

Tread Marks for PC

Produced By: Longbow Digital Arts (<http://www.longbowdigitalarts.com>)

Official Site: <http://www.treadmarks.com>

Review By: Tim Maxwell

Overview: A bunch of tanks, some nuclear weapons, and a bunch of open space; who could ask for anything more?

Good Press: Some of the best graphical effects I've ever seen in PC gaming; awesome weaponry; tons of tanks and venues to choose from.

Bad Press: Controlling your tank and turret at the same time is often an exercise in frustration; the camera angles could use some work.

System Requirements:

- Windows 95/98/NT
- Pentium 200 MMX
- 32MB RAM (64 MB recommended)
- 4X CD-ROM
- Graphics card capable of OpenGL 3D acceleration strongly recommended.

Our Ratings:

Overall: 7/10

Graphics:.....9/10
Sound:.....7/10
Documentation:.....8/10
Getting Started:.....6/10
Gameplay:.....7/10
Value:.....7/10

Tips:

Try to stay out of the water if possible. It slows your tank to a crawl and makes you an easy target for enemies.

Your tank can only carry one weapon at a time. Keep this in mind so you don't accidentally pick up a weaker weapon than what you are currently carrying.

With the insane popularity of games like *Quake 3: Arena* and *Unreal Tournament*, it isn't difficult to see where the computer gaming industry is going. Multiplayer games are now more popular than ever and the reason is simple: a game with a multiplayer options essentially has unlimited replay value – you'll never play the same game twice. Although new challenges face players with each new game, it can get repetitive just running around and obliterating everything that moves. Therefore, it is nice to see a game once in awhile that brings something new to the table. Longbow Digital Arts' newest tank simulation *Tread Marks* does exactly that. The traditional over-the-top array of weapons and fast-paced action of a good deathmatch is still present, but instead of having groups of staunch marines firing at each other, you've got 50-ton tanks duking it out for supremacy.

There are two different game types in *Tread Marks* – battle and race. Both types can be played either online (via TCP/IP, LAN, or Internet connection -- all of which are quite playable), or against computer-

controlled opponents. A battle basically pits you against other tanks in a standard deathmatch setting. The winner is the tank with the most kills after the time expires or the score limit is reached. Racing is similar except not only do you have to contend with maniacal tank drivers armed to the teeth with nukes, but you also have to be the first to reach the finish line. The gripping story behind the game is one of hate, betrayal, a beautiful woman and...aw forget it – there is no storyline. A bunch of people just decided it might be fun to meet in a big open space with some heavy machinery and weapons of mass destruction strewn about and just have it out. Works for me.

Once decision that won't be taken lightly when playing *Tread Marks* is deciding on your tank and venue. There are dozens of tanks to choose from – each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Whether you choose girth with the beefy Dreadnought or finesse with the zippy but under-powered Dwarf, you're sure to find a rig that's right for you. If not, you can always go style over substance and choose one from the "Liquid" class (futuristic *Independence Day*-style treads sporting a sleek chrome finish). As many tanks as there are to choose from though, there really isn't much difference between many of them. Same goes for the plethora of maps – a few trees, a body of water or two, some dirt, and a whole lot of bumps pretty much define the scenery. There are exceptions of course – most notably the moon complete with its low center of gravity and craters o' plenty, but the majority are similarly structured and border on bland.

Luckily, you won't care much about the scenery when you start playing the game. The tank and weapon graphics are simply breathtaking. Each tank is richly detailed right down to the logo and color of your choice. As you begin to take damage, your tank will show it with everything from a few chinks in the finish, to an all-out blaze raging from the rear. The weapons effects are spectacular and do a great job of portraying the immense power they pack. If you've been hit with the standard gun, there might be a minor explosion. If you're the target of an air raid, there won't be much left besides a pile of shrapnel and a giant hole in the ground.

Speaking of holes in the ground, the ability to permanently alter the landscape during battle is perhaps one of the coolest features in *Tread Marks*. The more powerful the weapon you fire, the larger the indentation it leaves in the ground. This is not only cool to look at, but it adds a bit of a strategic element to the game. If you're so inclined, you can use your firepower to create yourself a hiding place or trap unsuspecting tanks for an easy kill.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when playing *Tread Marks* is that practice makes perfect. I treated this game like a standard first-person shooter and set up my familiar mouse/keyboard control scheme. There are a couple of control issues that really take some getting used to. First off, you have to remember that you're not only controlling the tank, but also the turret. Often times, I found myself moving forward while my turret was facing backward. Severe disorientation ensued. Secondly, the turret doesn't have vertical movement so you'll have to time your shots based on the angle at which you are driving. This might disappoint hardcore fps fans, but it alleviates the control difficulty a bit. With patience and a bit of experimentation, you should be able to accustom yourself to the gameplay relatively quickly.

There were a few problems I encountered in *Tread Marks*. First and foremost, there are a whopping two available camera angles ("boring" and "funky" as they're appropriately named) and they don't help the learning curve much. It would have been nice if Longbow Digital Arts could have included a more panoramic view for those moments when you're trapped in a gorge and can't see anything. Also, as incredible as the weapons are, they all seem almost too powerful and precise. Nothing is more frustrating than having a comfortable lead in a race only to be nuked by a distant tank with a homing nuclear warhead. Thankfully, these quirks can be easily overlooked considering how well the game plays and how much fun it is when you get the hang of it.

Overall, I was pleased with *Tread Marks*. Sure, it has its share of control and camera problems, but the game is innovative, the graphics are outstanding, and the game is a blast to play – especially with a bunch of cyber friends. If you're tired of the same old deathmatch or are just longing for a new challenge, take *Tread Marks* for a spin.