



FIREPOWER (1980)

Pinball sound wiz Eugene Jarvis described Firepower as “inspired by the classic Bally electromechanical multi-ball Fireball, the razzle-dazzle electronic theatrics of Flash, and the all-consuming game-play mania of Space Invaders”. Phew. It was a breakthrough game for Williams, one of the oldest manufacturers in the industry. The company had experienced a considerable pinball lull in the late '70s, but Firepower's theme was spot on. It rode the wave of Space Invaders and is credited with bringing a lot of players back to pinball. Steve Ritchie led the design and the artwork was overseen by Constantino Mitchell, the man behind Flash and Gorgar. Eugene directed the sound, making Firepower the second pin with speech. Over 17,000 machines were produced and all of them sold. **Playability:** Firepower was considered a real skill tester and featured two notable firsts: it was the first solid-state pinball with multi-ball and the first with lane change (which shifted lights on the playfield). Multi-ball was a very big deal; from the mid 1980s few machines were made without it. The combination of unique features upped the adrenaline to create what Steve and co described as “in your face!” pinball.

Machine value: \$2500-3000. **Trivia:** Firepower's speech was actually the voice of the designer, Steve Ritchie. He and Eugene wrote a robotic script that could say things such as ‘fire’, ‘power’, ‘won’, ‘enemy destroyed’ and ‘mission accomplished’. This might sound mind-numbingly simple to our modern ears, but Eugene was working with 128 bytes of RAM and made nearly every sound himself. It's darn impressive. •