# JOHN'S DREAMCAST GUIDE THING.

So you're thinking of getting a 2nd hand Dreamcast? Good for you! Here are a few things you might find interesting to know. :-) This is really aimed at those of you who know little about the console, because I don't know EVERYTHING about it. If you've already got a Dreamcast, well some of this maybe interesting too.

Getting Started:

Depending where you get your Dreamcast, you may end up with different bits of hardware from whoever had it before. Unless of course you manage to come across one that's never been used. :-) Basically though, you'll need one controller, the power cable and the AV cable also to plug into your tele'. All the Dreamcast consoles should have a modem attached on the side.
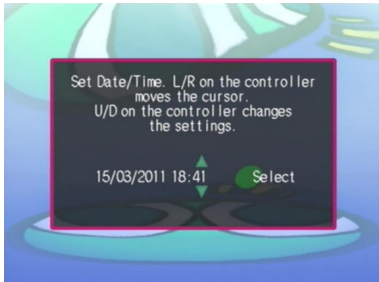
Each console has a rechargeable button battery inside that keeps the clock running. It will eventually go flat if you don't use the console for about a week or so. The only stuff you'll lose if it does is the time and date, which you'll need to set when you turn the Dreamcast on.

You'll probably want to back up your game saves, so you'll need a trusty VMS (Visual Memory System). They're also called VMUs. (The "U" for units.) These are usually only a few dollars 2nd hand. The VMS is one beefed up memory cartridge! It has its own LCD, 4 buttons and takes 2 CR-2032 button batteries. The batteries are optional however and your saves don't depend on them what-so-ever. They are only to power the display if you want to play mini games on it, to view your contents or to plug 2 VMSs together to transfer data. Don't expect them to last long either! You'll need to unplug all your VMSs from your controllers if you have batteries installed or they'll get drained even faster. Apart from the games, this is all you really need to get going. :-) Mmm and a TV of course.

International Games:

The Japanese line up of Dreamcast games is like a whole other world with some interesting titles you may never have heard of. Plus with European & American games drying up around 2002, there are a bunch of later titles you can obtain on import. Karous was one of the final officially released games in 2007.

The easiest way to play games from overseas is to use the slightly controversial Utopia Boot Disc. You may have to do a bit of searching, but you should be able to find it on the Internet as a disc image. You then just burn it to a CD and pop it in the Dreamcast. Once it gets to the spinning reindeer, you can open the Dreamcast's drive door, take the CD out and put in the game you want to play. The only issue with this is that American and Japanese software will usually only run at 50 Hz on a PAL console. This is okay if you have an older TV that doesn't do any more than this, but if you want to run the games at full speed, you may want to consider further hardware modification to your Dreamcast, if you're comfortable to do it that is. I won't be covering this, but from what I've read you don't need any special extra circuits — just soldering ability and some special software.

Most of the PAL games already have a 60 Hz option though.

What You Can Play:

For those of ya who don't know, the Dreamcast will only play game GDs (Gigabyte Discs) and audio CDs. It can't play DVDs. You can get home made software to play Video CDs however, as well as MPEG 1 files, small DivX videos and the like. If you're interested in audio, one of the best options is DC Playa. It handles a variety of modules, MP3 & Ogg files too, along with background pictures. The console will not read re-writeable CDs, so only use regular blank ones. You can use 8 cm CDs too. Most software will come as a disc image and will be able to boot itself.

If you have an older style TV with only an antenna connection, you can also get a RF unit that plugs into the antenna socket. I think the games still present the 60 Hz option through this, but TVs that old may not support it.

What You Can Plug In:

If you're really into the games that need something special, there's quite a selection of peripherals for the Dreamcast. Although some of them are rarer and more expensive than others. The camera and microphone for instance. I paid something like $145 for my broadband adaptor, and the maracas are slightly tricky to get too. If you're aiming to use your console on the Internet or play the likes of Outtrigger, Quake 3, Unreal Tournament & The Typing Of The Dead, you'll need to consider the keyboard. And possibly the mouse as well. Games like The House Of The Dead 2 and Confidential Mission benefit from the light gun and of course the fishing games work well with the fishing rod. Most games can be played with the standard control pad however.

If you want to crisp up the image quality, a VGA Box may be your cup of tea. You just need a standard VGA type PC monitor. Not all games support it though. You can also connect it to an arcade monitor if you have one which is compatible.

Taking Care Of Things:

Depending on how paranoid you are, there are a few little things you can do to keep parts of your Dreamcast running longer. Some of these are a little pedantic sounding though.

One tip I read about was to press down just lightly on the disc holding spindle bit as you lift the GDs out. This puts a little less stress on the motor. Another thing you can do is to open the lid before turning off the console when you're finished with a game, so that the disc is slowed up quicker. Basically all this does though is cuts back on a minor amount of continued friction on the innards of the motor.

Don't turn your Dreamcast upside-down while it's on. I did that with my 1st one to check for something and it made a horrible smell! It probably disturbs the liquid cooling. Although apparently not all the consoles actually used this in the end.

If you're concerned about the heat, you can put a small fan on the vents at the back which blows cool air inside. Be sure that you keep the dust around it down to a minimum though.

One problem that seems to have occurred to a lot of Dreamcast consoles is that the socket on the power supply board fails to keep a good connection with the large pins that come up from the motherboard / main board. I'll have to say that credit for this goes to Rhett Mann who worked at Sega Ozisoft here in Australia, because he was the chap that I spoke to about it. The short term solution is to clean the pins over if they've become dirty, but the permanent solution for me was to attach secondary wires to the tops of the pins and then to the power supply socket. Kind of like a heart bypass or something. :-P To do this though, you'll want to be confident enough to open the console and be able to wield

a soldering iron. All you need to remove is the power supply board which is screwed and clipped into place.

(In the above picture you can see inside my own console, and where I added in my own yellow wires.)
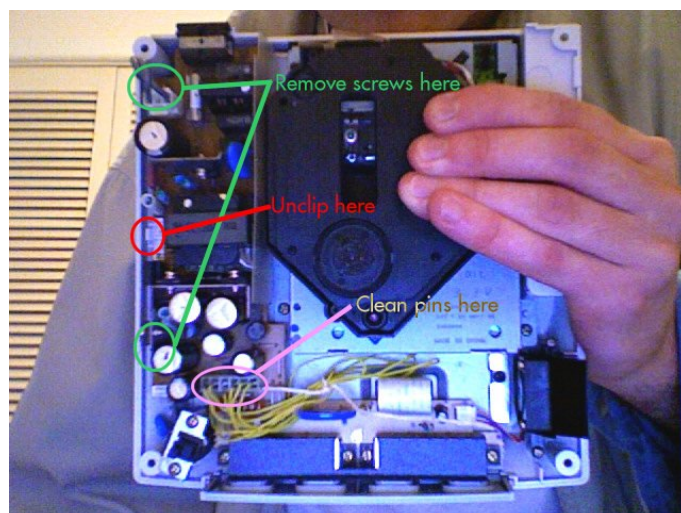
Once you have things apart, you'll need to solder 6 wires onto the very tops of the pins coming up, and then pass them through the holes in the socket, loop them around and solder them to the corresponding connections on the socket, where it's soldered in. Mess this up and you may fry something in the Dreamcast. Keep the wires long enough to get the power supply out again also. Remember that heat can be very destructive to semiconductors and the like, so be quick about doing it. A 25 W or so soldering iron with a small tip should be sufficient. I had to do this on my original and 2nd Dreamcasts. The usual symptoms that you're having this issue is the console partially working and then suddenly resetting and doing weird things it shouldn't. For me it mostly just kept resetting back to the main menu / BIOS section.
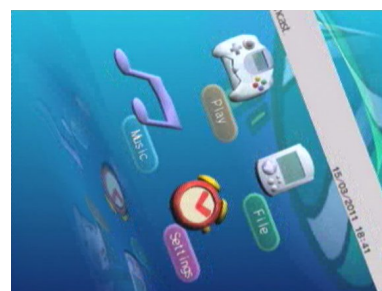
Console Management.

The options on the left here are about as simple as it gets. Note the bottom option to set your VMS's clock. This is very handy if you have a wad of them plugged in, and want to set the lot of them to the correct time & date without having to do it from the VMS itself. That said, they keep horrendous time, so you may not want to bother.

Auto start is basically whether you want the game to load when you shut the lid.

If you have Puyo Puyo Fever, (which is pretty much the only game that ever did this,) you can get the game to put a special file on your VMS as a new background for your Dreamcast's main menu. It's a shame this was never put to use on nearly all the games as a way to make your console feel more themed to what you were currently in the mood to play. The Dreamcast will constantly check for this file's presence, and change to the image it contains if found. While this is present you can press the Start button to activate a special version of the display which can be rotated and which has a reflective looking base. You can also use *Dream Explorer* to change the image to whatever you want.

File management is a breeze. Select what you want, press A and choose whether to delete the file(s) or copy them to another VMS.

When you get a fresh VMS, you can customise it with a little picture and set a colour for it also to help identify it better when you have multiple ones plugged in. With 4 control pads you can have up to 8 at once. There's some nifty software out there that you can download for free that manages your VMS files, including compression. You can even get applications for the VMSs like a little calculator.

Icons with a black border are regular saves and ones with a green border are applications. You can only have one of these per VMS. Any with a reddish brown border are not copyable. However there is one way around this, and that is to remove the VMS and insert the one you want to copy to and then get the game to save again.

On the right here are a few Dreamcast related odds and sods of mine. The games are Confidential Mission, Shenmue 2, the American version of Evolution 2, Skies Of Arcadia and the Japanese Karous, which comes in a DVD type box. We also have the standard controller with a

white VMS plugged in, the console itself of course, the broadband adaptor, a green VMS, the gun, European keyboard and mouse. :-)

If you're super serious about your saves, you can buy a Nexus memory card with a PC link cable. These are hard to find now and require a computer running Windows with a parallel (printer) port.

You can then transfer / backup your save files onto your computer. It is one easy way to share files also. The only issues are lugging your Dreamcast in next to your PC to do it, and finding the software in the 1st place. I use a 3rd party program called *VMS Linker* by Umezawa Takeshi and Kamino Youm, because I find it more reliable than the official EMS / Nexus one. Good luck finding it still.

Good Games.

If you've read my Dreamcast page, you'll know which games I like. If you're into RPGs, Skies Of Arcadia is a must have. Although it does seem to sell for quite a lot 2nd hand now. Shenmue 1 & 2, plus Grandia 2 are top buys as well. Racing fans should consider Daytona USA 2001 and the 2 Crazy Taxi games, which are pretty psycho. Confidential Mission & The House Of The Dead 2 are great games for gun fans, and you can even pick up Virtua Cop 2 from Japan. Although it's a conversion of the PC game, which is a conversion of the Saturn game, which is a conversion of the Model 2 board original.

If you like sports, titles such as the cute Tee Off Golf, Virtua Tennis 1 & 2, Sega World Wide Soccer 2000, (plus the Euro Edition,) Virtua Striker 2 and Virtua Athlete 2K might well be your cuppa tea.

Radirgy / Rajirugi is a fun, colourful shooter, and if you can rotate your TV, you can play it as intended with a portrait, or TATE type display. The Dreamcast had quite a deluge of shoot 'em up games, most of which came out after Sega stopped production of the console. Such titles included Border Down, Shikigami No Shiro 2, Chaos Field, (Radirgy of course), Karous, Psyvariar 2, Ikaruga, Trigger Heart Exelica, Trizeal & Under Defeat. All of which were on the NAOMI board. (Sega's arcade version of the Dreamcast, [that had twice the RAM in all areas,] for those of you who didn't know.) So you're spoilt for choice in that department if you like this genre.

On The Internet.

As every Dreamcast comes with a modem on the back, you can get it on the Internet. Originally they were all 33.6 kb per second speed ones, which were later upgradeable to 56.6 kbps. Sega also released a rare broadband adaptor and a LAN adaptor too. If you can get your hands on the American *Planet Web 3* browser, you should be able to experience the best of both worlds. You can use your own selection of ISP and the majority of web pages are still viewable too. These browsers only support up to about Macromedia Flash 3, so don't expect to be viewing videos at YouTube for instance. :-P (The Dreamcast can usually play small MPEG 1 files I think.)

Given that most web sites are intended for viewing on a high resolution monitor, stuff does seem quite squishy on your TV. Although if you swing by to my site on the Dreamcast Page, the SCUD Race review and the Skies Of Arcadia review, you'll get to experience some Dreamcast exclusive stuff on your VMS. Plus some vibration also, if you have a vibrator.

If you want the 3 "add ons" for Skies Of Arcadia, and extra cart circuits for Sonic Adventure 2, then downloading these goodies to your VMS is a good feature of Internet access. Some of this stuff takes up a lot of room also, and if you get a lot of large e-mail messages, be aware that you're limited to the free space of your VMS to save them.

There are only a handful of games however that can still be played online, one of which is Quake 3. However fans of Phantasy Star Online 1 & 2 have made up new servers to allow the continued play of these games.