

## 'Skylanders' injecting vehicles in next installment

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This photo provided by Activision shows a scene with a Dive Bomber from the new video game, "Skylanders SuperChargers," which releases on Sept. 20, 2015, in North America. (Activision via AP)

"Skylanders" is pushing the pedal to the metal.

The popular Activision video game franchise that jumpstarted the toys-to-life genre four years ago is souping up its latest edition with air, land and sea vehicles.

"Skylanders SuperChargers" will feature a parade of 20 vehicular toys that can be mimicked on screen similar to how the series' character figurines came alive in the past four installments.

"It's a natural addition to the universe," said Eric Hirshberg, CEO of Activision Publishing. "We've had what we think is a special innovation for each year of 'Skylanders,' from 'Giants' to 'Swap Force' to 'Trap Team' and now 'SuperChargers.' It's been a request for a while, and we think it's the right time to bring a new kind of toy to life."

"SuperChargers," which is set to rev up Sept. 20, will feature such vehicles as race car Hot Streak, jet Sky Slicer and submarine Dive Bomber. Other modes of transportation will include motorcycles, boats, tanks and helicopters. On screen, the interactive action will alternate between "Skylanders" characters battling on foot and in their rides.

"It's not just a different type of toy," said Hirshberg. "It's also a different type of gameplay. We've done lots of iterations with characters. 'Skylanders' started as an on-foot exploration and battle game. 'SuperChargers' required a different kind of technology and development suite, so it took a little bit more time for us to get that right."

Each of the vehicles can be virtually customized with parts found throughout the game. A few of the vehicle toys, which will cost \$14.99 each, have moving parts. For example, the Hot Streak race car is equipped with spinning wheels that could zip across carpets. However, the developers don't recommend submerging Dive Bomber in tubs.

The next "Skylanders" entry will also add 20 new characters to the roster of more than 300 heroes that have been released since the original "Spyro's Adventure." They include a daredevil blue bird named Stormblade and a demon race car driver dubbed Spitfire.

The new characters can be paired with their matching vehicles for a high-performance combination in the game. While every previous character is licensed to drive in "SuperChargers," none of the real-world figurines will actually fit inside the toy cockpits.



This photo provided by Activision shows a scene with Hot Streak from the new video game, "Skylanders SuperChargers," which releases on Sept. 20, 2015, in North America. (Activision via AP)

There will be limitations when it comes to cooperative gameplay in "SuperChargers," too. If "Skylanders" players—"portal masters," as they're known—are playing together, they must partner up when hitching a ride, with one player taking the wheel and another manning the weaponry of a singular vehicle on screen, according to producer Lou Studdard.



This photo provided by Activision shows the "Skylanders SuperChargers" starter pack. The new video game, "Skylanders SuperChargers," with land, sea and sky vehicles releases on Sept. 20, 2015, in North America. (Activision via AP)

In addition to motor power, "SuperChargers" is also tricking out the game with more star power. Josh Duhamel, Neal McDonough and Britney Snow are among the celebrities who will join longtime "Skylanders" voice actor Patrick Warburton for the latest adventure.

"We've found now that the game has a big pop-culture blast radius. A lot of actors who have kids in their lives know the impact of this franchise and are more open to being a part of it," said Hirshberg.

For the successful series, these injections are potential trailblazers.

Since its launch in 2011, "Skylanders" paved the way for the toys-to-life

category, which now includes Disney's "Infinity" and Nintendo's "amiibo." Earlier this year, Warner Bros. unveiled plans to unleash "Lego Dimensions," a game-toy line set for release Sept. 27 that features Lego vehicles and characters from several different franchises.

Hirshberg is unfazed by all the competition.



This photo provided by Activision shows a scene with Sky Slicer and Super Shot Stealth Elf from the new video game, "Skylanders SuperChargers," which releases on Sept. 20, 2015, in North America. (Activision via AP)

"It's a \$4 billion category now, and \$3 billion of that is 'Skylanders,'" he said. "We achieved that leadership position by having a deep commitment to innovation. Whether it's a Lego, Disney or Nintendo game, that hasn't changed our strategy. Our strategy is to make the best game possible."

Unlike most competitors in the genre, "Skylanders" is solely based on video game mythology—not comic books or films. But Hirshberg doesn't see that as a speed bump on the path ahead for the interactive franchise.

"We get to design our characters with a clean sheet of paper," said Hirshberg. "We don't start with a character that comes with a brand book that's two inches thick written by people who didn't have video games in mind. As a result, I think our characters are an advantage for us."

**More information:** [www.skylanders.com](http://www.skylanders.com)

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