

review: **GopherGolf**

by Patrick Boie

Type: Miniature Golf Simulation

Author: Bob Mancarella, 96 Highland Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801

Shareware Fee: \$15

Requires: Mac Plus or later, 1400k free RAM (for color, less for b&w), System 6.0.5 or later, 32-bit clean, System 7 friendly

Protection: Registration code required to play more than three holes or save games

inks, schminks. Despite two great golf simulations that were released this summer (Links Pro Mac and PGA Tour II), this is the golf game I have been waiting for — GopherGolf, a miniature golf game.

The controls are simple enough for just about anyone. You aim your putter by rotating it around the ball left and right with the cursor keys. Hold down the space bar to start your swing, and let it go to hit the ball. No matter how hard you swing, you can't knock to ball outside the hole you are on, so with a really powerful swing the ball ricochets around the course like crazy. All your favorite obstacles are here to get in your way: hills and valleys, windmills, drawbridge castles, loop-de-loop pipes, water hazards, underground tubes, and more.

The craziest obstacle is the gopher. He (or she, it's hard to tell) pops up at random intervals, looks around, and disappears back down the hole he just made right in the path of your shot. If you hit him with the ball while he's still up, you get a stroke subtracted from your score. If you hit the gopher hole, however, a penalty stroke is added. The longer you take to sink the ball, the more the course gets littered with gopher holes.

Gopher Graphics. The graphics are simple, but detailed. You can play in either black and white or up to 256 colors, and it will technically run on just about any Mac. The gopher is well drawn, and will look very familiar to anyone who has seen the movie "Caddyshack." Up to four people can play, each player gets a different colored ball just like the real thing. A "leader board" (a.k.a. "low score" list) is saved for each separate course, even the ones you make yourself.

he course editor (included when you pay your shareware fee) is what really makes this game shine. I know I can't be the only one who ever wanted to design a miniature golf course, and you can put just about everything you want in here. There are lots of tools at your disposal for placing walls and angles in the course, and the walls all snap to grid so that they line up properly the first time. You can place decorative bushes, walkways and flowers around your course to brighten up the space you didn't use, or you can fill the whole screen with one big ridiculous course if you like.

Unlike the wall pieces, the rest of the tools don't snap to the grid and can be placed exactly where you want. Lining up the tunnels and buildings takes a bit of patience, but you can turn the grid-lines on and off to help you place the pieces correctly. You can even edit various features of many of the tools, such as the slope of each hill piece, and the exit velocity and angle of the ball when it leaves specific tubes. Each hole you make defaults to a par three, but you can change it if you are feeling friendly (or cruel...).

Although the gopher is the real star of the show, there is a lot more here. The sound effects are great as the ball zooms around the course, rolling through pipes and bouncing off of things. Just about every aspect of the course is customizable, and if you don't feel up to making your own courses, the game comes with five different ones, designed to play on different sized screens from 9" up to 14" (even PowerBook owners are not left out). You can play by yourself if you like, but this game definitely at its best when playing against other people. Unfortunately, there are no computer-controlled "mini-golf pros" to compete against, but I don't really miss them.

Glitches. GopherGolf does have a few minor problems, but all of them are in the course

editor. My biggest complaint is that you can't test the game play of a hole from within the editor; you have to save the course and open it from GopherGolf itself (a separate application). This is a real pain because when you are designing the big, Rube Goldberg-esque finale for hole 18, because you have to play holes 1 through 17 to try out your new hole. There also needs to be more hill pieces (at least four more, in fact) so that any situation can be built.

also found two bugs of sorts. When building a hole, you can layer the pieces by moving them in front of and behind each other, but some pieces refused to go behind others, and some insisted on being in the front-most layer. You can clone pieces to quickly create a large section of wall or hill, but one of the pieces, the exit hole of the underground pipe, when cloned, leaves two exits for one entrance, and the original exit becomes part of the scenery and can't be removed. When I tried to play the hole, the course file got corrupted and I had to start over. None of these complaints are major, however, and all seem simple enough to fix in a future release.

Although the instructions say the game will run on any Mac from the Plus on up, when I tried it on an SE it slowed down tremendously, making it virtually unplayable. The black and white graphics are also rather confusing, especially the hills. On a IIsi, however, the game runs great.

our! Even with minor bugs in the course editor, I can't stress enough how great this game is when friends or family are over. There aren't that many multi-player games for the Mac that don't require a network, and since it's miniature golf, it appeals to all ages and there's no violence (if you don't count hitting a Gopher with the golf ball. . .).

A demo version of GopherGolf 1.1.1 is available at all of the popular on-line services (and on this CD-ROM, see below). The demo only allows you to play the first three holes of any course, and you can't save any of your courses until you register, but it does let you get the feel for the game and the editor. GopherGolf is highly recommended fun for all ages.

Pros

- Great multi-player game
- Good graphics and sound effects
- Detailed custom course editor — lots of replay potential

Cons

- Minor bugs in the course editor
- Registration required to play a full game or save your own courses.