eview: Putt Putt Joins the Parade

by Robert Lewis

Type: Children's Games
Publisher: Humongous Entertainment (206/485-1212)
Retail Price: $49.95 (disk),$49.95 (CD-ROM)
Street Price: $39.95 (disk), $39.95 (CD-ROM)
Requires: 256 Color Monitor, 2MB of free RAM, System 6.07 or higher, Hard Drive   with at least 10 megs of free space for the disk based version and a CD-ROM Reader for the CD version.
Protection: None

n the last 10 years, computers have proliferated their way into our homes.   They do so many diverse functions for us and yet there is one area that tends to get neglected in many ways: educational software.   Although there is a great wealth of software out there, a great deal of it is not used to its fullest potential.   In many (not all) school systems, teachers are getting multimedia systems without any idea of how they can integrate them into their curriculum, let alone what software is available.   The same problem can also be found on the home front as well.   Picking the right program for your child can be a real task.

I have been a teacher for 13 years and find that there are three important features to look for when choosing the right educational software.   The first thing to do is to make sure it enhances your child's learning environment by teaching, reinforcing and developing his/her learning skills.   The next factor can either break or make even the best of programs.   Poor graphics and sounds can ruin even the best of educational software.   The only way educational software can be effective is if it is used on a regular basis.   The graphics and sounds are basically the bait to make sure your kid wants to come back and "play" more. The final part of this triad is the interface or how well it interacts with your son or daughter. The way the program interacts should be seamless and require very little help in learning. A child should be able to jump right in without having to spend much time reading manuals. It should have the ability to guide your child as he or she learns how to control their new environment.

Now that IMG has expanded to CD, we hope in the months to come to help guide you through this ocean of software.   When possible, many of my reviews will be "kid tested" by my three year old son, Alex.   He may be young but he knows what he likes!   So, come with

me as we step into my classroom.

The Story so Far. It is a bright and beautiful day in Cartown as all residents prepare for the first Cartown Pet Parade.   When Putt Putt awakens that day he is all excited about the parade but he also has a small problem that will have to be solved before the parade begins. It seems that Putt Putt will need to find a balloon, a pet, and get a car wash in order to be in the parade.   Regrettably, Putt Putt does not have any of these in his glove compartment and it will be up to you to help young Putt Putt find these item so that he will be able to join the parade.

utt Putt Joins the Parade by Humongous Entertainment is a delightful interactive role fantasy game for ages 3-8.   It is also written in such a way that it could be used as a way to introduce preschoolers to the world of computers.   All commands are easily carried out by just a click of a mouse.   This automatically helps develop the hand/eye coordination of your child.   As with any regular role fantasy game, Putt Putt also helps to stimulate problem solving and critical thinking skills which are so needed in order to succeed and yet sadly lacking in too many students.   Other abilities developed within the over 30 different locations in Putt Putt's world are color recognition, basic addition and directional skills. The beauty of all this, is that Putt Putt does it invisibly by disguising itself as a game.

As I wrote earlier, it is up to you to help Putt Putt find a balloon, a pet, and get a car wash. To do so you will have to figure out a way to make some money because poor Putt Putt has only one coin to his name.   You might want to make a visit to your friend Smokey the Fire Engine and get some advice from him.   Getting there is just as easy as it is fun.   The game window can be broken into two main sections.   At the bottom of the screen is Putt Putt's dashboard where you can use his horn, radio, glove compartment, and most important, Putt Putt's fuel gauge.   Just make sure you keep Putt Putt's tank full or he may run out of pep before the parade ever begins.

The rest of the screen is devoted to the graphics window where most of your interactions with Putt Putt take place. There is also a lot more going on in this window than with other role fantasy games.   You can actually play around within each scene you explore.   There are hundreds of "point and click hot spots" that come alive with full digital sounds and animation that run very smoothly even on my Mac IIsi. This helps to develop the concept of self-exploration and discovery.

The graphics are well done, and can be adjusted in size and resolution to help improve overall performance of the game.   The colors and renderings are very bright and promote a very friendly environment.   The digitized sounds, speech and ambient music fully compliment the graphics in quality and adjustability   I found my son really getting caught up with the story as I played it with him.   I found it could hold his attention for over 90 minutes which I think is pretty good for a 3-year-old.   As we continue to   play Putt Putt,   I hope to use it as a way to get him to learn how to work with the mouse on his own.

dds and Ends. Since any skills taught to a child need a follow up reinforcement, Humongous Entertainment included a 48-page Juniors Adventurer's educational activity book.   The book is well thought out where the simplest activities are at the front and increase in difficulty as you progress deeper into the book.   They also sell additional copies of the activity books for $4 a piece and offer the game on both disk and CD.   It seems that Humongous Entertainment really has a handle on what it takes to put out an excellent learning program.

A Weak Link? In almost every aspect Putt Putt Joins the Parade is a well thought out and a lot of fun to play except that you cannot save your game.   Like most role fantasy games, there is no way to complete Putt Putt in one sitting and yet Humongous Entertainment, who thought of all other parameters, left out the ability to save as you go.

Last Words. Overall, Putt Putt Joins the Parade does exactly what it is meant to do: teach very important skills while allowing the child to have a great deal of fun.   It satisfies all three

prerequisites I stated in the beginning of this article and does it with style.   So drive on in to Cartown and help Putt Putt join the parade.

Pros
• Easy to learn Interface (mouse driven)
• Great graphics and digitized sounds.
• All parameters of game play can be adjusted
• Objectives are well carried out
• Great way to introduce children to computers
• Follow up activity book included

Cons
• No save command