eviews: The Bottom Shelf

The Bottom Shelf is where the older Mac games are usually found at your local software retailer. The games reviewed in this section have been released for some time now but are still selling, so you should get the Inside (Mac Games) scoop.

Mini-Review: Club Racquetball

By Bart G. Farkas

Type:
Arcade
Publisher:
Virgin Games
Pros: Crisp, clear color and background graphics; decent sound
Cons:
Crashes periodically, no network play, controls awkward, not PowerBook compatible
Requires: 2 MB RAM, B/W or color

t's been a while since the Mac has had a Racquetball game grace its screen. Smash Hit Racquetball was the last such game of note, and (like so many old games) it is no longer compatible with contemporary Mac systems. Virgin Games has filled the gap with Club Racquetball, a brand new simulation that attempts to capture the realism and fun of competing in tournament Racquetball. Unfortunately, Club won't run on a PowerBook 100 even though it is advertised as being compatible with black and white machines. Deep in the instructions there was a note saying that this game was not tested on any of the PowerBooks and they couldn't be sure that it would work on them. This will be a disappointment to those that enjoy this kind of game at 35,000 feet.

The background graphics are pleasing to the eye and give a realistic three dimensional atmosphere to the court. The players have a slightly 'chunkier' appearance, but are animated smoothly. Sound is adequate and of the digitized variety, with clear 'racquet hitting ball' sounds and voices announcing fouls on serves etc. There are also a slew of options that enable you to tweak the many aspects of the game, from ball-shadowing, to animation speed, to defining the game scoring parameters. You can choose from a tournament or practice game, but unfortunately there are only four opponents for you to

face in tournament play. Club Racquetball follows standard rules and has a display box that comments on the outcome of the last shot, be it a serve that fell short or a volley that had two bounces.

Controls are awkward and take awhile to get used to, especially for right-handed folk. Player movement is controlled through the keyboard, and the aiming of the shot with the mouse. The power of the shot is also controlled by the keyboard, which makes it very difficult to change the power of your shot while still trying to maneuver your player into position for the next shot.   If you are right-handed this means that you will most likely be moving your player (and adjusting shot-power) with your left hand on the keyboard, while trying to aim and time your shot with your right hand on the mouse. This control set is workable with a lot of practice, but will be frustrating for anyone that is not a dexterity 'wizard.' Fortunately there are some options that make game play easier for the beginner such as 'automatic hit,' which enables you to just concentrate on moving your player into position so the computer can shoot for you.

There was one other annoying aspect of Club Racquetball. It has a tendency to crash in the middle of games, and is generally unstable in System 7.1 when moving between programs in the Finder.   Also, when Club crashes, it takes the whole system with it; there is no command-key combination to bail you out. You just hang. It means a full restart every time.

Club Racquetball is a good idea; however, to be a good game, it needs to be cleansed of its resident bugs, and it could also use a change of interface and control set. As it is now, it impressive at first glance, but playing it is just too much of a challenge with the difficult controls and unpredictable crashes.