

Der Ausreisser

reviewed by Pevans

Yes, yet another German game:- *Der Ausreisser* means 'The Outrider' and is the title of a fun card game on a cycle racing theme from F. X. Schmid. This is a re-release of an old game whose designer has disappeared into the mists of time (the game was *Das Favorit* in its previous incarnation).

The game comes in a chunky 16 cm x 113 cm, 4 cm deep box and consists of a large pack of cards (99 of 'em), 2 sets of counters (blue and red) and a 'yellow jersey' marker. The bulk of the cards show a speed between 39 and 50 (7 cards of each speed). The objective is to finish a series of 'races' with the least number of penalties. A race is played in rounds, with each player in turn playing a card from his/her hand of 6 (and immediately taking one from the pack to maintain his/her hand at 6 cards). The current race leader (indicated by the 'yellow jersey' marker) plays first and this speed sets the pace. To remain 'in the pack' of cyclists following the leader, each of the others must play a card that is no more than 2 points less than the leader. Playing a card that is at least 3 points lower than the leader's gives that player penalties equal to the difference in their cards (the counters indicate current penalties, red being 1 and blue 5). Once a player has penalties, he/she is no longer 'in the pack' and has to match the leader's card or lose penalties. Penalties are removed by playing a card that is greater than the leader's speed and removing penalties equal to the difference. If you play a card higher than the leader's when you don't have any penalties, then you take over the lead and the coveted 'yellow jersey' and anybody who hasn't yet played a card this round must meet the new pace.

An example: Mike, who has the yellow jersey, plays a 47; Sonia plays a 45 which means she stays with the pace; Dave can only manage a 44, which gives him 3 (47-44) penalties; Alan plays a 50, but already has 2 penalties – he removes the penalties, but doesn't take the lead; Anne plays a 48 and takes the yellow jersey; with the pace now at 48 Martin's 45 loses him 3 penalties. Anne plays first in the next round.

The race ends when the last card is taken from the pack. Whoever has the yellow jersey at this point has won the race. Penalties are now recorded (as negative numbers), with the race winner getting +2 points. The pack is shuffled and another race played, all players starting even (i.e. with no penalties in front of them). After an agreed number of races the game ends and the person with the highest score (most likely the least negative!) wins.

Three special cards (5 of each in the pack of cards) add complexity to the game. Spurt can be played in conjunction with an ordinary speed card and adds 2 to your speed that round. *Gegenwind* (Headwind) is played immediately it's picked up and reduces your speed by 2 that round (I recommend using the optional rule allowing

Gegenwind to be played on any other player, with a maximum of 1 *Gegenwind* against any one person at any time). *Steigung* (Incline) is played at the start of a round and changes the rules slightly for that round. There is no pack: everybody has to equal the leader's score or take penalties. And there is no overtaking, so no-one else can take the lead. As always, players take a card from the pack whenever they play one of these, keeping their hand at 6 cards.

Let me re-work the example above with some additional cards: Mike plays *Steigung* and then a 47; Sonia's 45 now gives her 2 penalties; Dave plays his 44 (still 3 penalties) and a *Gegenwind* on Alan; Alan's 50-2 lets him remove 1 penalty; Anne plays a 48, but can't overtake; Martin plays a Spurt (+2) with his 45, enabling him to maintain the pace. Mike retains the yellow jersey.

This example also shows the usefulness of *Steigung* cards, especially for the current leader: enabling him/her to maintain the lead, which can be crucial in the last few rounds of a race; and making it easier to leave other racers behind by playing a high value card (how about 50 and a Spurt?!). Tactics in the game are pretty simple, playing your lowest card that will keep you with the pack is the basic one. The decisions you have to make are when to take over the lead (assuming you have the cards to do so) and what you do once you've got it – usually play a succession of high cards to try and leave the others behind. The closing rounds of the race are crucial as everyone jockeys to gain the yellow jersey for the finish or to remove as many penalties as they can, so it's worth keeping a bit in reserve for then (if you can!).

As a card-based game, however, *Der Ausreisser* is heavily dependent on luck: if you haven't got the cards, there's nothing you can do. *Steigung*, Spurt and *Gegenwind* (with the optional rule) cards give players more tactical options (though it's generally the leader who has the most influence on the race) and mean that there is some skill involved. Playing a number of races helps to even out the effect of a lucky run of cards, as well. But this is definitely not a game for those who like to calculate everybody's position and plan their moves in minute detail. It's a fun, fast card game and needs to be played in the right spirit (over a pint or two...).

Der Ausreisser is published in Germany by FX Schmid (since then merged into Ravensburger). [A new edition was published a few years ago, including an English language version as *Breakaway Rider*.] The game is officially for 2-6 players, though I'd suggest at least 3 and preferably 4, and it can stretch to 8. Three or four races should take about an hour, depending on how many are playing.

Pevans rates it 8/10 on his highly subjective scale.

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