Doggone It!™

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An ATARI 2600 Homebrew Game That is...

... Doggone Good!

In *Doggone It!* you play as Hank, a worker for a package delivery service. Your goal is simple: take packages from the truck at the top of the screen and deliver them to the recipients at the bottom of the screen. But of course it's never that easy–Hank has a chronic fear of dogs, and every person on his route is a dog owner. Hank has to deliver all of the packages, one at a time, to each owner before the delivery truck drives off the screen, while avoiding the dogs that are running amok. If Hank touches a dog, Hank freezes in his tracks out of fear, losing time. If he's carrying a package, he drops it, and has to go back to the truck for a replacement. If the truck reaches the end of the screen with packages still in it, the game is over.

Doggone It! is a fun, simple game that reminds me of early third-party games for the 2600. It fits right in with some of the quirky, creative concepts from those early developers, whether it was working as a fast food cook, retrieving luggage at an airport, or trying to protect your garden from gophers. Or trying to protect your garden from rabbits. It's weird how that became a mini-genre.

Doggone It! has three unique locations Hank has to deliver to, each with their own layout and challenges: a residential street, a hospital, and a manufacturing business. The number of dogs vary in each location, as does the behavior of the package recipients. As the game progresses,the speed of the dogs increases, as does the number of packages Hank has to deliver.

Where *Doggone It!* separates itself from the pack is in its use of power-ups. If Hank can pet a cat that wanders across a culvert at the top of the screen, he gets a random power-up which lets him pause the truck, deliver twice as many packages at once, run at super-speed, or gain invulnerability from the dogs. When and how to use these power-ups becomes an important strategy in the game, and adds some nice depth to the gameplay. For example: if you time it right, you can deliver four packages with a single power-up!

The dogs don't seem to have any set pattern, and they don't actively chase Hank. They just run faster as the game progresses. The dogs can also pass through objects, where Hank has to go around them. It would've been nice to see the dogs also having to go around the objects, as it could have made for some really interesting strategies where Hank could manipulate the dogs by forcing them to go around a tree or other obstacle.

The game starts out very slow, which gives you some time to develop some strategies. After a few rounds, the difficulty jumps to the point where surviving almost becomes random luck because the dogs move so fast. A more gradual ramp up in difficulty would've been welcomed. Keeping the first few rounds easy does make the game more accessible to beginners, and I can see this as a great game for kids–the graphics are charming and crisp, and the animations (especially of the Culvert Kitty) are nicely done.

The programmer, Andrew Pauley, has packed a lot into only 4K. Multiple levels, power-ups, a title screen, a game ending, and even some music. This is a really impressive effort, especially considering this is his first 2600 title. I look forward to his next game!

Doggone It! is doggone good, and gets a 3.5/5.

⭐⭐⭐⭐½☆