Sim vs real racing: what transfers from screen to track

14/10/2026 From the sim to endurance racing: three-time iRacing world champion Joshua Rogers and Le Mans winner Nick Tandy compare virtual and real-world motorsport, revealing what carries over from one to the other and where the differences begin.

Australian Joshua Rogers is a three-time iRacing world champion, who races for both the virtual Porsche Coanda Esports Racing team and for Team Parker Racing in the real-life Porsche Carwow Sprint Challenge GB, in the UK. In 2020, the 26-year-old raced alongside Britain's Nick Tandy in the virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans, where they won the GTE class alongside Turkey's Ayhancan Güven and Norway's Tommy Østgaard.

Tandy, 41, is a racing driver who's spent his racing career in top-flight sportscar and endurance racing, with wins including the 2015 24 Hours of Le Mans, piloting the Porsche 919 Hybrid. Today, both drivers are at Silverstone, and, shortly after Rogers has taken pole in qualifying in the Porsche Sprint Challenge, they reflect on how the two racing worlds collide.

More sim racers could soon follow Rogers from screen to track through the Porsche Esports Supercup's talent shoot-out. Up to five competitors will be selected for assessment in Cologne, with up to two progressing to an on-track test and the eventual winner receiving Porsche Motorsport support to compete in a Porsche one-make series in 2027.

Can sim racers succeed on track?

There's no guarantee, say Rogers and Tandy – but someone with raw talent and dedication is more likely to do well in both. "The best simulation drivers will always be good in a car," says Tandy. "The main reason you get into sim racing is because you love the sport. And if you have an absolute, single-minded dedication to being the fastest, you can apply it to sim or real racing. Comparing my experience and abilities in sim racing versus Josh's when we started virtual racing together, he was at a completely different level. And it would take me years and years and years to become an elite in that different sport."

Rogers says there are big differences between playing an arcade game – like Forza Motorsport – with a controller versus using a steering wheel and pedals, and a bigger shift again to using iRacing, the main platform for the world's sim-racing series. The biggest leap is, unsurprisingly, the one from virtual racing to real-life racing. "When I first jumped in the car, everything I felt from the sim translated, but I was dealing with new senses that I had to adapt to and tie to something and I had to figure out how to use them to my benefit," he explains. "I think it's easier to add a sense than taking one away. Going from a real car to a sim, you're stripping senses away. Sounds and tactile feelings that you normally use to 'feel' the car, are gone."

For Tandy, it was a sensory rewire. "I've always felt tyre degradation through how the car feels, but in the sim I had to listen instead. Josh taught me a lot about that."

But Tandy's real-world skills transferred into virtual racing, too. "I learnt a lot from him about traffic management," says Rogers. "When we did the 24 Hours of Le Mans together, we were in the GTE class, and he knew how to control the faster LMP cars – like positioning the car to let them get by, but without compromising our own line and race."

Training the body to help the mind

For Rogers, physical fitness matters in both disciplines, chiefly because it helps him manage mental fatigue – especially in the heat of the car. He spends four to six hours in the sim, five days a week, plus races, often following a session with an outdoor run. Rest, he stresses, is just as important.

"Competing at the highest level in the sim prepares you in ways that ordinary racing games can't," he says. "Staying calm under pressure leaves more mental capacity to monitor everything else, from the cars around me to changing weather conditions." This ability to remain relatively calm doesn't

necessarily mean a slow pulse, though: his heart rate can reach 140–160 bpm in the sim and often climbs to 180 in the car.

“Sim racing can be more stressful”

For all the potential risk in real-life racing, both drivers say they experience more pressure in sim racing. “Driving real-world cars is the most comfortable thing in my life. It's my natural environment,” says Tandy, who raced in the 2020 virtual 24 Hours of Le Mans when the real-life race was postponed. “Whereas sim racing was totally out of my comfort zone. Even though I was at a reasonable level doing it, it always put me under so much more pressure. I would sweat more sitting in an air-conditioned room, not moving, than I ever would driving around in a 60-degree-Celsius racing car.”

It's the same for Rogers. “I find it easier here,” he says, looking around at Silverstone, “because you're in the car and you've got so many more things to focus on. You're in your own little environment. There's more at stake, so you naturally focus more. When I'm in the zone, I don't feel the pressure. When you're racing in a sim at an event, you'll have a crowd, people talking, photographers taking photos – it can all break your focus.”

Winning feels the same – celebrating doesn't

Tandy says winning a race is as full of joy in both the sim and real world. “The amount of concentration is the same. And then, if you get to the end and you win, it's the same kind of peak of euphoria.” But the period following the win can be strange, without real-life's shared celebrations, and the post-race wind-down that's as much process as it is a shared ritual.

“If you win a race at night in sim racing, you feel the euphoria – but then you say goodbye, and that's it. You switch off your screen and everyone else is asleep,” says Tandy. When Rogers enjoyed his first real-life win, he got to experience the opposite: “Without the team behind me, with their preparation and support, I wouldn't be able to compete at all,” he says. “They give you the confidence to go out there and push it the hardest. It was a massive thing to have the team right there and be able to share the celebration. It's as much their victory as it is mine.”

How Rogers is combining sim and real-life racing

Rogers uses his sim setup for preparing for real-life races, but to a point: “My approach isn't trying to go the fastest on the sim in the lead-up to a real-life race – I don't want to learn muscle memory that only works for sim racing – but trying to do what I can and drive the car in a way that I know the actual car will want to be driven. I'll try a bunch of stuff – like different lines – that I wouldn't normally be able to try for real. So I might try 15 variations of one corner in the sim, and five might be viable, and then I can bring the final three to the track. So it's a different approach to normal sim racing.”

Later that day, Rogers would win all three of his races at Silverstone. Just two weeks later, a victory in the final round of the 2026 Porsche Carwow Sprint Challenge GB saw him narrowly miss out on the championship title by just five points. An impressive end to a debut season – and this time, his team was right there to share the celebrations.

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Title: Nick Tandy, Le Mans winner, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: Nick Tandy

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Title: Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 RS Clubsport, Porsche Carwow Sprint Challenge GB, Silverstone, 2026, Porsche AG
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