

LOCAL TRAIN POSTAL TRAFFIC

FIRST TRAIN TO NÜRNBERG

Beer production and commerce

The first train to Nürnberg follows the ... "Last train to Wensleydale" of the same designer, Martin Wallace at Treefrog Line (TF) 2009. We will compare the two games in the following notes but let's start immediately by noting that if you buy the "First Train" you do not need to own the other game, as it is included as a bonus in the Argentum Verlag (AV) edition 2010.

When you open the two boxes you immediately note that the maps have different dimensions: the AV version is smaller (420 x 595 mm) than the TF one (560 x 645 mm) but much better from the artistic point of view. It is a double-sided board: the "Nürnberg" map on the front and the "Wensleydale" map on the back. The latter has the same number of areas as the TF version, but it really seems to be another game, from the visual point of view. The maps are divided into areas: valleys (green), hills (brown with farming) and mountains (brown). Each area may be empty or contain a different icon (Train Station, Post office, Beer manufacturing, Cheese farm, Stone mine). Five MAJOR stations are also printed: 2 green (Nürnberg Nord and Nürnberg Süd) plus 3 red (Fürth, Zirndorf and Oberasbach) on the Nürnberg map and 2 red (Skipton and The South) plus 3 green (Harrogate, Ripon and Northallerton) on the Wensleydale map.

The different tables printed on the TF map have been canceled on the AV version, which uses two separate boards for those tables: one for the rent of the trains and one for all the other features (Turn track, Influence points cases, Influence track, Profit/Loss track). Moreover each board is again "double faced": one for 2-3 players games and one for 3-4 players games (with 3 trains less and 6 Influence points cases).

Components are the same for both games with the only difference in the diameter of the round tokens: 15 mm in the TF version and 12 mm in the AV version. This is because the different tracks have been reduced in dimension in the new map. Everything is OK but the markers for the Influence Tracks are still too large and they cannot fit well in the tracks if they are adjacent to other markers: here the best solution should have been to use "cubes" instead of discs. This is a remark that may be useful for an eventual future edition, but you may always find some colored cubes from another game, if you wish, or use one of the investment cubes. Anyway no problem to play, just a small "nuance".

Every player get a set of wooden markers (3 locomotives, 9 round tokens, 15 track links and 15 investment cubes) in one of the four colors (black, blue, yellow and violet). The box also contains: 1 tissue bag, 35 red track links, 35 green track links, 25 red passengers, 25 green passengers, 25 white landlords, 1 black turn marker, 60 yellow cubes (POST markers for the Nürnberg map or CHEESE for Wensleydale), 60 grey cubes (BEER for Nürnberg or STONE for Wensleydale) and 20 investment tokens in 4 colors (white, brown, red and green). The rules say that they should be "white" cubes but the box I bought has "grey" cubes instead. Again, nothing changes in play, just a note for the readers.

The rules of the AV version have been slightly amended but nothing really changes and thus we will refer to the new version in this review: hopefully some notes in the rules explain if something is different when playing the Wensleydale game. Note that a separate A4 sheet is provided for the SET-UP procedure (see later) that has on the reverse side a very useful rules summary: really a well done work from Argentum Verlag.

Ok, let's close the TF box definitely and put it on the book shelf: from now on we will follow the AV version and we will basically review the game for four players.

You have now to do the set-up: this is the most annoying part of the game, but it is very important to do it correctly. You put into the bag all the 120 yellow/grey cubes and you mix them thoroughly: then you draw out randomly always two cubes and put them into each area on the map with a Post/Cheese or Beer/Stone icon. If you play the Nürnberg game you will use all the cubes, otherwise a few will remain in the bag. Now you have to remove from the map all the wrong cubes, that is, the cubes that do not match the icon: yellow cubes cannot remain on the hills (those are for Beer/Stone) and grey cubes cannot stay on the valleys (those are for Post/Cheese). The cubes that remain on the map are the goods that you have to pick-up and transport to gain points.

The Passenger set-up follows: you place 4 red and 4 green passengers on the 8 stations with a colored icon and you put then the remaining 67 passengers (red-green and white) in the bag, then you pick up 2 or 3 of them at a time (the number is printed on the station icon) and fill all the stations on the map.

Finally, randomly determine the order of play

and place the round markers on the different tracks on the boards: Now we are ready to start.

The principle is simple: you have to create a track net, rent trains and transport goods and passengers to get Victory Points (VP). But you need to keep an eye on your expenses as it is very easy to make losses if you do not act carefully. Also you need to diversify in your commerce, as at the end of the game you get additional VPs for your "combos" (each "combo" is made up from 1 red and 1 green passenger plus 1 grey and 1 yellow cube). Before starting it is highly recommended to closely examine the map to locate the goods and the passengers and the possible paths to reach them via the shortest possible route,

Pietro Cremona

A highly interesting game that keeps your neurons busy, again an attractive well-made game by Martin Wallace

comparing the distances to the passenger's own color major stations. Also remember that each cube gives you 1 VP, but the grey cubes are more important for your profits and thus as the game starts you usually need to take more grey than yellow ones. Of course each game will be different (because of the random cube placement) and thus your strategy of the previous game may dramatically change in the following one: one important point for a positive evaluation of the game.

No Wallace's game will be complete without a bidding section and this one is no exception. You have eight influence boxes (numbered 1 to 8) in the smaller board: most of the influence colors are already printed on the map, but you have to add to each box ONE extra token (randomly taken from the 20 available).

The players have to bid to take control of TWO of those boxes using the Influence cubes. The bidding system is simple: you place some cubes on one box (minimum 3 influence cubes on the boxes 1-4, or 2 cubes on the boxes 5-8) and the opponent have to outbid you to take possession of this box. The out-bidden players take their cubes back and make another bid in the same or another box until all the players each control two different boxes.

This phase is probably the most important of the game: the inexperienced players often are a little confused about "which box" is better, but after a couple of games the bidding section will be very hard to play, especially when a couple of boxes will have the most needed Influence points.

In practice you "win" influence points in FOUR different tracks:

the WHITE track is the Government influence

and the player with most points will be the FIRST to build tracks on the map: so if you really need to reach a particular area you are compelled to invest in boxes with most white influence points

the BROWN track is the Train Influence and the player with most points will be the first to rent a train or to charge a good: so if you really need a particular train or if you want to be certain to collect the goods that another player may .. stole if he start before you, you need to invest in brown points.

the RED and GREEN tracks allow you to spend influence points mainly to sell your old rail lines to one of the two major companies in order to avoid great losses. So if you need to sell part of your railway network to a specific Company you need to get its color points.

Of course the "basic mix" of colors (the ones already printed on the board) will grant that every player will receive enough different points, but the boxes 5-8 must be checked carefully as they are strongly addressed to the white and brown points, and if an extra "random" white or brown token is placed here they become very important.

Every player gets 12 influence cubes per turn adding unused cubes left from the previous turn: so if you do not really need to spend

all your cubes you may keep 3 of them unused in order to arrive to the maximum of 15 cubes in the next bidding turn. This is often the only way to be certain to win the bid for a particular box when you desperately need to increase your points in a specific color. During the game always remember that white goes first in track building and brown goes first on the train operating phase.

Once you finish the bidding phase you adjust the Influence point tracks, paying attention to the order of placement because if two players have the same points the token on top will be the first to play. Many games have been won or lost because a player was able to play first (or at least before his main opponent)!!!

It is time to pass now to the "operational" phase: the first player on the white track may now build as many links as he wishes, provided that he has enough investment cubes left on his stock: links join two adjacent areas and cost 1 CUBE each (or 2 CUBES if you have to cross a border with a river). Each railway must start from a major station (RED or GREEN) and you have to pay a commission of 1 colored influence point for the first link: in the following turns you may add new links to your existing lines without paying any further commission, or you may start another

railway from the same or a different major station. Also you must pay a WHITE influence point every time that you enter an area containing a white landlord (who is immediately eliminated). It is not allowed to build a link between two areas already connected by an opponent's railway (or already converted to a major Company) but it is possible to reach the same area from different adjacent zones. It is also forbidden to build links to or through hills and mountains, so often a possible path may be blocked by rival railways and you have to select an alternative line.

When you create a railway you obviously need to know what to do with it: in game words you need to load goods to make VPs and to provide profits to your company, but you also need to move passengers to their "right" destinations (so, for example, to reach an area with two RED passengers is wrong or useless if your railway is connected to a GREEN station). You always need to check your stock of goods and passengers in order to decide if and when it is time to start another railway to make more combos: i.e. if you already have 3-4 RED passengers and 4-5 GREY goods it is better to go for GREEN passengers and YELLOW goods before expanding an old railway.

You constantly need to remember that every



link that you build will cost you ONE PROFIT point at the end of the turn. Each passenger that you transport and each yellow cube will that you pick-up will grant you 1 profit point: the grey cubes will grant 2 profit points instead. So be careful when you ask your Engineers to design a new track and advice also your Accountant to keep track of the costs and the profit balance.

Once that all the players have build their tracks and paid the cost with their investment cubes it is time to operate the trains. Unfortunately the players do not have enough wealth to "own" one or more trains, thus every turn you have to RENT trains, using the "Brown" train points and the second side board. The latter is divided in three sections: 3rd class trains that cost 1 "brown" point and may load a mix of 3 passengers/goods; 2nd class trains that cost 2 points and load up to 4, and 1st class trains that cost 3 points and may load up to 5. Each section has 4 trains with different mix: from 100% passenger to 100% goods.

The player with most brown points is the first to select a train: having a good idea of the situation on the map and giving a quick look on the number of brown point owned by all the players is very important to determine which train to buy first, as it is sometimes better to "steal" a train that could be decisive for another player or leave a train that the opponents cannot buy. Please note that you may buy only 1 train per type (1st, 2nd or 3rd class) and thus being fourth in the turn may be disastrous, especially in the first turn. Luckily, the rules help the players allowing them to exchange 3 influence points for one brown point in order to complete a train (but only if you already spent all your initial brown points).

If you already own at least one train you may start to run it loading goods or passengers: each player, in "train turn" order, is allowed

to load one item (good or passenger) and then the turn pass to the player to his left, who may perform one action (buying a train or loading one item) and so on until all players pass. To load a passenger you need to have a railway arriving or passing through the area in which he is located and that arrives at a major station of the same color (for example a GREEN passenger may be loaded if the railway arrives to one of the Nürnberg stations). To load a POST good you need to arrive or pass through a valley area containing a yellow cube. To load a BEER good you need to arrive at a station adjacent to the hill containing the grey cube (small arrows on the map help the players to understand where the beer can be loaded).

Once all the trains are fully loaded or no more passengers or good can be loaded the players calculate their VPs: in the 4 player game it is easy as you get 1 VP for each item that you loaded, while in the 2-3 players games you get 1, 2 or 3 points per item depending on the class of the train (3VP for 1st class, 2VP for 2nd and 1VP for 3rd). The players adjust their VP marker on the VP track around the map.

Now it is time to estimate how well your Company performed: each passenger and/or yellow cube gives you 1 Profit Point (PP), while each grey cube gives 2 PP. You add the PP and you subtract from the total 1 PP for each railway link of your color still on the map; then you adjust accordingly the Profit/Loss Track. These vary from -13 to +5: all players start the game with 0 PP and at the end of each turn they modify their position. The player with most PP at the turn end will be the first to play in the following turn, and the others will follow according to their position on the Profit Track: adjust the round markers on the Play order display.

Finally each player has the opportunity to save some extra expenses in future turns by

selling part of his railway to one of the two majors Companies (Red or Green): to do so you need to pay 1 Influence Point of the major Company's color for each 2 links: take your color's links out of the map and substitute them with the link of the selected major Company.

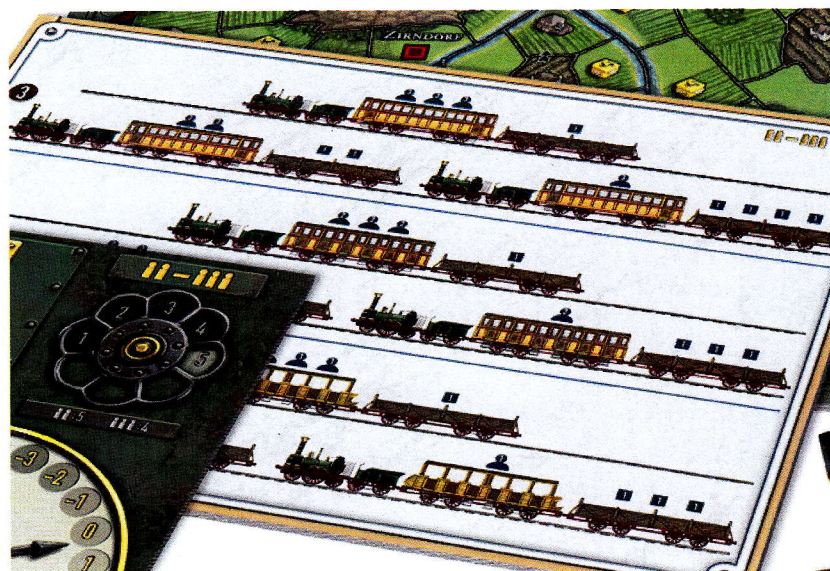
It is very important to understand "when" it is time to sell your links: usually you will do this after having loaded ALL the passengers and goods in this part of your railway (with the exclusion of the passengers of the rival major Company) in order to eliminate a "dead" section of your network. Remember that you may sell only 2 links per Influence Point of that color so you must keep an eye very well open when you bid for a particular case: it happens even too often that you cannot sell enough links because you do not have those "ever missing" influence points.

As I wrote before, the bidding phase is really the heart of the game: if you made a plan for the turn and you succeeded in getting all the necessary Influence Points you will be able to perform your project, but if you were out-bidden you will be obliged to change your plans and find a valid alternative in order to maintain a good flow of VP. Hopefully there are always alternatives because the game allows you a lot of freedom, but sometimes it will be better to use one turn to gain a minimum of VP in order to be able to prepare your vengeance in the next turn (i.e. saving some cubes and having the maximum of 15 cubes next time).

Of course it would be lovely to be the first to build tracks, the first to select trains, the first to load good, etc, but this will be impossible, so you have to be flexible and follow the opportunities that will arise each turn. Remember that if you are the first to build your railway you may block a rival company by placing links that will cut every possible path: your opponent will be obliged to search for an alternate (and longer) way or to start a new railway from a different station. This will not only gain more free goods to you, but also will oblige your opponent to spend precious cubes and to lose unnecessary time.

When the Nürnberg and Fürth stations are connected for the first time each player that has links in this connection gains 1 VP extra per link: in the first 2-3 games this possibility is often under estimated as the players always search for the most profitable way (in terms of immediate VP), but this has proven a fatal mistake in most of our tests. In effect the winner of the game has always been one of the players who gained the most VP from the above connection.

The game ends after 4 turns (5 turns with three players) and each player needs now to add the VPs of his "combos": 2 VP for each combination of 1 Green + 1 Red passengers



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+ 1 Yellow + 1 Grey cube. So, if you have 5 Red and 4 Green passengers, 7 grey cube and 8 yellow cubes you get 4 combos and 8 VP. All the extra passengers and/or cubes have no influence in the VP calculation.

The player with most VP is the winner.

This is really a sly game: everything is simple and very clear from the beginning and you feel very comfortable with the mechanics, especially if you already played other Wallace's games. But as the game progresses you are obliged to think more and more ahead, to fix objectives that you **MUST** perform (doing the best possible bid at the start of the turn) to avoid a catastrophic operational phase. When it is your turn to place links on the map take your time to study all the alternatives as you will need to be certain that the goods and the passengers that you need can really be yours (especially the grey cubes that give 2 PP) and do not hesitate to sell old tracks to the major Companies and to start a new railway: remember that your main target is to get the most possible combos at the end of the game.

In my opinion this is another HIT from Martin Wallace. Highly suggested to expert players, but not suitable for family games unless you leave the players compete without the "combo" points. ☑

Pietro Cremona

INFORMATION

Designer: Martin Wallace

Artist: Dennis Lohausen

Price: ca. 40 Euro

Publisher: Z-Man Games 2010

www.zmangames.com

PLAYERS:
2-4

AGE:
12+

TIME:
120+

EVALUATION

Bidding / resources management
For experts
Version: en
Rules: de en fr kr
In-game use of language: no

Comments:

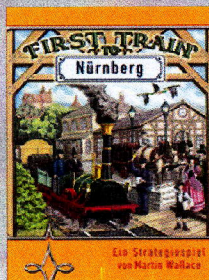
Version of Last Train to Wensleydale
This game is included as a bonus
Many different strategies to win
Basically an auction game

Compares to:

Other games by Martin Wallace

Alternate Edition:

First Train to Nuremberg, Argentum Verlag



FROM LATIN TO ITALIAN

DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA

Play the development of a language

The topic of „De Vulgari Eloquentia“ (DVE) is the period of the late Middle Ages, and the different languages of those times as well as the developments concerning the „Vulgare“, that has been emerging in that time as the common language, influenced by other languages.

During the game you must discover and decipher manuscript, accumulate knowledge and travel across Italy to accumulate the most fame. So you are told in advertisements for the game and also in the rule and this is exactly what's happening.

So, being one of those non-Latin people I had to research what is the name of the game?

Wikipedia willingly yielded some information, as cited in two passages of text:

„De vulgari eloquentia (lat: On the eloquence of popular speech or colloquial speech) is a work by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri. It was written in four volumes between 1303 and 1305, but only the first volume has been preserved completely and the second volume has been preserved including the 14th chapter. De vulgari eloquentia is mostly concerned with neo-latin languages.“

„As all romanic languages the Italian language is derived from Latin. At the start of the Middle Ages, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Latin remained alive as the language of office and the language of the Church. Furthermore, Latin retained its function as the written language of the time. The spoken language, on the other – as already at the times when the Roman Empire still existed – was a language deviating from the written standard, which was known by the name of languages Vulgar Latin or Spoken Latin. This was the predecessor of all proto-Romanic dialects and – finally – of all Romanic languages.

Thus in Italy and its neighboring countries new languages developed, among them the Oil languages in northern France, the Oc languages in southern France and the Si languages in Italy. Dante Alighieri named these languages for the respective word they used for „yes“. The first written documents of the Italian Volgare date back to the late eighth or early ninth century. The first document features a riddle that was found in the Biblioteca Capitolare di Verona and is known by the name of Indovinello veronese bezeichnet wird:

„Se pareba boves, alba pratia araba, albo versorio teneba et negro semen seminaba.“
[She] pushed cows, tilled white fields, held a

white plough and sowed black seeds.

[That is, the Hand]: Cows = (deep running) thoughts, white fields = pages, white plough = feather, black seeds = ink“

I admit that this was a lot of text, but it is directly connected to the topic of the game. The rules mention both the D'Oil languages and the D'Oc languages as well and even the Riddle of Verona is appearing! So I can only advise every interested player to start researching and acquaint himself further with the several definitions and topics that are featured in the game. It is fun!

And this takes me directly to a big compliment: the graphics and the ambiance are very attractive and appealing and the many details on the topic that are integrated as elements of the game make one curious about history and linguistics – if you are open-

Wolfgang Lehner

A game with lots of rules and details, which is attractive due to the many resulting possibilities to make decisions.

mindful for such topics.

But now for the game:

Everybody has a playing piece and enough markers in his color. Roughly half of the board features a map of Italy, which is fragmented into several zones (to be frank, I do not like that term at all – provinces or spaces would have been nicer). Furthermore, there are two seas, which you can enter via the zones with an anchor symbol = harbor and which are not connected to each other. The remainder of the board is taken up by a track for the game rounds and quite a lot of action tracks. All around the board runs a knowledge track, which must not be mistaken for a victory points track. The victory points are called Volgare points in the rules and are calculated at the end of the game.

The basic mechanism of the game is simple: your figurine moves across the zones of Italy. This is important, as many actions are connected to being present in a certain zone. In addition each player has 5 action markers for his turn, which he uses to mark those actions out multitude of actions available to him. There definitely is a scarcity of those markers as many actions take up more than one marker. Maybe you will even manage