

PONY EXPRESS

A game by **Bruno Faidutti** and **Antoine Bauza**
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8+



45-60'



3-5

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PONY EXPRESS

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From 1860 to 1861, the Pony Express was the only fast mail service crossing the North American continent from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The brave and sometimes crazy riders rushed to deliver their mail in less than 10 days – but then things started to change when the telegraph arrived on the scene. Suddenly, riders were going all out to be faster than the wind and reach their goal before the new "electric" mail!

You've got your horse, your trusty gun and a brand new hat on your head – but above all you've got a pack of letters that need to reach Sacramento before all the other riders in the Pony Express!



RULES OF PLAY



OBJECT OF THE GAME:

The players are wild riders with the Pony Express, racing from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California, where the winner will be the first rider to deliver his mail after having survived all of the traps, tricks and dangers of the Wild West!

COMPONENTS:

- 5 player cards, one per player corresponding to his meeple's color
- 5 poker dice, with sides A, K, Q, J, 10, 9
- 20 Item cards
- One gunfight token
- One dice shaker
- One game board
- 30 gold nuggets
- 5 "rider" meeples, one per player
- 3 Indian meeples
- This rulebook

SETTING UP THE GAME:

Place the game board on the table. Each player chooses a rider and places it on space #1 by St. Joseph. **1** then takes the corresponding card and places it face up in front of him **2** as a reminder of his rider's color and a place to put his gold nuggets. **3**

Give each player **3 gold nuggets** (\$3), then place the remaining gold next to the game board to form the bank. **4**

Each player rolls the five dice, and the one who rolls the best poker hand plays first. If players tie for the best hand, ties are broken as follows: The dice are ranked A-K-Q-J-10-9 from high to low, which means, for example, a full house with three Ks beats one with three Qs. If the three dice match, you'd then compare the pair. *(This tie-breaking rule applies to every dice roll during the game that involves multiple players, such as during poker games).* In an exact tie, the tied players reroll. Play then continues clockwise.

Shuffle the Item cards, then deal **two** to each player, with players keeping one card and discarding the other. **5**

Shuffle the discarded cards into the deck, then place this deck next to the game board. **6**

Place the 3 Indian meeples on the 3 red areas under Sacramento. **7**

Place the gunfight token on side of the board waiting to be used (see "Gunfight or poker game") **8**

A GAME TURN:

1- Receive charity?

If the active player starts his turn with no gold, he receives **1 gold** from the bank.

2- Roll the dice

The active player rolls the five dice in the shaker and places it upside-down on the table. He then discretely lifts it to look at the dice rolled, being careful not to show them to the other players.



Charity for the penniless...

3- Spend gold to reroll (optional)

The active player can pay **1 gold** to reroll some of the dice.

He can either:

- remove some dice from the shaker, revealing them to the other players without changing them, then reroll the other dice in the shaker,

or

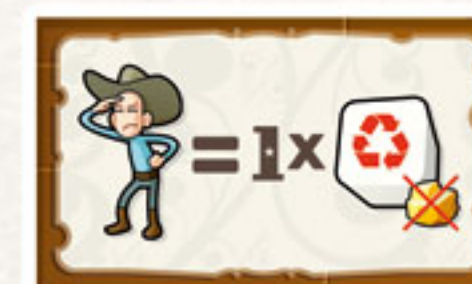
- remove some dice from the shaker and reroll all or a part of them by hand outside of the shaker, keeping the other dice hidden.

After each roll, the player may rearrange the hidden and visible dice as he wishes (i.e. placing one or more visible dice under the shaker and/or removing one or more dice from the shaker and revealing them) as long as he doesn't change their values.

The player must keep at least one die when he rerolls the dice, which means he can never reroll all five dice together.

The player can repeat this process as long as he has gold to pay, moving dice in or out of the shaker and rerolling under it or outside of it.

Exception #1:
If the active player is alone in last place, he can reroll once for free, but must pay normally for any further rerolls.



Last player gets a free reroll

Exception #2:
Once a player enters the desert, which starts on space #25, the price for rerolling dice is **2 gold** instead of 1.



The desert starts in space 25

Exception #3:
Once a player arrives in Sacramento (space #33, on the mailbox bearing one bullet), he doesn't roll the dice for movement; instead he moves clockwise one mailbox each turn, from the first mailbox to the second, then from the second to the third (see "Last space: Sacramento and mail delivery").

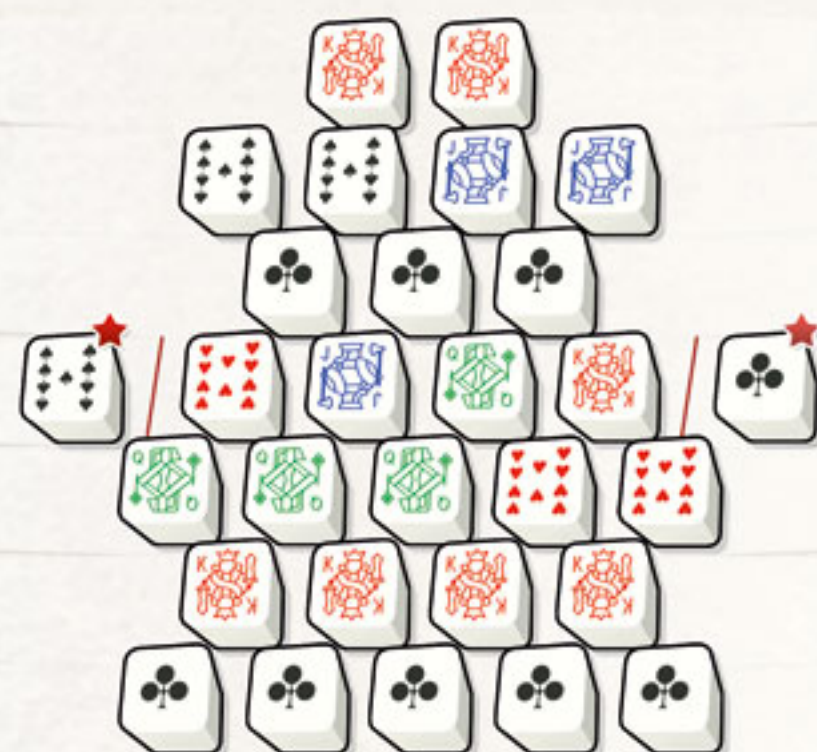
Example:

Ted secretly rolls all five dice. After peeking at them, he decides to keep two Jacks hidden under the shaker, pay 1 gold and reroll the remaining dice openly. He rolls one more Jack - excellent! Deciding to reroll once more, he keeps the new Jack visible, pays one more gold, then rerolls the two dice under the shaker (first moving the pair of Jacks from under the shaker, thus revealing them). He rolls a Q and a 9. The other players see the three Jacks visible but don't know if he has a three, a four or a five of kind, or may be a full house. Might be a good time to claim a full house...

4 - Stake your claim

The active player announces a poker hand, claiming that this is what he rolled on the dice. This hand determines the number of spaces that the player might move his rider, as indicated on the table below. The player must claim to have at least a pair, although he can claim to have a stronger or weaker hand than what he actually rolled.

Claimed hand	Movement
PAIR	1 SPACE
TWO PAIRS	2 SPACES
THREE OF A KIND	3 SPACES
STRAIGHT	4 SPACES
FULL HOUSE	5 SPACES
FOUR OF A KIND	6 SPACES
FIVE OF A KIND	7 SPACES



Note : a Straight might be composed of 9+10+J+Q+K or 10+J+Q+K+A

The player doesn't move his rider at this time, but must wait until the next phase.

5 - Call the bluff?

The active player has claimed to hold a certain poker hand, but he might be bluffing, either higher or lower.

A rider on the same space as the active player (and not in prison) can choose to call his bluff or not; if no such player exists, the player who is closest to the active player on the track (and not in prison) gets the chance to do so. If two or more riders are on the same space as the active player or at the same distance from him, the first of them to call out has priority, and no one else can choose whether to call the bluff.

Players in prison can never call a bluff, and their riders are ignored when determining who can call a bluff. If all other players are in prison, the active player can claim any hand since no one can call the bluff.



Ted (brown) and Bill (white) can call Harry's (green) bluff.

6 - Reveal the dice and move

• If the active player is not accused of bluffing

He moves his rider forward exactly as many spaces as indicated on the table on the board, based on the hand he claimed. After moving, gunfights and special effects of the space he landed on, if any, take effect. He doesn't reveal the poker hand that he rolled.

• If the active player is accused of bluffing
He lifts the shaker and reveals all the dice, then:

• If he was bluffing:

The player who called the bluff can, if he wants, move his rider forward a number of spaces equal to the poker hand that was claimed. He can forfeit this move if he so wishes. Ignore the special effect of the space he lands on, if any. The active player's rider doesn't move.

• If he wasn't bluffing:

The player who called the bluff is sent to prison (see below).

The active player moves his rider forward a number of spaces equal to the hand that he rolled and claimed. Gunfight and special effects of the space, if any, are applied after movement.

Example of the roll, reroll and bluff sequences:

Bill secretly rolls the dice and gets two pairs: K+K+10+10+J. His goal is to move three spaces forward, so he needs a three of a kind to succeed. He pays 1 gold (as he's not the very last in the race) to reroll the dice. He removes the two Kings from the shaker and secretly rerolls the three other dice, getting A+J+9. Thus, he now has only one pair of Kings.

Despite this bad reroll, he puts on a satisfied attitude and announces "Three of a kind!"

Ted, who is only one space behind him, thinks Bill is bluffing but decides he doesn't want to risk going to prison. He announces, with a gloomy look, that he believes the claim. Bill smiles, moving three spaces forward and passing the dice without revealing his roll.

GUNFIGHT OR POKER GAME:

If the active player's rider moves to a space where there is already one and only one other rider, there is a gunfight duel. If two or more other riders are on the space, they hold a poker game.

Exception: The first five spaces on the track are in St. Joseph, the Pony Express HQ. Two or more riders can stand on these spaces peacefully (☺) with no gunfight or poker game taking place.



St. Joseph is a peaceful town

• Gunfight:

Place the gunfight marker on the space where the two riders stand. 1 Each player then takes his rider and places it on one of the "duel" spaces in the opposite corners of the board, 2 with the player who just moved to the space deciding where each rider will stand. Each duelist takes one die in hand.



Rick trying to avoid innocents while shooting at Sammy.

Starting with the player who just moved to the space, each duelist takes turns rolling his die like a marble, starting from behind the line in front of his rider, trying to touch the opponent's rider. 3 This duel continues until one of the players hits his opponent's rider or until each player has fired three times.

The losing player gives **half his gold**, rounded up, to the winner*.

If there is no winner, nothing special happens.

Place the two riders back on the board, then remove the gunfight token from that space.

Special case: If during the gunfight, a die hits a rider that is not taking part in the duel, 4 the player who fired it is arrested by the sheriff, loses the duel, and is sent to prison (see below).

* Special case: If the losing player has no gold, he is sent to prison and the bank pays 1 gold to the winner.

• Poker game:

If two or more other riders are on the space, these players hold a poker game instead of a gunfight. The players in the poker game each roll the five dice openly only once and note the results. Once all of them have rolled, the player with the single highest roll gets **2 gold** from each opponent*. If two or more players have the same high roll, they reroll the dice until only one highest roll stands.

* *Special case: If a player has no gold, the bank pays for him and he is sent to prison.*

ACTION SPACES

When the active player's rider lands on an action space (those with a colored dot), the effect of this space is carried out – but only after any duel or poker game on this space has been resolved and only if the active player has not been sent to prison.



Railway station:

The player can pay gold equal to the price indicated on the space to move his rider to the next railway station. He can move only one station forward, never more. The last railway station (space #22) is the end of the line.

Note: Since gunfights happen before special effects, there can be a gunfight before taking the train, but there can't be a gunfight in the railway station that a rider moves to by using this action.



Indians:

Place the three Indian meeples on the three red spots in the corner of the board. ①



Rick trying to hit the Indians

The active player takes one die and rolls it from behind the line in the opposite corner, ② trying to knock over as many Indians as possible. He receives **1 gold** from the bank for each Indian he knocks down, ③ then moves his rider backward as many spaces as there are Indians still standing, ④

Special case: If the active player hits another player's rider on the board, he's arrested and sent to prison; he earns no gold and doesn't move backward.



Gold Mine:

The player rolls all five dice openly and only once, then takes a number of gold from the bank equal to the movement value of the poker hand he just rolled.



Saloon:

The player must ask the other players if they want a drink, and if so, go fetch the drinks from the nearest fridge. The player then rolls all five dice openly and only once, and pays gold to the bank equal to the movement value of the poker hand he just rolled. If the player doesn't have enough gold, he pays all he has and is sent to prison.



Relay station:

The player draws two Item cards, keeping one and placing the other one face-down on the bottom of the draw pile.

General rule about gunfights, poker games and action spaces:

Gunfights, poker games and action spaces are triggered only when the active player's rider moves forward due to normal dice movement. This means there is no gunfight in the destination station when a player moves forward by train. There is also no gunfight or effect when a player moves his rider forward after calling a bluff, or when a player moves backward due to Indians.

PRISON:

When a player is sent to prison, set his rider on its side next to the space that it occupies.

This player will spend his next turn in prison without moving unless he pays **3 gold** to the bank or manages to escape.

On his next turn, the player can pay **3 gold** and play normally from the beginning of the turn, even receiving charity if he now has no gold.

If he doesn't pay, he rolls the dice only once. If he rolls two pairs or better, the following effect applies. (If he rolls less than two pairs, nothing happens).



Sammy (blue) is in prison

TWO PAIRS

THREE OF A KIND

STRAIGHT

FULL HOUSE

FOUR OF A KIND

FIVE OF A KIND



1 GOLD

1 CARD

ESCAPE

ESCAPE + 1 GOLD

ESCAPE + 1 CARD

ESCAPE + 1 GOLD + 1 CARD

If the player **escapes from prison**, he receives charity if he has no gold, then rolls the dice again for movement as normal. If the player **doesn't escape**, he places his rider upright on its space; he will play normally on his next turn.

ITEM CARDS:

Each player starts the game with one Item card, choosing one of the two he is initially dealt.

A player earns an extra Item card (again keeping one of the two drawn) when he lands on a Relay Station space.

Item cards have various effects and must be played at the right time, depending on the card.

Remove Item cards from the game after they are played.

Once the Item card deck is exhausted, no more cards are drawn when landing on a Relay Station space.

LAST SPACE: SACRAMENTO AND MAIL DELIVERY

The last space (# 33), Sacramento, doesn't have to be reached by exact count.

As soon as the first player reaches Sacramento, he places his rider on the first mailbox. On his next turn, if no other player has reached Sacramento, he moves to the second mailbox. On his following turn, if no player has reached Sacramento, he moves to the third mailbox and immediately wins the game (see "Victory: two ways to win").



Delivering mail in Sacramento

VICTORY: TWO WAYS TO WIN

1 - Jackrabbit: "Catch me if you can, you coyotes!"

If a player reaches Sacramento long before the other players, he will have plenty of time to deliver his letters to the three mailboxes (see "Last space: Sacramento and mail delivery").

Once he reaches the third mailbox, he's instantly renowned as the Fastest Rider of the West and wins the race!

2 - Last man standing: "There's not enough space for the two of us – stranger!"

If a second player reaches Sacramento before the first player's rider has reached the third and final mailbox, there is one final duel between these two players to determine the winner.

The player whose rider arrived first shoots first. If his rider is already on the second mailbox, he shoots twice before the other player can shoot back. This duel is fought to the death, meaning that players fire in turn until one of them is hit or arrested by the sheriff for shooting an "innocent" rider; that player loses the game.

During this final duel, each player may play any useful Item cards he owns, as usual.

The winner of the "last man standing" duel must be the fastest and bravest rider of the Pony Express, so he wins the race!