

The Secret Story Behind Forza Horizon 4 LEGO® Speed Champions

It turns out that there's actually a narrative explanation for why life-size LEGO® cars can be found during Forza Horizon 4's Horizon Festival.

"According to the official canon, there is a partnership between the LEGO Group and the Horizon Festival, and they have blown all these things up to a human-sized scale so that humans that are attending the Horizon Festival in the game can go and explore the LEGO Valley and then go and explore all of these things," said Mike Brown, creative director on the Forza Horizon series.

It's a lost bit of fiction that explains the disconnect that happens when an open-world racing game with intricately detailed real-world cars suddenly becomes home to life-size versions of cars from the LEGO Speed Champions theme sets.



That mashup of Forza and LEGO bricks arrived on June 13, 2019 as the Forza Horizon 4 LEGO Speed Champions DLC. But work on it, or at least the early discussions that led to the partnership, started back in 2016 at an auto show.

"It was actually the Detroit motor show in 2016 where I met Michael McClary, who was running the Microsoft Forza side of things," said Craig Callum, the design manager for LEGO Speed Champions at the time. "We were chatting about what we do and how much fun it

is, and then it just kind of led to this idea that perhaps we need to get bricks into the Forza world."

The idea kept bubbling up at the car shows Callum was attending to promote the LEGO theme. Eventually, he brought it to the folks at LEGO Games, who were, around the same time, discussing ways to broaden the reach of their titles. They felt they had the action-adventure games locked down with the excellent titles from TT Games, but they wanted to try other approaches, and racing seemed to have a very broad appeal. Combining the two felt like a natural fit and a solid solution.

Once on board, the LEGO Games and Forza teams needed to figure out what a collaboration would mean. That included looking at everything from whether the title would be tied to Forza Motorsport or Forza Horizon, and whether it would be a stand-alone video game, or a downloadable content add-on for an existing game. They also looked at doing something as small as simply adding a skin to an existing game to make it look as if it were built of LEGO bricks.

Eventually, though, the teams settled on developer Playground Games creating LEGO-themed downloadable content, or DLC, for Forza Horizon 4.

Scale became a discussion point, as they worked to determine whether the LEGO cars in the game should be made of tens of thousands of regular LEGO bricks or a smaller number of huge LEGO bricks. They ultimately decided to follow the design aesthetic of LEGO Speed Champions and have them made of oversized LEGO bricks.

Once the scale was sorted, both philosophically and technically, the team had to figure out where these LEGO Speed Champions cars would be racing. The result was LEGO Valley. The new location added through the DLC is packed with everything from its own LEGO city to a speedway and even a stunt park.

The team at Playground Games ending up working six to seven months creating the DLC, the most they'd ever spent on downloadable content for one of their games.

When it launched on June 13, 2019, it brought those wonderful playscapes, a LEGO Master Builder's House, its own radio station, and five cars – including the 1967 Mini Cooper S Rally and cars from the original three manufacturers that launched LEGO Speed Champions.

While Forza Horizon 4 came out in 2018, it remained the most recent Forza game for three years, until November 2021 when Forza Horizon 5 hit. With the release of the latest, greatest Forza title, we asked Brown if he feels that Forza Horizon 4 and this LEGO DLC is now retired.

"That isn't how we look at it actually," he said. "I think with Game Pass, all the titles can stay alive alongside newer titles. They still have access to it through Game Pass. Obviously today, you should definitely go and check out Horizon 5, but I don't think that closes door and Horizon 4."

Explore more ...

In order of appearance:

[LEGO Speed Champions](#) - Official website

[Turn 10 Studios](#) - Official website

[Forza Motorsport](#) - Official website

[Playground Games](#) - Official website

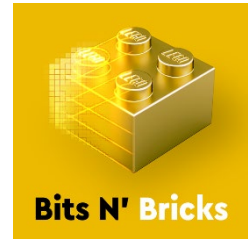
[Forza Horizon](#) - Official website

[Forza Horizon 4 LEGO Speed Champions](#) - Official Xbox website

Transcript

Bits N' Bricks Season 4 Episode 41: When Forza Cars Met LEGO® Bricks

Nov. 24, 2021 · 37:27



Prologue – 00:00

Announcer

Please note that this episode of Bits N' Bricks contains instances of misuse of the LEGO trademark, which must always be used as an adjective and never a noun. As a reminder, it is never appropriate to refer to the company that designs and produces LEGO brand products as LEGO. Rather, the correct name for the company overall is the LEGO Group.

Announcer

I hope that was severe enough. Was it severe enough?

Studio Engineer

Yeah, that was great, Ben. We got it.

Announcer

Alright. On with the show.

(Child's voice announcing Bits N' Bricks)

Bits N' Bricks: Introduction – 00:39

Ethan Vincent

Welcome to Bits N' Bricks, a podcast about all things LEGO games. I'm Ethan Vincent.

Brian Crecente

And I'm Brian Crecente. Together we look back at the rich 25-year history of LEGO games, chat with early developers and seasoned studios, who have all tackled the creation of video games for one of the most popular and respected toy companies in the world – the LEGO Group.

(Bits N' Bricks Season 4 theme music plays)

Brian Crecente

Hey, Ethan. Did you know that this month marks the release of the fifth Forza Horizon game and 12th game in the Forza franchise?

Ethan Vincent

It would be hard not to know that. It seems like everyone is talking about the new Forza.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, it's a really good game. It's not just that it's this beautiful bit of racing. It also is a lot of silly fun. There are sort of threads of a story you can follow as you essentially hang out at a massive car festival in Mexico. But the real fun for me, at least, is unlocking the sorts of cars I'd never get to drive, let alone doing sort of these crazy things with them like driving off-road through a wall of cactus in a 1993 McLaren F1 or jumping off boulders in a 1965 Shelby Cobra Daytona coupe. By the way, that's more than a \$7 million car.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah.

Brian Crecente

And it's obviously not designed for off-road bouldering.

Ethan Vincent

Yeah, I mean the embarrassing part is obviously, Brian, I haven't played it yet. But I do know that Xbox head Phil Spencer recently said that Forza Horizon 5 is Xbox Game Studios biggest launch ever, with, what, 4.5 million players?

Brian Crecente

Yeah.

Ethan Vincent

And one of the things that seems to be driving that popularity is how the game delivers not just a driving game, but a fun interactive sandbox in which to play.

Brian Crecente

Yeah, you know, and that sounds very familiar.

Chapter 1: LEGO Speed Champions – 02:34

Ethan Vincent

And it's why we're talking about Forza today. Not only does Horizon deliver the sort of experience that LEGO games and toys are best known for, but back in 2019, the LEGO Group and the people behind Forza actually built something amazing together.

Craig Callum

My name is Craig Callum, I was the design manager for LEGO Speed Champions. And well, I guess I was the guy that sort of initiated the whole conversation of how we could get bricks into Forza Horizon 4.

Brian Crecente

Craig isn't at the LEGO Group anymore. In fact, he's currently living on the road out of a Mercedes Sprinter van that has been converted into a mobile home of sorts, complete with a bay for two motorcycles, his surfboards, and even a little recording booth. He's been touring England for the past nine months.

Craig Callum

We're just perched on top of a cliff overlooking, well, barrel after barrel of wave. So we're just kind of waiting for the right conditions to get back out there on the surfboards. So it's – I can't complain. I can't (laughs) complain. Right now we're at Woolacombe Bay in Devon, so the southwest of the U.K., and it's actually November so it's not the warmest, but with the right wetsuit and a good attitude, you can you can still get out in the water. In fact, the water's quite warm. It's the air that's getting cold now. It's nice being out on the road, but I do miss having kind of my workshop, having my cars nearby, they're kind of – they're all parked up at friends' houses at the moment waiting for me to return and get my own workshop again and start working on them again, because I race. I've got a 1934 Model A hot rod that I race, and it's been kind of parked in a garage, although we did get out in the summer, went to Denmark and raced on a beach in Denmark, which again has been great because this turns into basically a little kind of race center where we can tow the car behind it and then do the racing all day and then you just go back to the van, have a cup of tea and fall asleep. It's great.

Ethan Vincent

Back before his stint touring the country in a decked-out van, before his time at the LEGO Group as a designer on the LEGO Speed Champions car sets, Callum was a big fan of cars. He got a degree in automotive design in the U.K. and worked on Renault trucks before landing a job at the LEGO Group as a designer in 2009.

Craig Callum

I initially started on Ninjago.

(LEGO Ninjago TVC Kai vs. Bonezai 2011 Commercial excerpt)

Narrator

New from LEGO Ninjago)

Craig Callum

When that project came to an end, I put forward that we should probably start doing cars again, because I mean, the LEGO Group has always had a background of doing cars with LEGO Racers and other lines like that in the past, but actually it had stopped and it hadn't done any for a few years.

Brian Crecente

The core concept for LEGO Speed Champions was one of the projects that a group of designers, including Craig, pitched during an annual event when the LEGO Group opens the floor to new ideas from designers.

Craig Callum

Every year there's a week of time put aside that designers can do that. And LEGO Speed Champions was one of the lines that came from that idea.

(LEGO Speed Champions Commercial excerpt:

Narrator

New LEGO Speed Champions sets. You can build the cars of your dreams!")

Craig Callum

There's lots of car fanatics within the LEGO Group. I mean, it is something that there's a lot of them. And so there was all sorts of different concepts and different ideas put forward, different scales, different kinds of vehicles, brands that we should work with, and different ways of doing it. And I just kind of took all of those in together and put them together into one thing and there was a smaller group of us that then developed the concept of LEGO Speed Champions, as you see it now. So you know, that's taking into consideration how kids play, what kids want from that, what brands would work best, what scale as well, you know, it's thinking about, kind of, whether it's a big car or a little car, and, you know, how playable that is whether you smash it up, whether you display it, whether you have that integration with the minifigure as well. I mean, the LEGO minifigure was a huge part of LEGO Speed Champions, because it puts you in the driving seat. So, all of those considerations were right at the start, a very small group of us, and then when the LEGO Group decided that this is a concept that's worth looking into more than then, yeah, I took that and developed it further.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

While the concept for the franchise was greenlit in 2012 or so, it took another three years before the LEGO Group officially unveiled the LEGO Speed Champions theme, announcing partnerships with Ferrari, McLaren, and Porsche.

Craig Callum

I mean, a normal LEGO brand product line, I would say probably it's about a year development time, and that's six months of design development, and then, sort of, six months of production development before it can get onto the shelves. But when you're really introducing a new concept, there's a lot of testing you have to do, especially with something new like that. We were aiming at different age kids, you know. We were looking to expand, kind of, the lifetime of the kids involvement in LEGO games, and by introducing those brands that's sort of one way we thought we could do that. So there's a lot of different things we had to play with. And the scale of the cars was one of those as well, where you know, if they're too big they're too involved, and you're building too much. But if they're too small, you don't get all the detail of the car. And so the brands wouldn't necessarily be that happy if, you know, if we can't replicate a Ferrari or a Porsche perfectly then. It was a complicated process because we had to convince all of these partners that this is OK that it looks a bit goofy or, you know, that it's built out of bricks. It's supposed to do that, you know, if you wanted a perfect replica of a car you would go to the people that do that best, without naming any of them. So we had to sell that to them that this is a LEGO brick version of your cars.

(LEGO Speed Champions Commercial excerpt

Narrator

Ferrari, Porsche, McLaren. Do you have what it takes to become the speed champion? New LEGO Speed Champions sets.)

Brian Crecente

The theme was a success when it hit in March 2015. And soon those three iconic supercars were joined by a growing list of vehicles from Nissan to Lamborghini, to the Corvette and Dodge Challenger.

LEGO News Show: Episode 7 LEGO Speed Champions excerpt.

Helen Stone

What's your secret, Ace?

Ace

A speed champion is made of two things: determination, and a really cool car. The Ford Mustang. Five liter V8 motor, 426 horsepower, the classic with loads of fun under the hood.

Dan Brickman and others

Wow!

Ace

The Yellow Flash, the Chevrolet Corvette V6 with 650 horsepower. A supercar that's street legal.

Dan Brickman

Nice!

Helen Stone

Wow!

Ace

The Porsche 919 Hybrid. From zero to 60 miles per hour in 2.2 seconds, powered by electricity.

Fan #1

Oh

Fan #2

Yeah!

Ace

The Audi R18 e-Tron Quattro with two engines and four-wheel drive.

Helen Stone

Ahh.

Dan Brickman

That's mine, mine mine mine!

Ace

Take it easy my friend.

Dan Brickman

What?

Ace

You don't choose the care. The care chooses you.

Brian Crecente

While all of this was going on Craig and others on the LEGO Speed Champions' team were attending a lot of car shows and running to other companies with interest in replicating the car ownership experience.

Craig Callum

It came about fairly by chance because I got introduced – it was actually the Detroit Motorshow in 2016 where I met Michael McClary, who was running Microsoft Forza side of things. And it was chatting to him where we just kind of were chatting about what we do, we'd just met each other, we were introduced by Ford. We were chatting about what we do and how much fun it is. And then it just kind of led to this, this idea that perhaps we need to get bricks into the Forza world, which I hadn't even thought of being a possibility because, you know, Forza is such a reality-based game that I thought, well, this is a crazy concept. I'm not entirely sure how that's going to work. But he, you know, yeah, he

assured me that they'd been playing with similar concepts that would work really well. So, yes, it all started there.

(Short tune break)

Chapter 2: Forza and the Pitch – 10:39

Ethan Vincent

Forza Motorsport started as a simulation racing game developed by Turn 10 Studios and published by Microsoft Game Studios in 2005. It was the start of a racing sim franchise that would be compared to the likes of Gran Turismo, F1, NASCAR Heat, and Colin McRae Rally. It was well received, first releasing new versions every couple of years, and then adding a new sort of Forza title in 2012.

Brian Crecente

Forza Horizon handed a facet of the franchise to another studio, Playground Games, and dropped the racing franchise into an open world, specifically the open world of the fictional street racing Horizon Festival. The Forza Horizon games, which alternated with Forza Motorsport for biannual releases, injected a bit more playfulness and added a much greater sense of over-the-top antics. And with Forza Horizon 4, which hit in 2018, it also added a bit of LEGO brick fun to the mix.

Ethan Vincent

And that gets us back to Craig Callum and his run-in with the Forza folks at the Detroit auto show in 2016. Craig says that Forza Horizon's expansion into the open world form of play opened the door for a possible collaboration.

Craig Callum

Horizon almost is this kind of big LEGO brick box of possibilities. It was this big sandbox play, you know, big open world kind of play experience. So, I think already, you know, the way that they developed it just made total sense.

Brian Crecente

So Craig runs into Michael in Detroit, and then keeps running into him in other car shows. What started is idle chitchat grows into something more. And each time they meet, they continue to flesh things out. And after every meeting, Craig returns to the LEGO Group talking about this growing idea.

Craig Callum

I think, again, it was something without seeing it, it was very difficult for them to visualize. So it sort of always kind of fell a bit flat and it was a couple of years before there was

something I could kind of show to say, "OK, look, this is going to work really well." And it was the team over at Microsoft that developed just a little play reel video that kind of played with the idea of putting these bricks in place, and managed to sort of show that, and then it sort of started to kick off. And then it was actually at Le Mans, two years later, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, where we were with Porsche, and Porsche had a big esports championship running during the 24 Hours of Le Mans, and my marketing manager, for Speed Champions at the time, was there as well, and she saw everything that was happening, and suddenly it was, "This could be really huge. We can be part of this. We can be visible in this arena. And that's so important for us." And so the whole Speed Champions team then was just behind us, and we had to do this, and so we did everything we could and we came back to the LEGO Group and really started to push towards getting LEGO bricks in Forza Horizon.

(Short tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Jared Bals, a LEGO Game senior producer, said that around the same time Craig was coming to LEGO Games with this idea, they were discussing how to broaden the reach of their titles. They felt they had the action-adventure games locked down with the excellent titles from TT Games, but they wanted to try other approaches, and racing seemed to have a very broad appeal.

Jared Bals

It was the stars aligning, because we were, internally, having these conversations of. "Where do we want to place our bets? We want to do some new stuff." Not to say that our old business was going away. We love that. But we wanted to experiment. We want to try new things, and DLC was something that's like, "Is that something we're interested in? Do we want to experiment with smaller projects, not just whole standalones?" And this was the perfect opportunity. Up to this point, what we focused on primarily is the LEGO minifigure, which is tried and true very important to us, but what's also important to our portfolio is vehicles and building, and brick-built experiences, and vehicles are a key component of that. And to do something vehicular as the star, not to say minifigures, LEGO Minifigures, aren't in that, but something that could be focused around the brick and a brick-built world. Vehicles, racing, driving is perfect. I mean, again, it's stars aligned. It's perfect alignment.

Chapter 3: Forza Meets the LEGO Group – 14:55

Brian Crecente

Jared said once LEGO Games was on board, they started putting out slightly more official feelers to Microsoft and the Forza Horizon team.

Jared Bals

You meet people at D.I.C.E, you meet people at E3, and you say, "Hey, do you just want to have a conversation?" You get in the room and say, "Are you guys interested? Are you interested? OK, yes, then let's take the next step, let's start talking terms or whatever." But first, you have to have that initial meet and greet. And so, there's individuals at the LEGO Speed Champions team that got us talking to Microsoft, because Microsoft is at a lot of the same car conventions and rollouts that the LEGO Speed Champions people were at. And those aren't necessarily the exact same people that work on the game's division side of Microsoft, so they were able to get us in contact with the right people. And then, back in a world when we could go to conventions, we could be on the same location, you align certain stars that way to just, you know, break the ice. And that's literally how conversations start is through conversation. There are a lot of shaking heads, and lots of nods of, "This is perfect. This makes sense." We like to have some fun and experimentation on our expansions, because from a business standpoint, it spoke to a new audience for them, too. We brought something to the table that they could go, "Oh, this speaks to maybe a certain type of player we're not catering to, but it won't alienate them." So why wouldn't we take this risk in an expansion DLC format and see what the engagement could potentially be? So a lot of people saw this for what it was, and it was just a great opportunity.

Ethan Vincent

Next, the LEGO Games and Forza teams needed to figure out what a collaboration would mean. That included looking at everything from whether the title would be tied to Forza Motorsport or Forza Horizon. And whether it would be a standalone video game or a downloadable content add-on for an existing game. They also looked at doing something as small as simply adding a skin to an existing game to make it look as if it were built out of LEGO bricks. Eventually, though, the team settled on developer Playground Games creating LEGO-themed downloadable content, or DLC, for Forza Horizon 4, Craig said.

Craig Callum

Quickly, I think, the fact that it would fit in within the Horizon and it could be this DLC kind of made – it took the pressure from it a little bit, and I think that helped. If it was its own standalone game, you've got a lot of pressure then to sort of really make a lot of sales. As a DLC, it kind of – it relieved it a little bit of that.

(Tune break)

Chapter 4: Playground Games – 17:18

Brian Crecente

Playground Games was formed in 2010 in England, and is focused entirely, so far, on Forza Horizon titles. Mike Brown, Creative Director on the Forza Horizon series, said he was instantly excited when he first heard about the possibility of creating a LEGO car DLC.

Mike Brown

So I have been a huge LEGO brick fan my entire life. And so that opportunity to work with the LEGO Group to bring LEGO bricks into Forza Horizon, which is obviously a franchise that I love and care about deeply, I thought it was a great opportunity for me and for this team to bring together things that we love and I really believed our players would love as well. And so there was a really, a real natural marriage between LEGO Speed Champions and Forza Horizon.

Ethan Vincent

Next, Mike and his team started working with the folks at the LEGO Group to decide what shape the DLC would take. One of the most important steps was figuring out the DLC scale. Forza Horizon 4 features intricately detailed recreations of real-world cars cruising through stunning landscapes. The LEGO brick doesn't offer the same level of detail, and is of course, much smaller than the actual car. And on top of that, both teams weren't initially sure what to do with the scale of the drivers, both human and minifig. Jared said the team had to decide whether to include life-size cars made of tens of thousands of standard-sized LEGO bricks, or LEGO cars made with fewer but huge LEGO bricks.

Jared Bals

That took weeks and weeks of discussion to say, "OK, if this is the scale of the world, then everything has to fit the scale." So if you play LEGO Speed Champions expansion, we built the cars up to the scale one-to-one of what the car would be in real world. So if you put the LEGO Bugatti next to the real Bugatti in the game, they'll be approximately the same exact size. And so from that we use that as our scale representation of finding what a one-by-one brick was. Everything else in the world was going to be built on that scale. So we had established this, and then the LEGO minifigures within those vehicles, because they never leave the vehicle, they're in their cockpit, are scaled up to match what a brick size is in said world.

Brian Crecente

Mike noted that there's even official canon for the DLC in the size of those LEGO bricks, cars, and minifigs.

Mike Brown

Yes. So, (chuckles) in the official canon, the LEGO brick is really big. This is a partnership between the LEGO Group and the Horizon Festival. And they have blown all these things up to a human-sized scale so that humans can – those humans are attending the Horizon Festival in the game can go and explore that LEGO Valley, and then go and explore all of these things, so we approached it as though we were blowing those things up in size rather than shrinking everybody else down. That, on some levels, could be the same thing, but some of the geography in that DLC is natural. I think we have sand dunes, which are sand. We have rock faces, which are rock. And so, that way around allowed us to have all of that LEGO brick sit in a world that would otherwise look real. The cliff faces that are on either side of the valley look like real rocks. The sand dunes allow the cars to drive over them really satisfyingly because they're sand. But then all the bits of scenery, all the trees and bushes, and fences and houses, and everything else that makes up that world is made out of large scale LEGO brick.

(Forza 4 Horizon LEGO Speed Champions DLC In game Trailer excerpt:

Narrator

Skill. Nerve. Cutting-edge performance vehicles. Oh, and bricks. Lots and lots and lots of LEGO bricks. We've teamed up with the LEGO Group to create the biggest event horizon has ever assembled. It's time for LEGO Speed Champions.)

Mike Brown

We do have a philosophy of, which is called Forza authenticity. We push at the boundaries of this, but it's where we try and tell ourselves that everything that happens in Forza could be real. Now, as I say, we push at the boundaries of that, and probably the main example of that is the LEGO Speed Champions DLC. But we tried to tell ourselves there is a way that you could do this in real life if you had a multi-billion dollar budget, and nobody asking what you were spending it on. You could do this, the Horizon Festival could recreate this if they wanted to. And you see that where – the clouds, we have LEGO brick clouds, but if you look very closely at the LEGO brick clouds that are in there, you can see that they look like they're probably inflatable and they've been propped up up there, rather than actually being plastic (laughs) actual, like actual weather patterns made of plastic. And that's where we wanted this to sit. And you could still conceivably feel like it was in the real world.

Brian Crecente

While sorting out what the team wanted to do with scale involved a lot of discussion between a number of teams, getting it to actually work in Forza Horizon was a much greater challenge.

Mike Brown

Yeah, there were a few. So first of all was that the LEGO Group were really keen that we maintain scale, so all of our studs and bricks had to fit together. Our tools weren't really set

up to work in that way. A lot of our environments are very organic. All of the plant life, all of the rock faces in them are very organic, and our artists and our tools are very much set up to build a world that looks very organic and perhaps doesn't fit on a on a grid-like system like the LEGO Group tends to. So we had to do some work there to put some rules into our tools to make sure that artists couldn't get overly creative and push at the edges of what would be allowed with how the LEGO Group likes the bricks to be portrayed. Another example though is we really wanted those LEGO pieces to look like really real. Like you picked up that LEGO brick and were holding it really close to your eye and you can see the ever-so-slight imperfections on the brick, the slight scuffs where they rattle together in the bag, maybe even capture a bit of a fingerprint. I don't know what large fingers have built these LEGO cars, but we wanted to capture that in there so that it really felt like you were – when you went and looked at those cars in the game that it was an actual LEGO brick that you are, like, observing from super, close up. That is the same level of detail that we go to for all of our cars. We want all of them to feel really authentic when you're close up to them. I think there was just a real tactile feel to the way that we achieved that with the LEGO Group though, the way that we allowed for light to pass through the bricks because the LEGO bricks are ever so slightly translucent, so if you catch the sun just behind them, you get that kind of warm glow coming through the bricks. I think that was something that we were really happy with. It gave it that very authentic feel, and I know that the LEGO Group were really happy with that as well. It just felt really tactile, it felt like could almost reach out and hold it in your hands.

Brian Crecente

Once the scale was sorted both philosophically and technically, the team had to figure out where these LEGO Speed Champions cars would be racing. The result was LEGO Valley, a new location added to the DLC that is packed with everything from its own LEGO city, to a speedway and even a stunt park. Mike said all of this was born out of the love that the developers have for LEGO bricks.

Mike Brown

This came from the fact that quite a few members on the team are really huge LEGO brick fans. And when we start to piece together what an open-world LEGO Forza Horizon might look like, people were getting very, very creative and saying, "Oh, I really love those alien sets they did in the '90s. I love the pirate ship" or "I just love the Creator Expert modular buildings." And there was a lot of people bringing their own, kind of, LEGO brick fantasies into that creative process. And that just made for a really fun and diverse open world. In that reasonably compact expansion, you're able to see all of these different fantasies brought to life in the different areas, I think that it was – and that was really just borne out by the passion and creativity of the team here that loved LEGO bricks and kind of each had their own ideas for what was the kind of archetypal perfect example of LEGO models, and when you start to piece all that together, it just makes for a really fun and diverse world to explore where as you're driving around it, you're seeing different things all the time. And

because it's LEGO bricks and it's playful and it's vibrant, it's colorful, it just puts a smile on your face.

Ethan Vincent

Jared said creating that play space required meshing real world elements and LEGO bricks.

Jared Bals

If you look closely, the world is brick-built. But if you really look at the asphalt and the dirt tracks of it, that's what we kind of, you know, it's kind of off-the-cuff, we just say, "Hey, that's your art, you do what you got to do to make this feel good and work good," right? For a lack of a better term, "Do what you got to do to make the game fun." We will bring this look and feel around the edges in the coating on this. And you can drive on that and you have to fake certain things, but the LEGO elements still have to be pretty rigid and they have to still be on system, they still have to be 90 degrees. But if you really look at the roads, and you look at those kinds of surfaces, those are organic, and those aren't actually built out of LEGO elements. And that's how you can kind of get around some of this kind of feeling of the game feeling good, as opposed to where our brand brings the look and feel. Because as a representative of LEGO games, I'm not going to come into this developer, who is best in class, and tell them how to make the game. I'm only going to talk with them and say, "Well, this is what we care about from a brand standpoint and how you treat our brand. What you need to get there, what can we do to address these such as, oh, yeah, we're going to have to break the axles, we're going to have to clear out the wheelwell so you can turn the wheels and everything, and we'll get sign-off on that and we'll do what it takes to make that work, as long as you don't break the LEGO brick aesthetic." That was the whole point of being paired up with the Playground games and the Horizon brand is that, oh, we're going to be able to get somewhere. We're going to be able to just blow through all these LEGO brick-built elements. And that to me was extremely compelling and extremely fun. And if you look closely, the LEGO elements are never broken. They're just broken apart within the system. There's no cracks, there's no breakings, no melting. So, sure, you're kind of losing some clutch values there if you were to blow through a, you know, a stone wall, as you do a lot in the expansion. But again, that's the whole point of where we'll let things slide from a clutch standpoint if it's fun. It looks solid, it looks very well built, but if you're going to drive through that thing at 150 miles an hour, of course, bricks are going to go flying everywhere, but you don't break the bricks, you're just breaking the build apart. So, if it helps the game to be fun, we're going to do we got to do to get there, as long as it doesn't come at the cost of the LEGO brick aesthetic.

Brian Crecente

There was also discussion about whether to allow the real cars in the LEGO world or the LEGO cars in the real world.

Jared Bals

I am pretty sure it was Playground Games coming back to us saying, "But what if it was on scale, was just a bigger world, but it was still following exactly the LEGO brand framework?" At first, you're scratching your chin, and it's like, "Why would we do that? That's just – it's not LEGO elements, there's something else." But once you say to us that, "But the game will be better because then all the players' progression, all the vehicles they've unlocked will get to be able to play in that world." And you're not saying when you go into a LEGO brick experience, you can only play with the LEGO elements, you can only play the LEGO vehicles and that's it. It's very restrictive in a game about exploration, creative play, and all this progress you put into it, sort of like, "OK, yes, it will make a better game if we can find a way to marry these two, as opposed to keeping them separate." So, once you get that in your head and you start looking at it through that lens, you start to see things differently and it starts to dictate conversations from a design one-on-one standpoint.

Ethan Vincent

The team also had to settle on which vehicles to bring into the game. Craig said everything he was hoping would get into the DLC made it.

Craig Callum

I think it was very difficult because, again, these cars are kind of goofy-looking really when you compare them to the real car because we want the minifigure to be there and, you know, he's a funny looking chap next to a normal human being. So the cars themselves, I think it's the ones that really worked the best and ended up in the – I think it could have been really fun if there was a little bit more customizable content so that you could actually change a lot more of the cars. It could have been fun. But there's a priority really, I guess, you know, with the DLC as well, there's only so much you can really add to that. So, I think we got in there. I think the Senna, I mean having the Senna there is that – I mean, and that became kind of the poster car really for it. But having the McLaren Senna was a fantastic car to have on there.

(Sound of LEGO Speed Champions' McLaren Senna racing in game)

Craig Callum

And then of course we did the Porsche 911 Turbo (racing sounds), and then that had its own set as well, of course. So, having that as a tie-in worked brilliantly. I mean, that was really great because that was, I mean, for me, that was the car I grew up wanting to have was a 911 Turbo by Porsche, and to have that then visible in a game as a toy I designed was really fun.

Chapter 5: Launch – 29:54

Brian Crecente

The team at Playground Games ended up working six to seven months creating the DLC, the most the team has ever spent on downloadable content for one of its games. Mike said it took so long because of the grand ambitions the team had for the add-on.

(Forza Horizon 4 LEGO Speed Champions – Expansion Launch Trailer Excerpt
Everything is Awesome song from The LEGO Movie plays inside the Forza 4 Horizon LEGO Speed Champions Traler)

Brian Crecente

It launched on June 13th, 2019, bringing with it those wonderful playscapes, a LEGO Master Builder's house, its own radio station, and five cars, including the 1967 Mini Cooper S Rally, and cars from those original three manufacturers that launched LEGO Speed Champions. Mike said that going into the launch the team at Playground Games knew that while there was crossover between the fans of LEGO bricks and fans of Forza, this particular experience might not be for everyone.

Mike Brown

I think it's very hard to make something that everybody will love. And so, I think you have to kind of acknowledge that with whatever it is that you're making. But we really do try to make stuff for everyone. You might not be a huge fan of building LEGO sets, but I still think there was something in this expansion for, hopefully, for everyone. For example, it was the very first time we had an actual racetrack in any of our game or expansions. It was an official-looking, really nicely designed race track with multiple layouts, which is something that our hardcore community have been asking for for a long time, and I know that they were really excited about that. We built the campaign that, whilst inspired by the feelings of playing with LEGO bricks, the brick challenges and collecting those up to build your your LEGO brick house, there's still a lot in there to enjoy even if you're not a fan of LEGO bricks, and I think a lot of the gameplay that you have to do in the expansion is really, really pure Forza Horizon gameplay in a LEGO brick wrapper. So I think we knew that, even if you might be a really cool Horizon fan, there was going to be something here that you'd find joy in, because I don't think this is what people were necessarily expecting from the expansion. I think there was definitely more positive surprise than negative. And we do approach this – and whenever you're doing an announce there is that element of, there's going to be some people who were expecting something else. And it's kind of the job of the announce, of the trailer, of people like myself who will go and be a spokesperson for it, to let those people know that there is something there for them. You know, we strive to make the the racing games for everyone, the driving games for everyone, and I think we get really close to achieving that. And sometimes it just takes a little bit of talking to those people to let them know that we do care about them. We do know what they're after. We

know that you wanted these awesome cars and you wanted this race circuit in the world, and you wanted these cool new challenges that will challenge you to navigate that world at super high speed, and so on. And I think there is just the job of people, like myself, to get the message out there that even if you're not a fan of LEGO bricks, there's going to be something here for you to enjoy.

(Tune break)

Ethan Vincent

Craig, whose idea sparked the concept that became the DLC, was no longer working on the project when it launched, so it came as a nice surprise.

Craig Callum

I was so excited to see it. And I remember reaching out to my marketing manager, Myra, and sort of begging for a code so that I can download it and get it as soon as possible because I just wanted to experience it, because it had been such a big part of my development work with the LEGO Speed Champions line to then kind of walk away from it before it finished, was really tough. And so then, yeah, when it was released, I was just super excited. I just wanted to get hold of it and play with it. And I think I spent like a full day just in front of the TV just playing and getting through the levels and doing all the challenges that needed to be done.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – 33:37

Craig Callum

I mean, I, yeah, I'm totally biased, but it is fantastic because, I think, because I had such a hard time visualizing it at the start, and I mean that's, as a designer, I pride myself on being able to kind of pitch how things might look or could be and coming up with these crazy concepts and ideas, but actually, the Forza Horizon 4 and LEGO Speed Champions was something that, when it was put to me, was so far out there that I just kind of couldn't picture it. To see it, yeah, to develop it and see it, I'm so proud. I mean it is such a fantastic gameplay. It's the right level of being able to smash everything up, and still the cars kind of they hold their own. They don't look out of place there. They're great. I think it adds a new element to that game as well. I think is something that really worked well.

Brian Crecente

While Forza Horizon 4 came out in 2018 and the LEGO Speed Champions' expansion for that game hit in 2019, it remained the most recent Forza game for three years until just this month when Forza Horizon 5 hit. With the release of the latest, greatest Forza title, I asked Mike if he feels that Forza Horizon 4 and this LEGO DLC is now retired.

Mike Brown

Um, that isn't how we look at it actually. I think with Game Pass then all the titles can stay alive alongside newer titles. People still own that previous game. They still have access to it through Game Pass. All of that DLC is still really, really good. I think there's probably a time where when you bought a new game you might have traded in your old one or given it somebody else. That isn't really a thing in the world of Game Pass, and so, we anticipate that people will probably jump back to Horizon 4. Honestly, I kind of hope they do. I think Horizon 4 is a great game and I don't think there's any reason why we need to have to put it to bed and never talk about it again. Obviously, today, you should definitely go check out Horizon 5, but I don't think that closes the door on Horizon 4, and I think that is something that we're seeing with titles and Game Pass. It really was a bit of a dream experience for me. As I say, I've been a fan of LEGO bricks my whole life. And I kind of always wanted to make a LEGO game, but I've been working on Forza for a very long time. I was working on other racing games before that. It's just never been a thing that has really aligned up in my career, and this was just a great opportunity to, yeah, to work on a Forza title, to work with the IP. It was a real dream project for me.

(Postscript music)

Bits N' Bricks: Credits – 36:16

Ethan Vincent

Bits N' Bricks is made possible by LEGO Games. Your hosts are Brian Crecente and Ethan Vincent. Producing by Dave Tach. Our executive producer is Ronny Scherer. Creative direction and editing by Ethan Vincent. Research and writing by Brian Crecente. Art direction by Nannan Li. Graphics and animations by Manuel Lindinger and Andreas Holzinger. Mixing and sound design by Dan Carlisle. Disclaimer voice is Ben Unguren. Opening's child voice is Milo Vincent. Music by Peter Priemer, foundermusic.com, and excerpts from Forza Horizon 4, LEGO Speed Champions. We'd like to thank our participants: Jared Bals, Mike Brown, and Craig Callum. We'd also like to thank the entire LEGO Games' team. For questions and comments write us at bitsnbricks@LEGO.com. That's bits, the letter N, then bricks@LEGO.com. And as always, stay tuned for more episodes of Bits N' Bricks.

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