

Three times a year, the Ludum Dare event takes place. You got 48 hours to make a game from scratch.

This was the third time I participated. And I decided to shoot a little documentary about me coding my game.

This is the Making Of Pressure Run.

Ludum Dare officially starts when the competition's theme is released. Since I am located in Austria, this happens at 3 in the morning local time.

Instead of staying up like the last times, I slept till 8 to start well rested and with +3 on intelligence and perception. At least that's what I thought.

I learned of the theme, a tie between "2 Button Controls" and "Growing", and utterly blanked out. I thought I could come up with something in 5 minutes but there was *nothing*. I overestimated my originality once more. So I needed to bootstrap my brain.

The coffee helped. It just took a while to seep into my brain. Back at my computer I began typing down every little idea that that came trickling in. Hitting rock bottom once I aimlessly toyed around FamiTracker until one note hit me with a hammer of nostalgia. Suddenly I knew *exactly* what I wanted to create.

In our little museum of videogame history in our living room, I found my inspiration: A 34 year old Game and Watch handheld from Nintendo.

It had pre-drawn LCD outlines of every possible sprite position, a single piezo speaker and, most importantly, just two buttons. I always wanted to make something like this myself and this weekend, I decided, I would.

My approach to making games is pretty random, so naturally the first thing to do was to record the sounds from the original game. I also took photos of the handheld for reference and designed the stage of my game in Photoshop.

Since those early games are step based, I did a quick layout blocking out the player sprite and where the hazards should be placed and prepared a quick tile map to easily nudge the pieces around in Game Maker.

I also needed a character sprite. I settled for my own interpretation of Mr. Game and Watch because I just love that simple yet expressive body with the huge nose.

Coding in solitude only gets me so far, I like to be among a bunch of people and, ideally, close to an endless supply of coffee.

[Starbucks Sign]

At Starbucks I began with the actual coding, setting up the game to be step based, wiring in the sprites steps and doing some more programmer art on the hazards.

Of course I had to deal with a bunch of bugs but that's only natural. In the end I got the player movement and trap door mechanic working more or less solid. Then I needed a break.

On a cloudy Saturday night in Salzburg I hit the road for a trip into the old town to vent my head from all the coding.

And more coffee. The Cafe Wernbacher has mediocre coffee (at best) but a nice atmosphere to sketch and ponder for a couple of hours.

After filling two pages with sketches and my belly with a club sandwich I headed back home but not without a little epiphany in the car solving one of the many problems I had in the game thus far.

Back at my beast I dove right in, kept adding features and debugging until I both ran out of water and energy for the day. It was past 11 p.m. and I am old. With 27 and a half hours to go it was bedtime for me.

Day 2 -----

A healthy 8 hours later and weird dreams of playing Worms against Warren Spector I was in the perfect mood for some more coding. Well, almost. There still was a severe lack of caffeine in my blood I needed to take care of.

With the morning sun in my back I finally came around to add the other hazard type, the steam plumes from the vents. As simple as it may sound, it broke what I had so far and sloppy coding took its toll when I desperately tried to tie up all the loose ends.

I finally succeeded and the game was feature complete. Now I could finally polish the game and draw a nice background and rework the sprites.

I still had some bugs in the code but at some point an empty belly blocks you from making any progress. I had spent all the day coding and drawing and at sundown my stomach was rebelling. We jumped in the car to get some takeaway from our favorite Turkish food shop.

Coding and eating don't go together well, but eating and watching TV are great. And watching one little show wouldn't hurt my time management I thought. Okay, make that two shows because we had some Christmas cookies too many.

After a full meal, returning to the game was a bit strange, it felt like I was gone for two days. At least I could fix those bugs quickly. It was really fun also to create an authentic-looking Game-and-Watch-like border around the stage and cleaning up all the sprites for the final version.

A game is not complete without playtesting and my lovely Conny was eager to push the two buttons herself and provide some feedback regarding the difficulty progression.

Some final cleanups, a nice Icon and a last quality check later I was finished!

Even my ISP was playing along this time and both upload and submission at the Ludum Dare website worked flawlessly. With three and a half hours to spare, I had finished without even breaking a sweat. Yeah, I was getting the hang of it!

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And you know what? The game even works great on Android!

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Certainly, Pressure Run is nothing revolutionary in any way, rather a loving look back at the stone age of portable gaming without defaulting to the stale pixel look.

Its gameplay is archaic, its sound is minimal and it's interesting for 2 minutes at best. But I don't care. I am proud of getting it done before the deadline and, most importantly, I am happy to fulfill one of my childhood dreams I had as a kid in the 80s: Making my very own Game and Watch.



