

A Hill of Beans

Bean Trader reviewed by Pevans

I mentioned a while back that I played the prototype of this game at last year's Spiel and enjoyed it. I've now had the opportunity to play the final (not to mention English) version of the game and I'm still impressed. The German edition, published by Amigo, is called **Bohn Hansa**, which extends the pun of **Bohnanza** – Uwe Rosenberg's much-extended card game. There is actually very little in common between the two games, except for the different types of bean involved. **Bean Trader** is a board game, designed by Rosenberg, about delivering beans between the cities of the Hanseatic League (though I wasn't aware that Edinburgh was part of the League) to earn money. The player with the most cash at the end wins the game.

Bean Trader comes with a mounted board, showing a stylised map of northern Europe. Specifically, it features ten cities, linked by roads. Each city produces 2-3 different colours of bean and has a track – the 'Beanometer' – that indicates the current prices of those beans. Prices go down as beans are harvested and added to the Beanometer. They rise as beans are bought from the Beanometer. Players have a wooden horse-and-cart piece to indicate where they are. They also have a card with a summary of the rules and spaces for the (up to eight) beans in their cart. There are banknotes for the money and solid cardboard counters for the eight types (and colours) of bean used in the game.

Each player has a hand of seven cards specific to the colour they've chosen. Cards are played from your hand – strictly in the order they are held in – for



each city you move into or out of in your turn. Only two of the cards really matter. Playing the Toll card (number 3 in everybody's hand) means you have to pay 20 Thalers (the game's currency) to the bank. Playing the Supply card (a different number in each player's hand) means that a New Harvest card is drawn. According to the bean type and cities shown on the card, extra beans are placed on the board. When the eighth New Harvest card is drawn, the game finishes. Note that, as beans are added, they cover spaces on the Beanometer track in that city and reduce the cost of beans there.

The other pack of cards in the game is made up of contracts. Each shows 2-3 different colours of bean, a city and a value. Delivering the right beans to the right city earns you that amount of money. This is the core of the game: buying beans in one city, taking them somewhere else and selling them at a profit. Except that you'll have to visit at least two cities to get the right beans. Their cost will bring down your margin on the sale. And paying the Toll to transport them can make the whole deal unprofitable! So some planning is required. And there are further complexities to think about. To begin with, you start with three contracts, one of which is delivered to give you your starting capital (and decide who plays first). The other contracts go at the back of your hand. Which means that they can be played when you're moving, just like the travel cards. So, if you get it wrong, you can end up playing the contract you're trying to deliver before you get to your destination!

To explain all this, let's take a look at what you do in a turn. First off, you travel, moving your dobber down the roads you wish. You have to play one card from your hand for your starting city, finishing city and each one you pass through. And pay the Toll if you played it. Then the travel cards go back into your hand. They go at the back of your hand, Toll card first, then the Supply card (if you played either), then the rest. Which makes that Toll come round far too quickly!

Having arrived in your destination city, you can seek to trade beans with other players. If they're in a different city, they move (playing just one travel card) to the city you're in. Since this can move someone all the way across the board, it can be a huge benefit. Make sure you gain from the trading! You can also buy beans that are available in that city at the current price, if you have room in your cart. The price depends on the beanometer and will usually go up once you've bought. And you finish your turn by adding a new contract card to the back of your hand.

Before or after you move, you can deliver a contract. You discard the card and the correct beans from your board and receive the sum shown on the card. You can do this even with contracts that you've just played to move, which gives a bit of leeway. The other thing you can do – at any point – is trade in any of the standard travel cards and pay 5 Thaler to buy yourself an extra contract. Of course, getting rid of the card means that your Toll card will come round that bit faster from now on!

Once the eighth New Harvest card has been turned over, you play one more round. At the end of the game, any beans in your wagon are cashed in at a standard value. The player with the most money wins. For me, the game is reminiscent of an old FX Schmid title, **Auf Achse**. This has players trucking goods around a road map of Germany. The ability to trade between players makes **Bean Trader** a whole different bean game. It matters less what you have in your wagon than what you can trade and the whole game becomes highly interactive. I'm not sure whether this makes planning more important or less. If what I'm doing is looking for the optimum route to buy the beans I need and deliver my contract, I can plan it. If I can hop right across the board and swap the beans I have for a completely different set, then I've got a lot more things to think about. Who's going to want to join me in whichever city I'm in? Do they have beans I want? Do I have beans they want? With so many variables, I give up planning and play it by ear!

Avoiding trading is not really an option. Getting around the board only by playing cards gets expensive (all those Tolls!) – and shortens the game as Supply cards come out. The need to buy the beans for the contract either means a lot more travel or doing deals. And deals usually work out cheaper. So – as in **Bohnanza** – the key to the game is trading.

All of which means that it's a cracking little game. I say little because it feels like it finishes sooner than you're expecting. The given playing time is 90 minutes and that seems about right. Far from out-staying its welcome, though, the game leaves you wanting more. Which can't be bad!

***Bean Trader** was designed by Uwe Rosenberg and is published (in English) by Rio Grande Games and (in German, as **Bohn Hansa**) by Amigo. It is a trading board game for 3-5 players aged 12+ and takes about 90 minutes to play. The game is available in specialist shops in the UK at around £30.*

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