



Metal Slug explodes in a maximum of on-screen sprite action: Metal Slug X, 1999.

After 1996, support from third-party developers slowly dried out but widespread arcade distribution kept the Neo Geo alive even after 3D graphics became mainstream.

As the Neo Geo was not suited for polygon rendering, developers had pushed 2D sprite animation and scrolling to the limit by the end of the '90s. Shoot 'em ups such as Aicom's massive 305 Mbit **Pulstar** and countless beat 'em ups on cartridges carrying more than 200 Mbit of data were Neo Geo's speciality. SNK concentrated its head-to-head fighting experience into the release of **King of Fighters** in 1994, gathering all the heroes and villains of the SNK series in one majestic bout. The smooth and detailed animation of this all-star tournament appeared as 196, 250, 362, 460 and 680 Mbit carts – and ultimately as 892 Mbit episode **King of Fighters 2001**.

Die-hard Neo Geo fans don't waste their time waiting for a CD to load and sniff at later hardware variants: They play with Megashock carts or – even better – MVS arcade cabinets only.

### Neo Geo variants and successors

|                         |             |   |
|-------------------------|-------------|---|
| <b>Neo Geo</b>          | <b>1990</b> | The original model shipped with a huge joyboard. In Japan it was sold with red fire buttons for a short time.   |
| <b>Neo Geo CD</b>       | <b>1994</b> | This lower-cost, CD-only console was available in two versions, as a top- or a front-loader. Only the front-loading version came with a joyboard, the other with a simple gamepad instead.  |
| <b>Neo Geo CDZ</b>      | <b>1995</b> | Apart from a changed housing and faster CD drive, the CDZ was otherwise unimproved – and loading times remained too slow.   |
| <b>Hyper Neo Geo 64</b> | <b>1997</b> | The completely redesigned 64-Bit-RISC successor was not compatible with the 16-Bit MVS or original Neo Geo and never released for home use. The technically powerful, yet unsuccessful arcade architecture saw seven games released, including polygon updates of Samurai Spirits and Fatal Fury. |

Likewise, plenty of ROM was poured into **Metal Slug**, a series of militaristic jump 'n' shoots which became SNK's strongest brand, and the third instalment shipped on a 700 Mbit cart. But the cult series could not save SNK from demise – the era of 2D was over. The lack of success achieved by both the MVS sequel Hyper Neo Geo 64 (which featured a 64-bit RISC CPU and nearly 200MB RAM) and the hand-held Neo Geo Pocket as well as the decline of the arcades eventually led to a takeover by Korean investors.

Today the most popular Neo Geo brands are systematically updated and ported to other systems by the new company SNK Playmore, while other activities (Neo Geo hardware among) were closed or buried for good.



To challenge the Game Boy, Sega made its 8-Bit technology mobile: Colour and LCD backlight were the upside, high battery consumption the downside of this Master System for your pocket.



# Sega Game Gear

Japan, 1990

Units sold: 3 Million  
Number of games: 300  
Game storage: Cartridge  
Games developed until: 1996



With its first handheld hardware, Sega overtook the Game Boy: The Game Gear boasted 32 colours and a backlit display at a time when Game Boy visuals were still grey.

Beneath the black housing rested the technology of Sega's Master System. The number of colours was increased, but the resolution slightly reduced to 160x146 pixels. A compulsory add-on was the 'Master Gear Converter' which could run Master System cartridges on the handheld. In addition, Sega sold display lens, an external battery pack and a TV tuner with AV input: In theory, it is possible to use the Game Gear as a portable monitor for stationary consoles like Saturn or Dreamcast.

Apart from the connector for the power supply, the handheld also featured a headphone jack with volume control, a foldaway stand and a port for linking a second Game Gear.

While Sega initially delivered classics like **Space Harrier** and **Wonderboy**, the Game Gear later benefited from the Mega Drive's success and reaped conversions of **Ecco**, **Lunar** and **Shining Force**. From 1993, western licensees took over: Acclaim published **NBA Jam**, **Terminator 2**, **Robocop** and **Mortal Kombat**, Electronic Arts released **FIFA** and **John Madden** games; and the British company Codemasters converted its **Micro Machines**. Sega's answer to Nintendo's Super Mario Kart was two exclusive and network-capable **Sonic Drift 3D** racers. Finally, at the end of 1996, **G-Sonic** and **Virtua Fighter Mini** appeared – at 8 Mbit, the biggest Game Gear cartridges.



Please feed it with six batteries: Sega Game Gear

### Variants and successors

|                        |             |  |
|------------------------|-------------|--|
| <b>Game Gear</b>       | <b>1990</b> | Following the dark Game Gear (19,800 yen), the mid-'90s saw multiple colour variants released for 13,800 yen in Japan, including red and blue, and (from 1995) 'Character Pack' bundles priced at 15,800 yen – coloured consoles including one game. |
| <b>Game Gear White</b> | <b>1991</b> | The white Game Gear priced at 34,800 yen, was manufactured in limited numbers (only 10,000 units were ever sold) and released with a matching TV tuner and a carrying-case.  |
| <b>Coca Cola</b>       | <b>1994</b> | The rare Game Gear version in design and colours of the famous soft drink brand was released with the Coca Cola Kid cartridge.   |
| <b>Kids Gear</b>       | <b>1996</b> | The final model in Virtua Fighter-Anime look, in greys and one distinctive colour and with blue buttons. It was bundled with VF Mini and only released in Japan for 14,800 yen.  |

