Dodonpachi Daifukkatsu

Released: May 22, 2008
Publisher: AMI
Developer: CAVE
Hardware: SH3

Thank you: Images from System16.com, video from CAVEPCB on YouTube & review from an archived version of CAVE-STG.com.

Review

By EOJ / November 21, 2008

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I can't say I ever really liked the Donpachi games. I just could never click with their very strict chaining systems. Learning the games felt too much like work, and I'd rather have fun when playing games. Admittedly, Dodonpachi is fun for a simple 1CC, and Dodonpachi: Daioujou is fun for its great bullet patterns and intense challenge. But they really aren't games I've ever been compelled to spend a lot of time with.

When Dodonpachi Daifukkatsu (henceforth DDPDFK) was announced, I was interested, but cautiously optimistic. I knew my track record with the Donpachigames, but I also knew what lead programmer Tsuneki Ikeda was doing these days in terms scoring system depth and overall design, and I found this encouraging. Initial pictures of the game were stellar, and when it was released in May there was a very positive reception in Japan.

Then, about three weeks later, Pink Sweets Lace 1-ALL world recorder holder YOS.K counterstopped the game at the end of the first loop, exposing a serious miscalculation of the scoring by both the game testers and the designers. And with that, a version 1.5 was born out of necessity. Released in the end of June, version 1.5 adds the green helicopter ship, balances out the game's scoring, fixes an exploit on the final boss, and tweaks other bits here and there.

Basically a successor to Daioujou, instead of having the dolls as your pilots, they are the bosses that you meet at the end of each of the five stages in the game. The bosses are not simple ship designs, but rather gorgeously animated transforming mechs with a variety of forms.

The game gives you many ship types and playing styles to choose, as well as separate high score boards for each (as a serious scorer, I love this feature). You can choose between three ships: A-type (red, quick, narrow shot), B-type (green, moderate speed, mid-range sweeping shot), or C-type (blue, slow, wide shot). After that, you can choose three play styles: Bomb-style (three options, bomb stock), Power-style (two options in Normal mode, four options in Boost mode, no bomb stock), or Strong-style (six options, very wide shot, wide laser, same bomb stock as Bomb-style). Strong is basically just a powered-up version of Bomb-style (and only unlockable via a code), while Power-style is almost like playing a different game. In Power-style, instead of a releasing a bomb, the B button changes between two shot types, namely the aforementioned Normal and Boost: the former is quick and weak, the latter is slow and powerful. It also has a much quicker hyper-gauge refill, and different effects in hyper mode based on if you're in Normal or

Boost: Normal hypers give you more hits, Boost hypers refill your hyper gauge quickly. You can also pick up and store one bomb at a time in Power-style, which can only be used as an autobomb.

Speaking of autobombing, this is a controversial element found throughout the game, in all three styles. However, it works better than you might assume. In Bomb and Strong styles, when you get hit and release an autobomb, it kills your chain just as a death would, and the bomb only lasts 2 seconds (and does little to no damage). If you manually release a bomb it lasts for 5 seconds, and does quite a lot of damage. The different effects of an autobomb and a manual bomb create an interesting new tension in the game, especially in the second loops – do you try to dodge that nasty pattern on a boss to keep your chain stable and rising even though there is the risk of autobombing, which amounts to a loss of a bomb, a chain break, and no damage to the boss? Or do you fire off a bomb that results in a lot of damage to the boss and five seconds of invincibility (which can be used to increase your hyper gauge) but also a chain break seriously hurting your score? It is a very salient example of risk versus reward. Essentially the autobomb feature is really there to help novices get a grip with the game and progress further than before, as well as to make entering and practicing the second loops less of a burdensome task. It does sort of feel like training wheels at first, but if you want to score well you need to learn to chain the levels and not get hit by anything, so in the end it isn't much of an issue. I also find it preferable to version 1.0's system which had an autobomb in Power-style, but not in Bomb or Strong-styles, and instead gave you a ton of bombs, as every time you picked up a bomb carrier it completely refilled your bomb stock. Version 1.5 cuts the total bomb inventory down significantly and only adds one bomb to your stock when you pick up a bomb carrier, but adds in the autobomb to compensate. A much better trade-off, if you ask me. Without the autobomb few but the absolute best players in Japan would clear both loops of this game. CAVE has already made enough obscenely difficult games to 2-ALL (meaning to clear both loops on a credit) in the past. It's nice to play one a bit more realistic to 2-ALL for those who are less than world-record holders. My only complaint here is the autobomb in Strong-style. They really should have removed it from that style, as it would have balanced the game more evenly. Arcadia seems aware of the Strong-style imbalance, as they still do not accept any scores done with that style. In all honesty, Strong-style isn't as fun as the other styles. It feels like a console-port arrange mode, and was obviously tossed in there to appeal to those new to Donpachi (and shooters in general, perhaps).

DDPDFK is a sum of many parts that have preceded it, taking elements from both Ikeda and Yagawa games. First, let me list the elements from previous Donpachigames. Obviously, you still have chaining here, complete with the same chaining gauge found in the previous games, and your total hit count displayed prominently on top of the screen. Continuing an element first introduced in Daioujou, there are hypers (as mentioned earlier in this review), but they work differently. There is a hyper meter that fills up, a special button just to activate hypers, and an added bullet-canceling ability unique to the hypers. Perhaps the most exciting feature in the game from a previous Donpachi is the inclusion of the Dodonpachi stage bosses as hidden midbosses if you meet certain requirements.

The above is where comparisons with previous Donpachi games end, and the innovative collection of elements from other games begins. Borrowed fromMushihimesama are larger chains (into the tens of thousands) and a more forgiving chaining system, as briefly losing your chain when your hyper meter is not full slowly reduces your hit counter, rather than abruptly resetting it to zero. That is not to say you cannot break and reset your chain in the game. As mentioned before

(auto-)bombing or dying any time breaks your chain. Any time you are in hyper mode and you lose your chain, it also resets to zero. In addition, when your hyper meter is full you have an increasing multiplier in effect, but the catch is if you break your chain during this time, it resets to zero. This is a brilliant system that makes the game far more accessible to beginners, while still handsomely rewarding the scorers for taking more risks. The basic strategy in the game is to try and use hypers in the first part of a stage to build up a good chain, then ride that chain with a full hyper meter until the boss fight for maximum points. Easier said than done, of course.

Another game that has inspired elements of DDPDFK is Pink Sweets. One unfamiliar with how each game really works may think that is a bizarre comparison, but if you have played both games in depth, you absolutely will feel a similarity. They both have lots of fat lasers frequently shooting at you, they both allow you to cancel bullets with your shot and add each cancelled bullet to a hit counter, and they both increase the bullet speed and bullet count while reducing the bullet-canceling ability as the rank increases. The boss milking is also rather similar in each game (a good comparison is the stage 2 boss milking "loop" in DDPDFK and the stage 1 boss milking in Pink Sweets).

From Muchi Pork! we see a similar element in the bullet-canceling, in that the bombs in MMP! convert all bullets in their path into piggies that fill up your lard meter. In DDPDFK, when you use a Boost hyper in Power-style, all of the cancelled bullets give you stars to absorb that rapidly fill up your hyper gauge.

From Mushihimesama Futari Black Label's Maniac and God modes, we see a similar proximity effect. Basically, the closer you are to enemies, the faster your hyper gauge increases, much like how the multiplier increases in MFBL based on proximity to enemies.

Perhaps inspired by Ibara Kuro ~ Black Label, we find the Normal/Boost shot change feature in Power-style, which is very reminiscent of IKBL's weapon change feature.

From Deathsmiles (yes, Deathsmiles!), we see a very similar looking bomb, and similar bomb damage and duration. There are also suicide bullets in the second loop that are the Deathsmiles "Death mode" suicide star sprite blown up to roughly 3x the size.

From Ketsui, we see two different loops (or "second rounds"): Tsuujou and Ura. However, the requirements to get to the loops are different than in Ketsui. In this game, you need to clear the first loop on one credit and collect 35 of the 45 bees scattered around the levels, or no miss the first loop, to enter the Tsuujou loop. To enter the Ura loop, you cannot die more than once, and you cannot use more than two bombs. You also must collect all 45 bees. The Tsuujou loop has the normal midbosses and only one True Last Boss ("TLB") at the end. In the Ura loop you find the hidden Dodonpachi midbosses in the stages along with a second TLB at the end of the game, which is a very brutal form of Hibachi.

Finally, we also see suicide bullets in the second loop taken from Mushihimesama Futari, and the ability to ride lasers for points, taken from Ikaruga (compareIkaruga's stage 3 with DDPDFK's stage 5). Another element taken from Ikaruga is the need to rapidly switch between shot and laser, particularly in the second loops. It mimics the feel of quickly switching polarities back and forth in many parts of Ikaruga.

As must be obvious by now, it is quite clear that Dodonpachi Daifukkatsu is not only a rebirth of the Donpachi series, but also a culmination of many elements used in previous CAVE games, as well as Ikaruga (a game Ikeda has praised in the past as a "work of genius").

In regard to the sensory elements of the game, the graphics are incredible, really some of the best 2D stuff ever done, and overall the best in any CAVE game to date. Everything is highly animated, richly detailed, and the backgrounds are gorgeous – replete with layers of parallax and diverse scenery. The music, by Manabu Namiki, is equally great – it definitely reminds of Espgaluda II, but also has many elements reminiscent of tracks in previous Donpachi games.

The bullet patterns also deserve mention. They are colorful, diverse, and skillfully designed, as is typical of Tsuneki Ikeda and Takashi Ichimura. The second loops have some of the wildest and most beautiful bullet patterns to date, with multicolored lasers and a variety of bullet types constantly bombarding the screen. Things get very hectic to say the least.

As for complaints, my biggest one is that they really should have included an in-game reset command as found in Pink Sweets. Restarting a failed Bomb or Strong-style run is an unnecessary chore as you have to autobomb away all your bombs before you can suicide. Also, making the autobomb optional, perhaps even just in the dip switches, would have been a nice option to have.

This is a very special game, perhaps in part due to the fact it was a very unexpected one. It has the power to lure in people like myself who never really liked Donpachigames, while still appealing to the core Donpachi fans. It reinvents, reinvigorates, and redefines. It is the only chaining game I truly love besides Ikaruga, and one of CAVE's finest works to date. The graphics, music, sound effects, stage design, bullet patterns, scoring system, bosses, ship diversity, shot types, and overall flow are all so incredibly refined, inviting, expertly crafted, and enjoyable, it nearly brings a tear to the eye of the devoted CAVE fan. With that said, it does not inspire me to want to play the older Donpachi games (because it is so much better than them), and it does not quite dethrone my beloved Mushihimesama Futari version 1.5 as CAVE's best game to date, but it's a close second. Damn close.

Vidéo : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGBpeBgtI_o

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