

NEC's first games console was a dream machine, a joint development with software house Hudson. NEC sadly never made the ingenious hardware available in Europe.

NEC PC-Engine

Japan, 1987

Units sold: 7 Million
Number of games: 650
Game storage: Card, CD
Games developed until: 1996
★★★★★

Rectangular, not much bigger than a handheld and with a slim slot instead of a fat cartridge flap: The PC-Engine was an achievement of diminishing electronics. Even 15 years after its launch, it still appears modern and practical. Games came on thin HuCards – to date the smallest media for stationary hardware.

The joint development by chip manufacturer NEC and games producer Hudson marked the transfer from the 8-Bit age to the 16-Bit era. Released in 1987 in Japan, the

PC-Engine, with its 6502-related processor and 16-Bit custom graphics chip, stood between the best selling NES and the highly anticipated Mega Drive and Super Nintendo consoles. Although it was based on a CPU similar to that used by the Apple II, NES and C64, the PC-Engine hardware was totally superior graphically and acoustically. Tapped to the full potential by experienced programmers, the PC-Engine even left Amiga computers behind in comparison. In 1987 and beyond, the machine was second to none.

The very first PC-Engine was square, white and tiny. A CD-ROM drive similar in design was added just a few months after its release.



Konami's characters came late to the PC-Engine, but when they did, it was something special: Dracula X (1993).



Give me five: Bomberman tournaments required the multi-player adapter and a lot of pads (1990).

Pixel-perfect coin-op conversions of **R-Type** and **Galaga 88** proved to Japanese gamers (and a band of western import freaks), that NEC and Hudson had created a milestone – unfortunately, it also became clear very soon that nobody was thinking of a release in Europe. A US version named Turbo Grafx 16 arrived late and came under fire from Sega and Nintendo. The outcome was that outside of Japan, the PC-Engine was subject to obscurity.

In Japan however, sensational events unfolded. As early as 1988 NEC shipped an add-on CD-ROM drive, beating the competition by several years. Although there were only a small number of noteworthy discs before 1990 (Capcom's **Fighting Street**, Hudson's **Monster Lair** and two episodes of the **Ys** RPG series), after 1992 all publishers moved to the new medium. The ultra flat HuCards with a maximum of 20 Mbit (on average only 4-8 Mbit) became defunct and Konami, despite its late

Does the little witch below look somehow familiar to you? Maybe you've met her in later games by Magical Chase developer Quest, in Ogre Battle or in Final Fantasy Tactics.

