

Virtual Pool from Interplay

Is your basement too small to fit a pool table? Is your existing pool table so full of scratches it looks like cats have been using it for a scratching post? Is your local pool hall populated by drunken, obnoxious slobs? Do you live in a dormitory whose pool room is populated by drunken, obnoxious slobs? Is your only experience with pool limited to a painting hanging above your bar depicting a quartet of mangy dogs shooting a round? If you answered "yes" to any of the above, then maybe you should try "Virtual Pool," a new CD-ROM pool simulator by Celeris.

This is definitely the BEST pool simulator that I have ever played. Of course, it's also the ONLY pool simulator that I've ever played, but that's beside the point. Virtual Pool has tons of great features, and the game play is so outstanding that it would be a very tough act to follow.

Have you ever wondered about the history and origins of pool? Just take a look at the highly informative and extremely entertaining "Animated History Of Pool." Trying to decide what kind of pool game you might want to take up? "Games Of Pool" gives a detailed explanation of the objectives and techniques for several different variations of pool. Too lazy to read through the manual? The "Virtual Pool Tutorial" walks you through the fundamentals of playing the simulator. Need a few pointers on the game, or want to see some trick shots? Pool champ and expert "Machine Gun" Lou Butera appears in an extensive series of short full motion video movies, covering everything from the very basics of the game, to some of the most outrageous trick shots you'll ever see. Also, for those of you with modems or network connections, Virtual Pool supports both of those modes of play. Beat your friend with a virtual stick from the comfort of your own computer terminal.

Now, as far as the actual playing of Virtual Pool goes, it is great. Game interface and control are absolutely superb. The pool table can be viewed from ANY angle by simply moving the mouse. This enables you to take many different looks in trying to line up your shot. VP also allows you to zoom in and out from the table and alter the center of rotation for the view. Quite simply, you can look at the table any way you want.

Control of the cue stick is outstanding. The aiming and shooting of the cue are done entirely with the mouse, and a key or two on the keyboard. By having the cue respond directly to mouse movement, it allows for a great amount of fine control. This method of control also is great when taking the actual shots. A slow movement of the mouse will result in a soft tap of the cue ball; a fast motion with the mouse will shoot the stick forward and smack the cue ball hard. Also, the angle of the butt of the cue is adjustable, and putting "English," an off-center hit, on the cue ball is simple. This allows for the execution of all those fancy trick shots.

The graphics in Virtual Pool are pretty simple. However, how much detail do you really need in a bunch of two-color balls? There is an appropriate pool hall type background, with a similar amount of detail, but most of your attention will be on the pool table, so you'll barely notice it. Compare your local "real" pool table to the table in Virtual Pool and you'll probably see they look remarkably similar.

Sound effects in Virtual Pool really add to the atmosphere of the game. The clacks of the balls hitting each other are very authentic. My dorm room is across the hall from the pool room, so I am intimately familiar with the sound of a game of pool. However, I must note that the sounds are a lot more annoying and a lot louder at 2 in the morning than they are in the game. :) Oh, there is a little bit of music in the game, but I suggest that it be turned down or drowned out. Trust me on this.

So, all in all, Virtual Pool is a solid simulator and a lot of fun to play. Whether you're a novice who's never picked up a cue stick, or a regular pro who wants to try out something new, Virtual Pool offers something for everyone.

Jeff Godemann

Rating		System Requirements	Recommended
graphics	92	386/33 or better	486dx2/66
sound	89	4meg ram	sound blaster comp sound card
interface	96	2 MB hard drive	2x CD-rom
fun factor	95	CD-Rom	SVGA
		mouse	
overall	93	VGA video card	