

Transport Tycoon Deluxe

Microprose

Reviewed by: Tim Chown

Game category: Commercial

Game type: Simulation/strategy

Price: #22.99 (UK CD)

Required: 486/25Mhz or better, 4Mb RAM or more, SVGA VESA-compatible graphics capable of 640x480 with 256 colours, CD drive, 4Mb HD space + 200Kb per save file, Microsoft-compatible mouse and driver (v8.2 min). Can run under Windows95.

Control: Mouse, keyboard.

Sound: Most cards supported, including SoundBlaster family, GUS, PAS, Roland LAPC, General Midi, Sound Canvas.

Reviewed version : CD release (December 1995).

Reviewed version on: 486 DX4/100, 8Mb RAM, Panasonic 563CD, SB16.

Reviewer recommends: 486 DX2/66 or better, 8Mb RAM.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles ... and boats too.

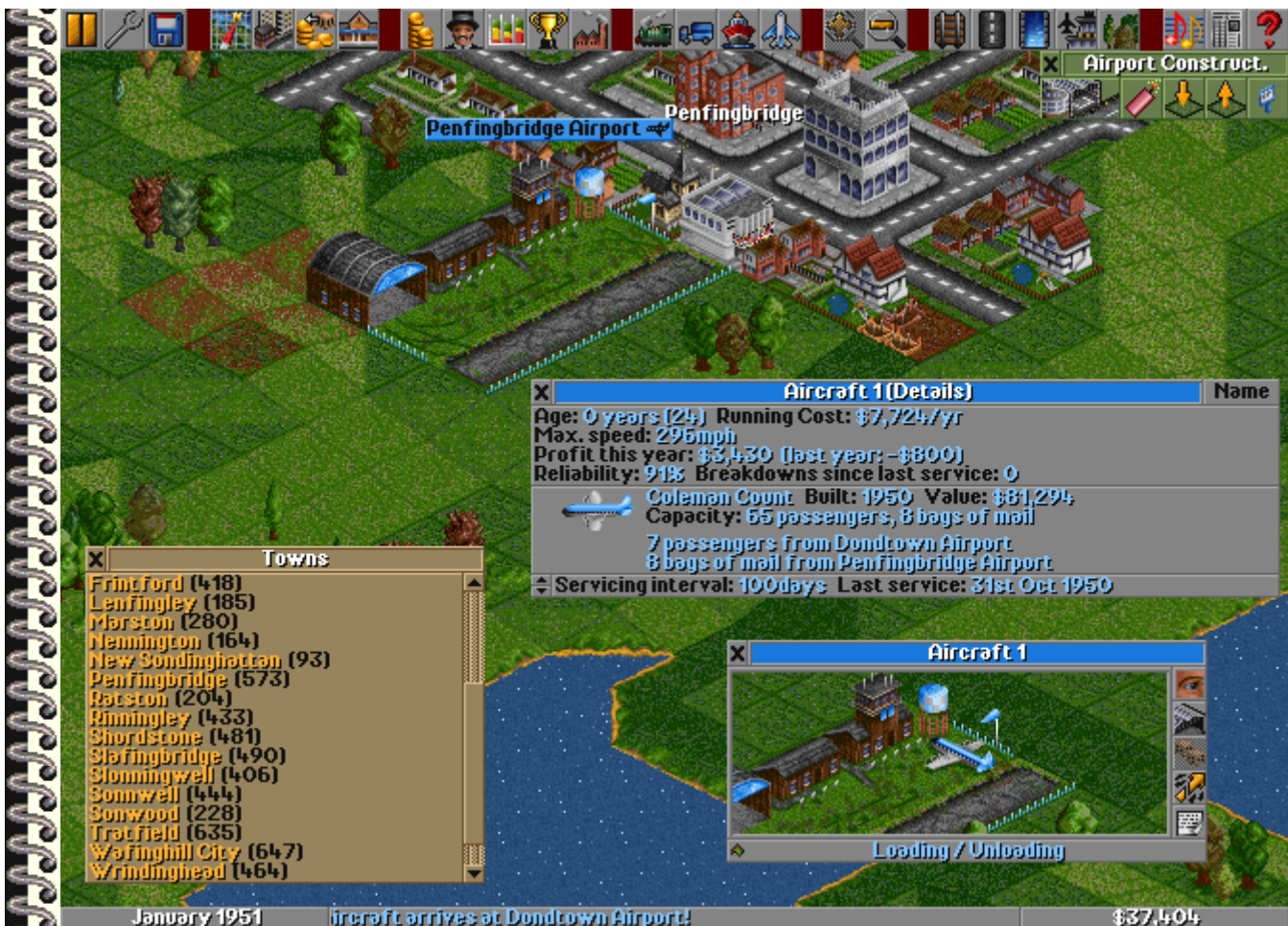
Transport Tycoon Deluxe (TTD) appears to be one of the most overlooked games of 1995. As a strategy game it lies buried under a sea of (deserved) hype and praise about Command and Conquer and Warcraft 2, yet for the more sedate game player TTD is a well-presented, challenging and addictive offering which deserves wider credit. Microprose tout the game by saying "it will satisfy the megalomaniac in everyone", but TTD is a far more subtle and relaxed game than the normal bloodthirsty global conquest genre. Here you can be master of your world without a drop of blood being spilt.



An overhead view of a tiny fraction of a game world

Naturally enough, TTD has a passing resemblance to Sid Meier's original Railroad Tycoon, and from the rail point of view a lot of the functionality is similar. You start off in 1950 with a bank loan and a quest to build the best transport network in the (very big) local area. The concept is simple - try to run goods from where they're supplied to where they're in demand, make a profit, race to get lucrative subsidies/monopolies and attempt to drive your opponents to bankruptcy. However, this isn't another Sid Meier game - while still under the Microprose banner TTD is largely the effort of Chris Sawyer, and the end result is a far more sophisticated product.

The scope of the game has been expanded to rail, sea, road and air. Graphics are detailed SVGA, and all the menus and options are viewable and tweakable through a very slick window-based system (and you don't need Windows to run it). There's a selection of catchy/annoying (delete as appropriate) background music, and suitable, yet infrequent, sound effects. I did have trouble with the sound - my SB16 would only work set as an old SB, else I got lockups. But other than that it's pretty silky and free of bugs.



TTD is not just trains - planes are efficient but expensive

TTD runs on a smaller scale than Railroad Tycoon - it's like playing with a train (or road/plane/boat) set in a SimCity 2000 world. The game by default starts you off in 1950, and you play through "real-time" (one month is a few minutes) into the 21st century. There is no time skip feature, so a full game will take quite a while, but it's quite surprising how fast time does go by as there's always something to do. TTD is an engrossing and detailed game.

What's new from the original Transport Tycoon?

I haven't played the original TT game so I can't make any authoritative comment, but the manual gives a list of the main changes, including:

- Three new world environments (sub-arctic, sub-tropical, toyland)
- A world (scenario) editor - so you can simulate your own real world area
- Heliports and "maglev" trains and tracks
- You can buy and sell shares in opposing companies
- Multiplayer (apparently just 2-player) network play
- More stations and vehicles
- Improved communication of information
- You can customise vehicle and town names
- You can refit aircraft and ships to carry different cargo types

The manual also claims that the opposing AI is now a bit smarter all round, laying better transport networks and recognising where to invest and where to close unprofitable lines more efficiently than before. At the harder difficulty settings, the computer opponent is not that easy to beat.

How does it look and feel?



You can drag and pin info windows around the screen at will

It looks great on a 15" screen. Graphic detail is very good, and while the animations are sometimes a little jerky the overall effect is very pleasing to the eye. Naturally, the more that's happening on the screen the more jerky it gets (and the slower the game runs) but on my DX4/100 it's rare for it to be that noticeable. The problem is that the more the game progresses, the slower it gets as there's more vehicles (and action) on screen and more being simulated at once. On a DX2/66 things do start to chug as you get into the 21st century, and if you do by chance get close to the game's 250-station limit you'll probably appreciate a bit of Pentium power.

Scrolling around the map is easy, just hold down the right mouse button and drag. You can scroll around the overview map the same way (at full size the overview map is just one quarter of the whole map). The town menu lets you access towns quickly, and vehicle rosters let you select and locate any vehicle quickly. The roster also shows profit summaries for each vehicle, useful for choosing which lines to expand and which to cut.

The game is driven by a neat window-based system. You have a menu bar along the top of the screen with pull-down options to open various new windows. Each can be dragged around the screen and left open at will, or closed by hitting the 'X' in the window corner. Clicking on buildings, town names, trucks, stations, etc will each bring up the right window for that object, from which you can quickly get the info or action you need. Usually, clicking on names or icons in subwindows will also bring up just what you expect and need (eg. on the subsidies menu clicking on a town name will recentre the screen on that town).

As TTD is a bit of a "simulator" you can just sit back and watch your vehicles/trains/whatever. Click on a vehicle on the main screen and you get a mini-window which tracks the vehicle as it moves. Thus you can watch 3 or 4 trucks, trains, etc in operation, or keep an eye on stock levels in a station, without having to keep moving your main map view around - very useful. You can also "tune" your game to use different currencies, or to make your trucks drive on either side of the road (though we all know driving on the left is the proper way...)

There are four different worlds to play in. There's the standard temperate world with normal landscape and the usual industries, then there's a mountainous sub-arctic world where tracks and roads will be winding up steep hills and coal and ores proliferate. Third is the one I'm currently enjoying, the desert/rainforest sub-tropical world where water and wood are at a premium and diamonds abound. The last option is the "silly" toyland world where you can ship sweets and candy around, and the graphics are suitably whacky.

Playing God



The world editor, easy to use and fun in its own right

If you don't like the random scenarios that can be generated within any of these worlds, you can make your own scenarios with the map editor which is fairly simple to use, and good fun to tinker with in its own right. The editor is built in to the main game, and at first glance appears similar to the game itself, and most of the creation options work as they do in the game.

The world editor lets you change/create a world with whatever features you like (given they're available in the game itself!) so you can for example spend a while making a scenario which reflects the area around where you live, placing towns, roads, industries, etc in appropriate places and naming them all accordingly. You can't place pre-existing railways or stations, but you can place anything that would appear in a random game. The editor lets you add random towns and land if you want to, but if you're recreating a real world you'll probably not use that ability.

Using the editor you can play with smaller maps (by having lots of water) or you can try having three or four islands to encourage the use of boats and planes (boats in a normal random game tend to be limited to the edges of the map). You can also alter the start date forward from 1950 up to 1975. The game itself always runs to 2050 before announcing the "winner" - you can play beyond that date but there's no new tech to pick up. I haven't tried it yet, but I fancy trying a world which has a central island in a "lake" with

resources on it, and "normal" land around the map borders where the resources are needed - should make winning custom on the island an interesting prospect.

Trains without the Anoraks



Prototype offers let you get a step ahead of the opposition

As time goes by, new technologies become available. You can't direct research, but sometimes you get exclusive rights to test new trains or vehicles ahead of the opposition (probably moreso when your company is rated the best). Obviously to stay competitive you have to judge when to sell off old running stock and when to buy new; not as easy a task as it sounds. Older vehicles lose value, break down more often, and aren't as efficient, and customers will give better ratings to companies with newer vehicles. I'm not a train spotter, so can't comment on the realism of the transport vehicles (and trains/planes/boats) offered, but they sound and appear about right, certainly from a gameplay perspective.

TTD is abstracted a little - by this I mean while time passes vehicles will travel only a fraction of the distance they would in reality. This again is a gameplay issue - you don't want to see your train whizzing back and forth 5 times a second between stations; instead the distances travelled "represent" your overall service. A (displayed) train may take a month to run a long route and back, where in reality it might be a few hours, but this "abstraction" is good for the feel of the game as well as the general aesthetics.

Thus while TTD is in spirit a "simulation" it's not so detailed as, say, A-Train in it's scheduling of trains. The developers have struck a fine balance to pitch some degree of realism against gameplay and have just about got it right. While it's not strictly realistic, it feels right, and thus it's fun to play, much the same way as SimCity is. It's a fairly safe bet that if you enjoy SimCity, you'll love TTD.

How does it play?

There are some handy tutorials to get you into the basics of the game. These show you how to build simple road and rail networks (you just sit back and watch) and are easy to follow. The beauty of TTD is the way you can pretty much do as little or as much as you like at any time - funds permitting of course. You get three basic difficulty levels, or you can customise your own options (like starting cash, or entry dates for opposing companies) to your choosing.



One end station in my train network - note the linked vehicle depot

Setting up transport routes is very easy. You'll need a minimum of two loading bays, terminals or stations, which you build and link with road/railway as needed, and also a depot in which you buy and service your transport vehicle. For a train, once the stations, depot and track are all in place, you buy the train, add the carriages you want (different goods need different carriages - don't try to put your passengers in copper ore wagons!) then select the route window where you set the stations to travel to. Then set the beast rolling. If you want to change the consist, just recall the train to the depot, sell the unwanted carriages and slap on the new ones.

Setting up a few initial routes is easy. The trick comes in building your empire - invest poorly at the start and you won't make much (or any) profit, which means you can't expand. If you can't expand you're dead. Choose wise routes and you'll get the cash trickling in - you may only make a couple of thousand pounds per vehicle per year, but it all adds up. Graphs show you the notional income for goods, dependent on time in transit and distance hauled. You have to choose whether to run a few trucks of mail between towns or set up a long-distance passenger rail link, or perhaps a quick air freight service.

The choice is yours, each has its merits, but if the demand isn't there you could get your fingers burnt. You can see easily supply and demand at all the towns and stations, and ratings which the towns give you. These ratings vary on all sorts of things - eg. demolishing towns to expand platforms doesn't go down well with the council officials. If two companies are providing a service to one supplier, the supplier will give his custom to the better service (ie. plop his goods on your station for transit rather than your rival's - but leave it there too long and you'll soon go out of favour).

Detail is quite good - there's enough to keep you engrossed but not so much as to swamp you. I have very few gripes with the game engine; one is that the road/rail construction menus sometimes force you to click in the correct corner of a square to get just the effect you want, but after a while you get used to it. Another is that trains can't change consist at stations, so you have to run back and forth with the same carriages; again no big problem, but perhaps it would have been neat to have.

Out of Tiny Acorns grow Big Oak Trees ... sometimes



Boats are very slow, but cargo rates are high

Expanding your empire also means rethinking your transport network. You can "link" stations (share goods) if they're adjacent, so you can transport goods to their final destination via more than one transport type, or perhaps pass goods from one train onto another train for final delivery. Doing this will improve your local rating for that station as it will be providing more services (as long as they're efficient services!). You can build new railway stations with longer and more platforms, if the town council lets you. You can use signals and dual passing tracks to let multiple trains run over shared single railways. The manual is lacking in showing you how to use different rail signal types but trial and error works in the end.

You also have to react and adapt. You should react to offers of subsidies that come up - these can give double income (for example) if you provide the requested service first, eg. coal from coal mine A to power station B. Likewise you need to adapt as existing towns and industries shrink or grow, as their output and demands will alter accordingly. Random disasters can also cause minor headaches (though having trucks napalmed by passing UFO's isn't an everyday occurrence!). And while all that's happening, you need to replace any aging vehicles to reduce breakdown rates and to keep your customers happy.

Intelligent Opposition?

The computer AI is OK. It'll set up sensible routes, and challenge your services where it thinks it might

win. It'll close down unprofitable lines, and generally behave sensibly. It's quite hard on the difficult settings, and the computer does seem to have one or two "advantages" over you - one is that it doesn't seem to pay for removing track while it's "thinking" of a route, and also I'm not sure that it pays fully for landscaping. However these advantages don't affect gameplay, and while some of the routes the computer lays are a bit "eccentric" it does act quite wisely and does well at scuppering your plans by competing vigourously for trade.

While battling to stay ahead of the computer opposition is one way to judge yourself the number one tycoon, just managing your own transport network is a challenge in its own right. If you are lucky enough to be beating the opposition you can play against yourself by trying for the elusive perfect rating of 1000, or for a personal cash record by game end in the year 2050. If you want a sneaky opponent, set some ground rules and dial up a friend over a modem or network. As a full game is long you may want to agree some winning conditions - I've not tried multiplayer yet but over a one hour or short evening's game it could be quite entertaining. It appears that only two human players can play in one game though.

There are no cheats per se, but you can play a dirty game by using a few tricks. One is to lay track across opponent's roads with an aim to ram and destroy their trucks ... another is to "reserve" land with track to stop anyone else using it. But like cheats in other games, you don't have to use them and the game is probably more challenging if you don't. However, if you need that bit of help ...

Looking Elsewhere...

As TTD is something of a cross between Railroad Tycoon, A-Train and SimCity, each might form an alternative in its own right, yet TTD would be my choice to get out of the four. While you don't get to place buildings as freely, you can fund new industries (at a cost) and encourage growth via the services you provide. Other "trading" games might in essence be similar (eg. Machiavelli the Prince or even Colonisation) but TTD has a certain appeal which the others don't have. Maybe I'm being a little "dazzled" by the presentation of TTD, but I think underneath the glitz is a very worthwhile game.

It's debatable whether TTD is worth the price if you have the original Transport Tycoon game, but if you didn't buy the TT World Editor you can buy TTD with its builtin editor for little more. There's also a rumour that (in the US at least) TT owners can get TTD at a budget price from Microprose.

Overall

Transport Tycoon Deluxe is not going to win Game of the Year (my vote goes to C&C;), but if violent arcade-style strategy games are not your cup of tea, and you'd rather have more time to reflect on decisions rather than worry about 24 Orca Helicopters blowing away your HQ in 10 seconds flat, then TTD might be just the thing for you. I'd not recommend it for younger children (say 12 or under) as the menus and concepts might be rather too much for them to grasp, but given some of the kids I know, I wouldn't make that a firm rule!

TTD almost an "executive toy" rather than a game; it's relaxing to play yet addictive enough to keep you playing for long stints. There's always something happening to make you have "just another 5 minutes" rather than quitting, which is the hallmark of a good game. How much you'd want to play a whole game a second time around is a debatable issue, but you could say the same of SimCity or any similar product, and the world editor should boost longevity a little. Overall, it's good value at a relatively cheap price and well worth a look, especially if you're a fan of the SimCity genre.