab the leftmost capsule as well. It's possible to grab the extra capsule directly behind the second-to-left one as well here, but you can get it just as easily on the second lap.

-Realign yourself to hit the boost plate. Follow the track to the

second boost plate.

-Head to the right side of the jump plate and nab the capsule at the far right.

-Hit the next boost plate on this side and slam R and the control stick for maneuverability to pick up the capsule right behind the boost plate and the one to the right of it.

-Realign to the center along the healing pit and hit the central capsule beyond it. If the clock is roughly at 46 seconds here, you're in good shape.

-Go down to the left, following the contours of the track, and grab the sole capsule there.

-You're now in good position to cut across the track diagonally, grabbing the series of several capsules, then hit L with the control stick to realign yourself in time to nab the central capsule soon after as you enter the tunnel. If you realigned yourself before grabbing the last capsule in the diagonal formation, don't panic - you'll be in good form to get it on the next lap. You'll pass by a boost plate. Don't worry about it - this is the stage's only boost plate that you will not need to hit AT ALL and still win.

-Even when you've got everything else about your route down to a science, the capsule cluster right before the finish line can screw everything up in a heartbeat. Try this: take the boost plate in the middle of the course, jerk to the right to pick up the right-hand capsule before the cluster, then angle back to the left diagonally for the three left-most capsules heading to the wall, then jerk away and realign yourself. If you miss any of these capsules, you might as well restart now rather than find out you have too much on your plate in later laps.

#### SECOND LAP:

-Boost immediately and take the right-hand capsule you left from the first lap.

-Run over the boost plate and take the middle capsule of the next grouping. If you left the one just to the left and behind it (which is a very common occurrence), then use a quick jerk with L and the control stick to get that one as well.

-Boost around the bend and grab the capsule aside from the boost plate. If the clock is approaching the half-minute mark at this point, you're in good shape.

-Remain on that side and tow near the railing, boosting all the way as you grab the two capsules on that side, and then use a now-familiar quick side jerk to grab the two just past the left-hand boost plate. You'll likely be running in the red zone by now, so swerve back to the end of the pit area to grab up whatever health you can.

-Boost on to the right hand side of the next boost plate and grab the capsule there. Remain on that side.

-Grab the next capsule on the right hand side aside the next boost plate. If you missed the one just behind it in the diagonal row last lap, you're in prime position to nab it now by staying relatively straight on your path.

-Run over that sweet, sweet pit area, then cut across (doesn't matter if you grab the boost plate, you'll be hitting your manual boost throughout all of this anyway) to the other side and grab the left-hand capsule before the cluster. Do the mirror version of what you did last lap: go diagonally and grab as many capsules as you can in a diagonal line to the right in the cluster. This comes with an asterisk, which I'll elaborate on later, but your goal should be at least two capsules here. When you pass the finish line, you should have around 18 seconds left on the clock.

### THIRD LAP:

- Hopefully, this is just a cleanup round. Boost like your life is on the line, grab the rightmost and (hopefully) the only remaining of the formation along the first straightaway.
- Slam the boost all the way across the curve and along the pit area. If the clock goes into the red before you hit the pit area, you might as well restart - even with perpetual boosting, you won't have enough time to finish. If the clock doesn't start ticking red until you're already in the pit, boost on, soldier.
- Grab the final isolated capsule along the left side of the curved path. If you've made it to this point then you're likely pumped, so it's surprisingly easy to do something stupid and miss such a simple capsule. Just...don't miss it. Tow near the railing, but not so close that you run the risk of hitting it and bouncing off.
- Run through the pit area and approach the final few capsules of the cluster from the right hand side. Now, the intent here is that you have three capsules left, in a formation that will let you grab the first one, slam a quick jerk to the left to grab the next one, then another quick jerk with R to the right to grab the final one, then make a screaming boost to the finish line because you undoubtedly have less than five seconds remaining at this point.

But there's that asterisk I mentioned near the end of lap two. I do have confidence that if you managed to scare up a good run after however many attempts, that this strategy is viable - but there was a slight variation to it in my winning run. While running the cluster at the end of the second lap, I unintentionally made a crazy swerve and picked up one more capsule than I intended - it's a move that I'm surprised I recovered from, and it's not something that I was able to repeat on command - but it allowed me to grab a mere two capsules in an easy diagonal formation in my final round at the cluster, and slide to a victory. If anyone knows just what I'm talking about, and wishes to provide readers with a concrete explanation as to how to activate this on cue, then email me.

For further information, check out jamesc359's map of this course on Very Hard, on GameFAQs. Distant\_Rainbow suggests using the map and the directions provided here in tandem if you're having trouble following a pure text medium for what is essentially a very visual course.

Your reward: Rainbow Phoenix: one of the game's most brutal challenges is justified by one of the game's best vehicles. With glide-like handling that (almost) never seems to become too drifty, insanely sharp turning capabilities and even a cool wing-foil boosting animation, the Rainbow Phoenix is worth the sweat, tears and blood you've invested in this stage. It's also, by far, the best vehicle in midair, with a glide that almost feels at times like flight: on Dragon Slope, you can even skip every ledge down on the namesake air slope and still come out on top. It's manned by Phoenix, the time-traveling officer whose backstory suddenly makes the whole game's plot so much cooler by proxy.

### GOROH

The rundown: Samurai Goroh challenges Falcon at a mountain pass. You've got to make it to the finish line first.

Strategy: This is snakeable, and that's the preferred strategy unless you want to shoot for an utterly perfect "regular" run. Start snaking before you reach the road segment of the track at the beginning, and if

your form is tight, you should have overtaken Goroh by the time you reach the first major rock slide, not counting the pebbles near the start, without having to use your boost. Unless you're in a tight spot, you shouldn't rely on the boost here; save your energy for when you'll really need it.

At this first major rock slide, you should keep snaking, and weave in and out of the larger boulders. You could keep entirely to the right, but that won't let you snake, so getting a groove down and snaking it is worth the risk. If you get hit here or slowed down significantly, you might as well restart.

At the second major rock slide, keep to the right. If your snaking form is solid, you should blast past these boulders before they get too far across the path.

Here, you're afforded a small stretch without boulders, so keep snaking.

At the third major rock slide, you've got to find a small niche near the left or right (depending on the position of the boulder) in which to slink past the massive boulder. You may want to burn your boost through here instead of snaking, but link the boost into another snake right after.

From here on out, the boulders get huge, and constant. You'll probably want to stick to one side, switching when necessary, rather than weaving in and out. Burn the boost only when necessary, but don't be stingy with it in a pinch. With any luck, victory will be yours.

Your reward: Spark Moon, which looks pretty and takes damage nicely despite its questionable handling.

#### HIGH STAKES IN MUTE CITY

Strategy: If you're efficient at snaking, then this becomes the easiest Very Hard stage in story mode. You can run the technique literally non-stop throughout the course. If you don't slam into everything like a bumper car, then even when they're boosting, the CPU just can't catch up to you so long as you're consistent with it. Should you snake, just keep rudimentary advice in mind: remember to keep tight on the area without guardrails, and to incorporate the sharp turns into your snaking pattern.

Your reward: The Rolling Turtle, a rock-solid machine that handles very smoothly despite its deceptively unwieldy exterior. It's manned by QQQ, the most sickeningly adorable robot this side of Wall-E.

#### CHALLENGE OF THE BLOODY CHAIN

Strategy: Once again, it almost seems as though these Very Hard levels are tailored to be mind-bogglingly unthinkable without the speed boost that snaking provides, so begin by doing it as well as boosting sparingly.

The seemingly intended way to beat the course isn't necessarily the best. The only thing you have to do is destroy Michael Chain's machine at the very front of the formation, but if you were burning your boost, it would become necessary to bash lots of his cronies' machines, which give you small health boosts upon their destruction. Here, you should

snake right around them and maintain constant forward momentum rather than getting drawn into scrappy fights, because on Very Hard, Michael is going to take more punishment than on previous difficulty levels and you'll need lots of time to do it.

Keep in mind, though, that Michael's cronies have very weak machines, and just normally snaking through the crowds will probably destroy many of them when you bump into them. As long as you don't go slamming into the rails every moment, you shouldn't be hurting too badly for health.

It's possible to reach Michael before you reach the bridge with the pit area, but not probable to destroy him until a bit afterwards, because the pit heals him too. You've got to burn both your boost and snake in order to catch up to him in good time, but you still need to kill him before he reaches the finish.

Try sandwiching him against yourself and the side rail, and slamming into him with a quick side-burst, and then doing it again when he bounces back from the rail. Just hope that it bounces him back to you, and doesn't just bump him faster and closer to the finish line.

Your reward: Fat Shark. Not the greatest handling in the galaxy, but incredible boost and damage-taking capabilities.

SAVE JODY!

The rundown: the power plant around you is exploding and you've got 40 seconds on Very Hard to escape this straightway with your lives.

Strategy: Normal's time of 50 seconds was doable with minor mistakes here and there, Hard required near-perfection, but on Very Hard, you can't get away with anything less than perfection. A strategy may follow on a later revision (feel free to email if you have something), but for now, all I can say is to keep playing. After long enough, the course will become ingrained deeply enough in your mind for you to hopefully get that one lucky run that takes you through.

There's a grace period of almost one second after the timer hits zero. My finishing time for Hard, where you have 45 seconds to hightail it, is 45.93. It's not a lot, but in a place like this where any microsecond you can shave off counts, it just might save your tail.

BLACK SHADOW'S TRAP

The rundown: Black Shadow has strapped a bomb to Captain Falcon's machine that will explode if his speed drops below 800 KMH, on Very Hard. Keanu Reeves as Captain Falcon must reach the end of the course without getting blown away.

Strategy: This isn't too bad. Rather than relying on some wacky tactic, all you really need to do is to take what you did on Normal and Hard, and tighten it up so that you don't hit anything for your speed to dip below 800.

Really, the most important asset you have is your own memory, as well as your reflexes. Restarts upon restarts are commonplace on Very Hard mode, and as such, you really just need to do what you did to beat the easier modes - only tighter. Some general tips...

-The trucks will pull over to the sides as you approach, but their

presence can still create mental alarms for you if you've been wired from a long gaming session. So, pretend like the truckers aren't there at all, because as you hit up the center of the track, the problem will resolve itself.

-Save your boost. You absolutely have to use it at the dirt patch near the end, but don't be afraid to use it in a pinch earlier. Because your margin of error is so much smaller here, go ahead and rock a quick boost if you drop anywhere below 850.

-Set your speed/acceleration balance to the center. Decreasing your max speed is bad for obvious reasons, yet giving yourself too much speed creates a whole new problem unless you have insane reflexes.

-L and R are your friends, but you can't snake this. Instead, make heavy use of things like the spin turn and slide turns, things that can take sharp corners without losing speed.

-To reiterate, memorize the course and memorize it well.

Distant\_Rainbow adds his own spin:

"Could be just a personal preference, but I'd say setting the engine at or near max acceleration is best. Max acceleration means your machine loses less speed and recovers much more quickly in cases of mistakes, and the lower top speed enables you to have more time to react to the curves/obstacles on the track, as well as navigate the sharper corners of the track more smoothly. Granted, the low top speed may look like a danger, but you're still at about 950 Km/h at max acceleration, the fast recovery offsets the low top speed, and unless you do a head-on collision or something you're not likely to lose more than 150 Km/h with a single mistake."

Your reward: the Silver Rat, that spirited little machine that could. Not very durable, though.

#### THE F-ZERO GRAND PRIX

The rundown: Here it is - the big race for which Falcon has so diligently trained.

The strategy: Pray.

Seriously, though, this course more or less almost resembles the Sapphire Cup's Mute City course, if it were designed by a sadist with a serious love of lava and tricky passages.

The CPU on this course seems to hover at a level just around the equivalent of the Grand Prix Master Mode, which we'll cover soon.

To succeed here, you've got to be both ever-presently aware of your surroundings, yet focus first and foremost on your own driving. As with on Master Mode, you've got to try and shut out all the other racers. They're aggressive, so definitely try to kill them if you're flying parallel and it won't affect your time, but don't get caught up on it; when in doubt, overtake them rather than try and destroy them. Their aggression goes beyond what you'll find in any other part of the game; spin attacks galore, which as it turns out can be extremely damaging to your machine.

You should keep an awareness of your health status at all times. You'll need to burn the boost to get any kind of decent standing (no snaking on this course), but the environmental hazards and less than generous pit area put you in a tight spot with a simple fact: if it looks in any way like you might not finish, you probably won't.

So for the first several laps, your goal should be to survive, which is easier said than done. You'll probably be in last place without some tricky moves on your part, but the only time you'll really get a chance to take the lead (without being swallowed up by the CPU legion seconds later) will be on the final lap.

At that point, you've got to burn your boost and weave in and out of the CPU racers, hit every boost plate and hit no environmental hazards or be slowed down significantly by anything. If anyone has a more concrete strategy for this course on Very Hard, please email me.

Distant\_Rainbow comes to the rescue with a detailed strategy:

"Recently there was a discussion about doing this chapter on Very Hard on the message boards. I provided several detailed strategies of my own there, so I'll copy/paste them here.

- 1) Find your optimal engine setting (mine: 90% Max Speed).
- 2) Kill Black Shadow within 3 seconds after starting the race. As soon as the race starts he'll try to pass you by just left of your machine; do a X-button side attack to knock him backwards. Almost immediately he'll try to pass you again, this time on the right; do another X-button side attack. If executed properly, Black Shadow's machine will be destroyed by those two attacks, knocking him out of the race. Good thing, too; since Black Shadow's AI is the cheapest and his machine is completely broken in this mission.
- 3) First lap only, before the recharge strip: cut through the lava zones to save time and push yourself up to the front of the group. About 5th place when the 2nd lap starts is good enough.
- 4) Avoid Pico, Samurai Goroh, and Michael Chain like the plague; although they don't have a realistic chance of winning, they WILL attack you if close and drain your energy. And you need all the energy you can spare in order to boost.
- 5) Kill Blood Falcon with a boost and accurate X-side attack during laps 2, 3 or 4. If you fail at this, good luck in lap 5, where Blood Falcon becomes a deranged killing machine hell-bent on killing you, even sacrificing his own lead to fulfill his murderous intents.
- 6) Boost just before the big drop right after the icy curve area to gain a lot of distance with a single boost.
- 7) Right after every major curve in the track. there's a straightway, so always boost after a curve. You'll have just enough energy left in case of accidents during the race.
- 8) Learn to time your turns perfectly so that you won't scrape the walls in a curve. Saves your energy and your speed.
- 9) Don't try to kill anyone (apart from Black Shadow and Blood Falcon) unless they're practically begging you to kill them by driving parallel to you and right next to you with nearly the same speed. In these cases, a swift and accurate X-side attack will make short work of the fool, but don't overdo it so that it hampers your own driving.
- 10) Make sure you recharge all (or at least >90%) of your health at the recharge strip. This is vital for your boosts in the next lap.
- 11) Boost as soon as you enter the recharge strip. As soon as you exit and while the first boost's effects last, boost once more. DON'T



BOOST FURTHER. All the other machines will boost madly just before the finish line and you'll be tempted to follow suit, but conserving your energy for boosting later on in the lap is better. Your standing may drop to 15th~20th; this is okay. Remember: conserve your energy and don't go on a wild boosting spree at the end of the lap. Of course, this is not the case in the final lap.

12) Even after killing Blood Falcon, nothing changes in your routine: keep driving efficiently with strategic boosts. If you get cocky and slack off, a nobody with mad boosting skillz like Mighty Gazelle, Zoda or The Skull might snatch the victory from you just moments before the finish. That will hurt your ego if it happens. A lot.

13) Try your best not to hit the mines at the end of the course. Save these for the final lap, where they will give you a bit more oomph in addition to the boosts to cement your victory.

14) At the final lap, as soon as you enter the recharge strip, keep boosting nonstop. When you reach the mines, deliberately ram them head-on to increase your speed even further.

I can think of that much as of now. But these tips can only do so much. The best tip, is to practice like mad. Only then will these tips help you manage to beat Chapter 7 Very Hard."

Your reward: The smooth-handling Pink Spider.

#### SECRETS OF THE CHAMPION BELT

The rundown: It's just Captain Falcon versus Deathborn, on his subterranean volcanic racetrack.

Strategy: On the first lap, your goal - at the very least - should be to keep Deathborn in your sights. Don't get too close, because chances are he will attack you, but make it so that on successive laps, when he seems to slow down ever so slightly, you'll be in a good position to burn the boost and take the lead.

It goes without saying that you should know the course like the back of your hand, because taking some of those sharp turns too lightly will be the end of your run. This course is, against all odds, snakeable, but that strategy makes it easier than ever to make mistakes. Keep in mind that taking certain bumps in the road while angled towards the wall can actually send you careening over the track and to your doom, so it's important to know the contours of the course as well.

Once you've taken the lead, you'll want to maintain it by using as much of your boost as possible, while banging into as few things as possible. Use the spin turn around some of the harsher curves, boost over the pit areas, and if need be, keep playing until you can anticipate everything the course has to offer.

Distant\_Rainbow adds his insight:

"Set the machine close to max acceleration, in case you're worried about scraping the walls.

You'll want to boost madly once you get boost power at the 2nd lap, so in the 1st lap deliberately ram into as many mines as you can so they won't harm you during your wild boosting sprees; stray mines can and WILL kill you during a boost if you're not careful. They also give you an added speed boost so that you can keep up with Deathborn in the 1st

lap.

Once the 2nd lap begins, keep boosting like mad while replenishing your energy at every recharge strip you come across. Deathborn's machine actually can't handle the sharper corners of this course well, so he'll gradually lag; as long as you keep boosting you'll easily catch up to and pass him, provided that you avoid Deathborn's deadly spin attacks. Once you do pass him and keep up your boosting spree, you can say you've nearly won already; Deathborn will never catch up to you and just stare helplessly as you take the win."

Your reward: that adorable lil' Bunny Flash.

FINALE: ENTER THE CREATORS

The rundown: The Creators' staff ghosts challenge Captain Falcon to a race on a Rainbow Road lookalike. Well...okay.

Strategy: Much like with Black Shadow's Trap, the hardest work here is learning the course to an extent that you'll have been able to unlock its Very Hard mode, because to beat this, you'll need to simply tighten up the skills you developed while beating its relatively-easier modes, so your own reflexes and memory will be your best friends. Just some basic things to remember...

-Try not to veer to the edges, because of the track's consistent lack of rails. If need be, use L or R to reorient yourself.

-The presence of the staff ghosts can be a mental alarm, even though they have no physical form. Much like the truckers on Black Shadow's Trap, try and pretend as though they aren't there at all. You'll need to concentrate fully on your own driving, so try to ignore the staff ghosts. As with the Grand Prix level, if you have any more concrete strategies for this course, email me.

Distant\_Rainbow sheds light on a valuable trick:

"Memorizing the track is the most important thing, obviously, but there is a certain quirk I've discovered that drastically shortens your time during the 2nd and 3rd laps.

Late in the track you'll remember a hill of sorts right after a tight spiral, where you gradually go uphill, reach the apex, and then drive down a steep downhill course. When you gain your boosts, conserve some energy until this part, then boost like mad at the uphill section. If done correctly and you're going fast enough, instead of going downhill along the track like normal, your machine will rocket over the hill and the track at super speeds of almost 2000 Km/h, eventually landing far ahead in front of the hill. This maneuver shaves off several seconds off the clock and I find it very useful for beating the Staff Ghost. Of course, you need to remain calm while actually forcing your machine to overshoot the hill so that you don't accidentally drive yourself off a cliff in surprise of what you've just done."

Your reward: Groovy Taxi, one of the quirkiest machines in the game.

IV: MASTER MODE and the AX COURSES

So we've covered story mode, but one last elephant remains in the

corner: Master Mode. You unlock this final difficulty level for the regular Grand Prix cups once you've cleared the first ones on Expert. Your ultimate goal, with this section as whatever help I can provide, is to unlock the AX cup: a group of new courses available to the arcade counterpart, F-Zero AX. Once unlocked in GX, these intricate, visually-impressive and diverse courses will function effectively as a fifth and final cup.

The first way to get them is through GCN memory card connectivity with an AX arcade machine. In my travels, I've noticed the sad phasing-out of arcades everywhere I turn, and as I write this, your chances of finding a fully-decked arcade are low depending on where you live, and even lower of finding a working AX machine. I can all but guarantee, though, that finding an operational AX unit and spending your hard-earned money on a plane ticket to go connect your memory card with that machine will be easier than the alternate method and the only one that most of us will have access to.

That's right - clear all four GX cups on Master difficulty. It's daunting, but with enough elbow grease, you can do it.

Imagine having to play through every GX cup against 29 CPU opponents who rarely if ever make the slightest mistake and who rock the boost at every possible opportunity, which you'll also need to do to ever have the hope of catching up to them, by the way. Oh, but your piloting had better be just as tight as your speed is fast, because you get a total of one spare life per cup: two deaths and you're back to square one for that cup. And did I mention the violently rubberband AI? Nintendo could take somebody's eye out with that thing.\*

\*Rubberband AI = a phrase coined by Mario Kart circles, wherein even if you're far in first place, the AI racers will somehow defy logic and overtake you from behind.

I achieved my Master mode victories with the Dark Schneider, which is tough enough to take punishment and easily kill other racers, able to effectively snake when the situation calls for it and sturdy enough to hold its ground and not get thrown around. The track-by-track strategies to follow will help with racers in heavy vehicles who are willing to train themselves to snake effectively and on a dime, which in some cases might be your best shot.

Some general tips before we begin:

-Rival-kill at every possible opportunity (See the Strategies section). This is a game of points, and by creating a large points gap between you and the closest rival, you give yourself leeway in case you perform under expectations in a course and place in a lower position, so you can still recover.

On that note, Distant\_Rainbow notes:

"Every kill replenishes a bit of health that translates into more boosts, and more importantly, 5 kills gets you an extra life, which is such a nice thing to have in a place where you only have 2 lives. The fact that every kill translates to more CPU players getting 0 points for that track is also very beneficial to your standings in the long run."

Sage advice; just be careful that after you destroy another machine, it doesn't bounce back in its exploding death throes and slam into you as

some kind of post-mortem revenge, because it can bring you to a dead stop sometimes if it happens.

-Keep yourself limber. Take breaks every now and then if you feel yourself getting too wired, because sloppiness can lead to failure.

-KNOW THE COURSES. All of the strategies to follow are going under the assumption that you, the reader seeking help, know the four cups' courses forward and backward.

Let it be said now that while snaking will come up frequently in my course-by-course overview, if I do not mention the technique for any given course stratagem, then it means it's not such a viable strategy there.

#### Ruby Cup (IV-I)

##### Mute City: Twist Road

This first course is money in the bank for any racer with snaking capabilities: the tracks won't get much wider than what you see here, so even a sloppy snaking job should land you in first place halfway through the first lap. The only potential choke point is the twist loop near the end of the course, where the track thins out. It's snake-able, but unless you're very precise with your technique and confident of that, you're better off switching off to a normal drive and hitting the boost plates, only resuming snaking when the track opens up again.

##### Casino Palace: Split Oval

This simple loop of a course is easily snakeable throughout (except for the namesake split segment), though requiring a more precise technique than the last course because of the thinner road, and you'll likely hit some of the abundant boost plates while you're at it. The only problem I've encountered with this course comes at the incline right after the split path: if you take the incline too fast or boost at just the wrong moment, you might go flying right off the course and one of your precious two lives will go splat. Be safe and don't hit the boost until you've cleared the incline, just in case; it's happened to me more than you may expect.

##### Sand Ocean: Surface Slide

To spin that broken record one more time, skilled snaking will win you the day - but this is the first course where you'll have to do it in an on-and-off fashion because of a more diverse track layout. You should be able to weave through the crowds with a quick snake until you reach the second boost plate, after which you should play it straight and fast but careful until you reach (or pass; use your discretion) the healing pit area, at which point snaking into the turn could help immensely. The following open-air twists and turns can be snaked, but only by someone with very slim technique. Take the chance to do so on any straightaway you get, though.

##### Lightning: Loop Cross

And just like that, you're thrown headfirst into the harsh reality of Master mode: training time's over. Because of the thin, turbulent nature of this course and the clusters of violent racers you're bound to face, snaking is out of the question, so if you've been doing it for

the past few courses, make sure to turn your pre-race settings dial to a balance between acceleration and max speed.

You should be able to hold a good position during the first lap so long as you play well and tightly, but as soon as the second lap begins and the enemy racers get their boost on...that sound you just heard was a legion of racers pushing themselves to the absolute limit and likely leaving you dead last in a matter of seconds if you didn't anticipate the rush, which is a phenomenon you'll likely be seeing a lot of throughout the Master cups.

As you race, you'll notice many of the racers in the first several slots constantly flashing in the red zone. It's to be expected from here on in, if you didn't see it in previous courses (you probably did): the CPU will push itself into the deepest deep red, probably to the point where a few light brushes with the rails would kill them, past limits of logic on Master mode, and that's something that I can't recommend of you, the human player, especially facing against CPU that are so violent and so clustered. Even so, just boosting enough to not be left in the dust will likely leave you in the red as well, so make good use of it: boost on straightaways and in the health pits for maximum speed and efficiency.

Even if you're in dead last during the second lap, you can recover by boosting at every possible opportunity during the final lap. You'll have to play a tight game and avoid slamming into the walls - but if you don't know these courses like the back of your hand, then you haven't logged in enough practice hours to be giving Master mode a serious try, I'd think.

Even with your boosting to your full capacity, it's very difficult to score a first-place victory on Loop Cross, but remember - you don't need to place first in every course in order to place first overall for the cup, especially after (hopefully) dominating the relatively-simple courses preceding this one. You can place in the double-digits here and still throttle the first-place overall ranking.

#### Aeropolis: Multiplex

After the previous assault, you might be relieved to find that Multiplex's wide track and generous straightways lend themselves well to snaking. If it's the strategy that you so choose, start doing it at the beginning and take corners normally - either that, or snake right into them. The boost-riddled segment with the brown speed traps can be snaked right through without loss of speed, even as you blaze over the traps. A first-place victory should be yours with relatively little difficulty using this technique.

#### Sapphire Cup (IV-II)

#### Big Blue: Drift Highway

When I started up my Master runs for the purposes of AX unlocking, this was one of the courses that I was dreading. Drift Highway is a challenging course under the best of circumstances, considering its multitudes of sudden, tight turns and its overall shortness compared to other courses of its caliber, meaning that there's little buffer room to slip up even on easier difficulties. The course, however, is snakeable.

If you don't wish to use that technique, you'll want to keep your acceleration well-balanced, and ramming into pretty much anything is a huge no-no. The course's short length means that you can boost more within the confines of the track without worrying about running into the red too soon - but keep in mind that there is only a single pit area, which may negate that advantage if you're not careful.

That scarce strategy up there doesn't work wonders, but if you're up to snaking it, you stand a greater chance of taking the lead - but it's a strategy tougher still. You'll want to snake hard on straightaways, and you'll want to snake into the tight turns: timing your movements coming up to the turns so that you'll flow right into them and not interrupt your technique or slam into anything, then be able to straighten out and seamlessly resume afterwards. It might take multiple tries to not screw something up - because like I said, the smallest things are so easy to screw up when you're continuously doing something as dexterity-draining as snaking - but fortunately, you can just restart if something goes wrong, with this being the first course of the cup. As a general rule, you'll want to quit out and restart if you get an undesirable outcome from the first course of any Master cup; you'll want to maintain good standing right from the outset.

Port Town: Aero Dive

Despite its initial appearance, it's quite easy to snake on this course, but you'll have to do it around corners and switch frequently back to normal driving. Try to gain big air at the jump section; if you can get the right forwards angle in midair, it's faster than taking the slope.

Green Plant: Mobius Ring

From the inoffensive-looking oval overview of this course, you might think that snaking this one all the way through will get you an easy first place victory. But you know those ground slants that sporadically change throughout the course? Those not only screw up your snaking when you pass over them, but they send you careening every which way. Because there's not too much risk of corner slamming on this course, crank your max speed at the pre-race settings screen and keep your boost at the ready. The health pits are relatively scarce, but take them at straight angles and you should be able to fully recharge.

None the less, don't get your hopes up too high. Without a potential for snaking and without any crafty strategies that you can pull otherwise, even with constant boosting you're likely to place in the double-digits. It's courses like this that make it so important to get first place or near first place whenever you can, and to rival-kill at every opportunity: sometimes you need the room to fall so you can get back up again.

Port Town: Long Pipe

Make sure to crank your balance all the way to speed at the settings screen, because the course is un-snakeable and the lack of straight walls will prevent you from needing to accelerate too much. you should be able to work into a decent groove with the stretches lined by boost plates, so your real foe will be the yellow and black bars near the end, which seem designed to trip up players. If you're unsure about your technique, you may want to slide up on the side when you reach the "cage" at the end of the gauntlet. If you're on a straight shoot

and not flailing, then boost right on between the bars to shave off a second. The clusters that will form throughout the course give you ample opportunity for rival-killing, so make use of it.

#### Mute City: Serial Gaps

Maybe it's because this is one of my personal favourite courses on any difficulty, but I don't find it too much more nerve-wracking on Master, despite the inherent challenge of its diverse layout. The thing you'll need to watch out for is to throttle the lead or close to it very early on, because if you find yourself being overcome by the swarming racers, it can be very hard, and seemingly hopeless to regain a leading position even with constant boosting. Make sure to always catch the jump plates to skip part of the corner before the zero-friction traps, catch one of the mines in the tunnel if you have energy to spare and always aim for the upper path after the jump.

If you can pull it off, it's faster to boost straight through to the finish line after taking the boost plate at the end of the aforementioned upper path, but you run the very real risk of slamming into one of the deceptively-thin cables running horizontally over the path and coming to a dead stop because of it. It may be safer to take that extra fraction of a second to angle slightly to the left, away from the cables, and then boost back on track.

#### Emerald Cup (IV-III)

##### Fire Field: Cylinder Knot

For this course, and this cup in general, I highly recommend snagging yourself a machine that's heavy enough to hold its ground in the wake of rounded, tilting passages that would throw off lighter racers like the Red Gazelle, because this cup is just rife with them. It has nothing to do with heavier machines excelling at snaking, because there's only one course in the cup where snaking is even an approachable option, and Cylinder Knot isn't it.

On the second and third laps, the place where you should really let loose with your boost is while you're maneuvering through the small blue pylons near the end. The CPU will usually rush you here or just beforehand especially if you're near the lead, but with some flawless boosting of your own, you can take the first place on this course without straining yourself too hard. There's not exactly a whole lot to ram into on this course to hit and lose energy, so don't be shy with the boost, because you'll be wanting to place at least within the top six to dig into an early strong footing for the cup.

##### Green Plant: Intersection

Ugh.

This course is the definition of "deceptively difficult" on Master. There are snakeable portions, but they're so small that they're not worth sacrificing your max speed settings for. Ironically, those segments are when the CPU makes its run at you, in one of those "legion of racers blowing past you in a matter of seconds" moments - only they do it so close to the finish line that unless you pull some massive jump or boost off another racer from sheer luck, you'll probably have to settle for a place in the double-digits.

The first, flat section of the course, when everyone is clustered and starting out, is an ideal place for rival-killing - just be careful to not clip over the red-rimmed edge near the end of the path from a missed attack. It's good that you have this opportunity here, because...

The majority of the course is the circular pipeline, and during the second and third laps, you should see to it that you space out your boosts in correspondence with each time the pipeline changes texture or colour, ideally once per texture shift. Once it changes to the solid dark blue, you know the health pits and boost plates are coming up. That CPU rush I mentioned typically comes right before the segment near the end where you catch the boost plates around the vertical pipelines, so you'd best do all you can to negate it by catching all of those boost plates and adding in as many boosts of your own as you can manage. Be careful, though - the slight incline just a few seconds after the boost plates can send you careening right off the course if you take it at any angle that doesn't send you directly to the finish line.

#### Casino Palace: Double Branches

You have two choices with this course. If you're a seriously skilled snaker, go to the first paragraph. If you want to play it more traditionally, skip the first paragraph after this.

So, if you want to snake it, you're going to need to be able to keep up a consistently tight form. Because of the tight and forward-angling nature of this course's turns, you'll need to constantly alternate between snaking and not, because taking a Big Blue-style approach of snaking into the turns will just get you slamming into things. Oh, yeah, I forgot to mention that it's extraordinarily easy to slam into things while snaking here, and the damage adds up throughout this exceptionally long course until you're ready to just go in swinging at that incessantly-grinning holographic clown, Happy Gilmore-style. Snake on the straightaways, but if any area looks like it'll screw you up, don't snake there because it likely will.

If you choose not to snake, it's probably the smarter option unless you really are a lord of the technique. In lower difficulties, it was actually fun to see just how far ahead of your opponents you could get in any given race here, but on Master mode you'll need to be in a reasonably near-constant boosted state in order to place within the top six. Fortunately, it shouldn't be too much of a problem to conserve your energy, because of the abundant boost plates. You should, however, know the distances between each plate and the next, and hit your own boost evenly between them, to get the most out of all three. For what it's worth, the right-hand paths seem to be faster.

#### Lightning: Half Pipe

There isn't too much to say about this, but again your heavy machine will pull its weight, holding strong where lighter racers might be tossed around and over the edges of the course's namesake. So long as you secure a position in the single-digits early on, the CPU doesn't seem to be as aggressive here and it shouldn't be altogether too hard to maintain your position. Just be warned: like on easier difficulties, it's easier than it looks to screw up in a split-second and find yourself careening right over the edge, so center yourself constantly.

#### Big Blue: Ordeal



Here it is - the only Emerald-class course where I would recommend snaking, thanks to its flowing and wide contours. If you choose not to snake, you face a dilemma: keeping up with the manic CPU will require constant boosting on your part throughout the last two laps and a borderline flawless performance otherwise, yet the course is simply too big to sustain such continuous energy-draining boosting, considering the decisively conservative placement of health pits: one near in the first half that you should take every time, and one in the second half that serves only to waste time and kill your lead (more on that later). Ordeal, indeed.

For best results with snaking, make a habit of letting your racer flow along with the course as you snake: time your snaking so that the twists and turns of the course are incorporated into the technique's flow so that you don't lose speed switching to and from a solid snake. Like on the first Big Blue, snake into the turns. As new-age-y as it sounds, let your vehicle become one with the course.

If ever you took the wide way around the brown speed trap to the second health pit instead of the boost plate, it's not a good idea on Master. You need every boost you can get your hands on, because even after you've taken the lead, all it'll take is the slightest detour from the fastest path, or a second or two over the speed trap, and you're suddenly in 23rd place. It's insanely easy to lose the lead, but given just a few seconds of letting the CPU legion catch up to you, nearly impossible to regain it - especially if it happens on the third lap, which is a specific situation that can happen more often than you might think.

If worst comes to worst, the way the course end is laid out sets you up perfectly for a suicide rush: coming up the thin road just before the final wider segment before the finish line, I was around 14th place after being overtaken by a swarm at the last minute. I had pushed my boost to the absolute limit and was smoking red, so I inadvertently slammed straight forward, into the racer in front of me. Having lost all energy at fifteen hundred miles per hour, my ship hulk went careening through the air and right across the finish line, jumping past ten places to a solid 4th. How sweet it is. But you can tell just by reading that that this technique, by its very nature, is as unreliable as they come, so don't start building a strategy around it. I'm including it here as something that's -possible-, not necessarily -probable-, because you could use all the strategies you can get your hands on with this thing.

Diamond Cup (IV-IV)

Cosmo Terminal: Trident

First off, there's no chance you'll be snaking this one, with its consistently narrow, rail-less tracks. Many players, myself included, often underestimate just how generous the healing pits are on this track. You can pretty much boost continuously and at every opportunity on the last two laps, and so long as you hit all the healing pits, you'll be in good condition. Good thing, too, because you'll likely need that constant boosting to score one of the top six places. After further application, I've determined that there's just enough space between each health pit for you to almost completely deplete your energy through boosting, assuming you boost evenly and fully each time and don't sustain any extra damage. You'll need every bit of it, too.

I find that the most effective paths go like this, in order: middle, right, middle, right. The latter is especially important, because it feels like the shortest of the three paths and spits you out right near the finish line.

This course also offers the opportunity to kill many opponents very easily, with quick side-bursts once you and the target are driving closely parallel. It's there for you to do on any difficulty level, but more important than ever on Master, where the extra life gained from killing five racers just might save your run in a tight spot later. It's very easy to lose control and fall off the track if you miss with a side-burst, but this being the first course of the cup, you can always restart if that happens.

Sir Jay offers up an additional strategy:

"There's a way to boost through more speed pads if you change intersection paths instead of staying on one track.

At the second intersection instead of taking the right way, take the left way. Take the speed path, keep on the track, but as soon as you see one of the other two tracks neighboring on the left side, slightly lower with an energy pit, go fall off to the left and land on that track. There's another Speed Pad to boost through to, which is one extra boost per lap. So keep in mind, that the right spot to fall off to the left is where the energy pit on the neighboring track starts. If jumped off early enough, it almost seems like you only changed tracks instead of really dropping down. Try out and look for yourself."

While the initial moment of actually "switching" tracks over the gap may be jarring to some players, it's a strategy that could give you the edge you need if you're feeling adventurous.

DIAMOND CUP NOTE: If you've unlocked Fat Shark (from beating story mode chapter 4 on Very Hard) and aren't playing as him here, then watch out. No matter which character I tried in my Master attempts, Don Genie was always at the front of the pack, at times too far to even conceivably catch up to before the race ended.

It does make sense: with a CPU unhindered by the Shark's frankly-atrocious handling, these Diamond courses play to the machine's superior boosting and speed, and its rock-solid hull means that you might need two or more good bashes to kill him, depending on who you're racing as. My only successful run was the only time I managed to destroy Fat Shark, on the second course. Correlation? There were tons of other factors at work, but yes, I don't believe I would have done it without sending that fat [censored] to sleep with the fishes. If you get a chance to destroy the Fat Shark, do it - you might not get a second chance.

Sand Ocean: Lateral Shift

At first glance, Lateral Shift seems like a snaker's paradise, with a decently wide track at points and a stage feature that plays right into a snaker's M.O. But don't be lulled by that siren song - attempting to snake here will end you with a smashed machine and a smashed ego, because of the CPU's manic clustering and an interesting phenomenon that really gets put on display here.

Recall the "CPU gets boosts, suddenly bursts past you on the second lap

and leaves you dead last in a matter of seconds" thing from the Loop Cross overview. It's like that here, but seemingly here more than on any other course, the CPU legion doesn't even try to hide that its rubberband AI pretty much cheats you. Pretty terrible thing to see on an FAQ, isn't it? But I ran an experiment: I played the course on Master with several racers who have the fastest boosts, or at least were in the upper echelon of boost-users; ergo, if I were to hit no walls and boost continually after I acquired the boost, there would be at least half of the CPU legion, those in the slower side of the boost-using echelon, that by definition could not catch up to me, let alone overtake me in seconds.

You can guess how that turned out. I don't call shenanigans without good reason, but there you have it. My advice is to try and survive this course. Try and kill some rivals, and hopefully the points gap you create will help you stay afloat even if you land in 20th place.

#### Fire Field: Undulation

Undulation serves as a much-needed breather after the hair-pulling intensity of Lateral Shift, but being less difficult than Lateral Shift doesn't entail being in any way easy. By slamming on the boost, you're afforded chances to overcome your leading opponents after the big drop-off, but be CAREFUL on both bumpy zones. On lower difficulties you could ease off the thrust and let yourself be gently carried over the bumps to keep yourself from slip-sliding away, but here and at the speeds you'll be expected to move constantly, you won't get the chance to ease off and glide over except maybe on the first lap. It's extremely easy to get thrown in a direction you didn't expect over the bumps, so try to keep straight and don't try attacking opponents until you're past the bumps.

Take the second jump plate every time and prepare to steady yourself over the bumps upon landing, but never take the first jump plate. The risk of slamming right into the overhead beams and losing too much ground to recoup is just too great, and smashing into them is easier than it looks, much like with the second Mute City course and the overhead cables.

#### Aeropolis: Dragon Slope

If you're racing with a machine that has exceptional snaking capabilities, then this course will be a welcome change from the previous endurance gauntlets. Its wide track and generous, flowing corners offer plenty of chances for snaking.

You can perform the technique from the starting line all the way to the boost plates nearing the big jump; take the course's namesake slope as normal, then begin snaking again as soon as you reach the regular path again. Don't do it over the friction trap combo bridge, but a boost or two wouldn't hurt over the bridge on the second and third laps. Resume snaking over the wide health pit, maneuver around the wavy corner and, after the first lap, boost along the narrow path, then once you've enough room, start snaking from here to the finish line, and repeat for the next laps.

You'll notice I'm not offering an alternative strategy for those who are for whatever reason adverse to the technique. Fact is, this is an easy first-place victory if you can maintain yourself and keep your snaking tight, and by this point, chances are you'll NEED a first-place

victory. Getting one on Trident isn't such a struggle once you've had practice, even if sometimes you may have to settle for second or third there, but that and Dragon Slope are the only Diamond courses where I can see sure-fire strategies for consistently landing first place, so I suggest you take them. If anyone knows of any more for the other courses, email me and I'll update with credit to you.

#### Phantom Road: Slim-Line Slits

And you thought this was an unforgiving course on the lower difficulties.

With this being the final course of the cup, you should pattern your strategy depending on your overall standings in the cup. If you're at or near first place, go to the first paragraph after this one. If you're struggling, go to the second.

If you have a comfortable lead, having been consistently rival-killing and placing decently in the preceding courses with a good point gap between you and the closest rival, your job here should be to survive and rival-kill to widen the points gap. It's impossible to snake here (The thinness of the track and the namesake slits assure it), it's easy to fall off when you're going too fast, so if you have a comfortable lead, just try and survive. Just remember to keep the points gap wide.

If you're struggling in the rankings, you're going to have to take risks if you don't wish to just restart. You'll definitely want to rival-kill a few times, as well as try for the "shortcut": near the start of the course, on the second and third laps, you'll come to a spot where you go up a steep-looking incline, and then pass a smaller incline. It's on this smaller incline that you'll want to boost just before the top, and if you do it right, you'll go flying down the steep slope that follows, saving time. Some racers can do it easier than others. You'll want to angle yourself perfectly level with the track afterwards to avoid losing speed upon touching down.

If you're feeling really gutsy, you can try a killspin - hit Z with left or right - on one of the narrow passages if you're in a cluster, and hope to take out a rival or two. Just be sure to balance it out with a well-aimed boost so that you don't lose too much speed.

#### AX Cup (IV-V)

##### Aeropolis: Screw Drive

In my experience, the AX courses are a degree easier on Master Mode than other cups, for the simple reason that the courses are generally very wide: whether you choose to snake or to simply burn the boost, or both, you stand little chance of slipping up too terribly. With Screw Drive, you can actually refer back to the strategy for the first Mute City level; just take into account the wavy sharp turn in Screw Drive, and the fact that there's only one boost plate. This is a very easy, simple course.

##### Outer Space: Meteor Stream

It's a shame that your goal with such a beautiful level is to burn through it as fast as humanly possible, but this too is snakeable, even in the areas that are totally covered by frictionless plating. If you do choose to snake, then try to catch every boost plate and keep to the

right-hand path when the track splits.

#### Port Town: Cylinder Wave

Because this course isn't snakeable, you'll have to play a tight game: catch every boost, and playing the course enough times should help you memorize their locations. Crank your acceleration/speed balance to the max speed setting, since there aren't any walls for you to slam into and lose speed. As with on your non-Master runs, when the path splits between the boosts and the pit area, take the boosts on the first lap, then plow through the pit area while boosting on your own on the second and third laps.

#### Lightning: Thunder Road

Despite the course's length, this is surprisingly easy for the same reasons as Screw Drive: the massively wide stretches of track have incredible snaking potential, and the numerous pit areas give you plenty of leeway to burn the boost to your heart's content as well.

#### Green Plant: Spiral

The final, longest and most complex course in the game isn't much more difficult than the other AX courses on Master thanks to its wide track and generous pit areas, so the aforementioned strategies should serve you well. Just watch the tricky corners; it only takes one slip-up for the AI legion to blow past you in seconds, and this course has many opportunities to do so. Know the course well and you'll know your victory.

Your reward for besting the AX Cup on Master difficulty is the classic Big Blue music, selectable as an alternate theme by pressing Z whenever you're about to head into a Big Blue course; that is, if you didn't already unlock the music through its secret code.

#### V: Acknowledgements:

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#### Contact info:

Reach me at [darthvenom75\(at\)hotmail.com](mailto:darthvenom75(at)hotmail.com) if you have any questions, comments or strategies; I hope this guide has helped, but a guide like this is never truly finished without the experienced input of many, so I'd love to post your strategies if they're viable and give credit where it's due.

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