

Carousel

Rules and History

James Ernest, September 2015

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Notes: *This game is still in development, so much of the odds listed below are straight-up guesses, and we are still not sure about the final rules. But this is what playtesting is about.*

History:

In 1962 Darius Camber, nephew of J. Robert Lucky, opened the Lucky Mansion Hotel and Casino on Las Vegas Boulevard. Darius was the black sheep of the Lucky family and since his uncle's famous death in 1920, he remained more or less out of touch with the Lucky family. But that didn't stop him from basing his luxury hotel on the life and death of his uncle, Doctor J. Robert Lucky. The Lucky Mansion Casino officially opened its doors on September 15, 1962.

In April of 1964, a singer named Helen Montin, working at Lucky Mansion, brought a table game called Carousel to Darius, the likes of which he had never seen. It used an obsolete "triangle" deck, not seen since the Middle Ages, and it was a fast-paced betting game with interesting jackpots and complicated odds.

Darius started offering the game at Lucky Mansion in June 1964, and it met with limited success. It is possible that Helen and Darius were romantically involved, though reports differ as to the exact nature and timing of their relationship.

In October 1965, a nearly identical game called Pony appeared at the Pyramid Casino, "invented" by assistant slots manager Fernando Estrella. Pony was a direct copy of Carousel with a slight theme change and an additional "pony bet." However, unlike Carousel at Lucky Mansion, Pony was a huge success at the Pyramid, quickly expanding onto many round-the-clock tables.

By June 1966, Pony had spread like wildfire through most of the Las Vegas casinos and into Reno and Atlantic City. Fernando Estrella and the Pyramid Casino earned significant royalties by licensing the game to other casinos. A court battle raged between Montin and Estrella, each backed by their respective houses.

In February 1968 Fernando Estrella won an incredibly lopsided judgment in the case. By claiming that Carousel and Pony were both derived from existing Medieval gambling games with a similar deck of cards, Estrella simultaneously escaped owing any recompense to Montin, and yet he continued reaping the rewards of his many licensing deals.

Livid over the result of her court case, and the public humiliation that she suffered at the hands of the underhanded Estrella, Helen Montin worked with Darius and his underground connections to arrange a hit on Estrella. The hit succeeded, and Fernando Estrella was murdered by an unknown assassin on December 9, 1968.

Montin was eventually charged with conspiracy in the case, and in 1972 she was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Darius Camber escaped prosecution but closed the Lucky Mansion casino in 1971, selling it to the Harrah's corporation for \$15M.

By the mid-1970's, both Carousel and Pony, and some related derivative games, had nearly vanished from the casino floor. The last known Pony table survived at Circus Circus until 1982.

In early 1986 Selchow and Righter released a family game called Merry-Go-Round, based loosely on Pony, with no credited designer. The game failed in its first year, in part due to the sale of Selchow and Righter to Coleco in late 1986.

Today hardly anyone remembers this game, but we're pleased to bring you the complete rules for Carousel and Pony below.

Rules:

Carousel is a casino game using a triangular deck: 1x1, 2x2, 3x3, etc. up to 10x10 (55 cards). (This is a standard Pairs deck.)

Shuffle and deal six cards face up onto the table. These six cards are the foundations of six different hands, as shown here:



Players may now bet on any one of seven numbers on the felt (0 through 6); the exact placement of the bets within their respective betting circles indicates which player has made each bet, as in craps.

Players must bet in order, starting with a button, which moves one seat to the left after each game. Players may bet only on one spot, and they must bet exactly the table limit. For example, if the table limit is \$5, that is the amount that everyone bets.

If a player chooses not to bet on a given round, he withdraws from the game until the next shuffle.



One card is then dealt to each hand. Any hand with a pair is eliminated. Then the remaining hands are counted, and all bets placed on that number are winners. In the example below, one hand is eliminated, so five remain. Anyone betting on 5 would be a winner.

2	8	7	5	10	7
5	9	7	3	8	10

The winners divide all the money that was bet, with odd chips carrying over into the pot for the next round. This amount is called the “carry-over” or the “carry.” If there are no winners, then all the money carries over into the next round.

The game proceeds until either one or zero hands remain. If no one wins the last pot, the leftover money becomes a seed for the next pot. This is called the game carry-over, or the “game.” New players may join the game, and withdrawn players may rejoin the game, *only when the carry is zero*.

House Edge: The House takes a small amount from each non-zero carry, typically 10% rounding up. Note that players can reduce the house edge to zero by covering all possible bets, thus preventing all carries. But all players must conspire to make this happen, and typically the “tragedy of the commons” prevents this from happening. Since the players can’t increase their payout above 100% (because the house adds nothing to the game), the game holds no attraction to angle-shooters.

Odds: The odds of a specific number of hands surviving the round are variable based on the number of each card that has been dealt, so making perfect bets on the fly in this game is mathematically quite difficult.

An Example Game:

On the deal: 3 4 6 7 8 9

Five players bet 4, 4, 5, 6, and 0.

2nd Card: 10 10 10 6 8 7

The 8-8 is eliminated and 5 hands remain. The player who bet 5 wins all the bets.

Players bet 2, 2, 3, 1, and 0.

3rd Card: 2 8 7 9 - 10

Five hands remain, and no one bet 5. So, all these bets remain for the next round, and the dealer takes one chip as a rake.

Bets are 2, 2, 1, 1, and 3.

4th Card: 6 10 1 3 - 10

Two hands are eliminated, and the 3-bet wins all.

Bets are 0, 0, 1, 1, and 3.

5th Card: 9 - 8 8 - -

Three hands remain, and the 3-bet wins all.

Bets are 0, 0, 1, 1, and 2.

6th Card: 7 - 5 7 - -

Two hands remain, and the 2 takes all.

The big winner withdraws from the game at this point.

Bets are 0, 0, 0, and 1.

7th Card: 7 - 9 - - -

The 1-bet wins all. Because one hand remains, that's the end of the game. Because all was won, there is no carry-over and anyone may join or rejoin the game.

Changes in Pony:

The original Carousel theme suggested horses that were going around on a carousel, but Pony takes the metaphor to a race track.

At the start of the game, each player may also make a "Pony Bet," which is a bet on a specific hand to win the race, i.e., the hand that will survive the longest. Those bets are placed in a separate pool, and that pool is divided among all the players who bet on the winning horse(s). If all the remaining horses are eliminated at the same time, the rank of each card in the stack is a tiebreaker, starting with the most recent. If that is also tied (nearly unheard-of), then the prize is split between the winners.

House-backed side bets: In a 6-horse game, the house allowed players to bet on any horse to win, and paid 6:1 on a "living win." However, they did not pay winners if their horse was eliminated on the last round, only if it survived, making the house odds approximately 15% on the 6-horse game (odds differ in games with more or fewer horses; some houses dealt as many as eight hands to increase action.)

Changes in Merry-Go-Round

High Card Bet: Merry-Go-Round introduced another new bet called the High Card Bet, or Round Bet, which was similar to the Pony Bet, but played each round. The bet is on any of the remaining hands to draw the highest single card, regardless of whether that hand survives. Like the Pony Bet, this bet is trivial to analyze, as all hands have the same odds of winning. In the case of a tie, this bet carries forward to reward the next Round Bet.