

# CIRCUS MAXIMVS

## STREAMLINED

### NEW & FASTER RULES FOR PLAYING AVALON HILL'S GAME OF CHARIOT RACING by JP Trostle



Flat out, my favorite board game of all time is *Circus Maximus*, Avalon Hill's game of chariot racing in ancient Rome. My friends and I began playing it shortly after it was published in the early 1980s, and, beginning in 1988, I started running large events using 15mm miniatures in a scale model hippodrome. Since then, I've put on hundreds of races at numerous conventions and for groups of friends, both gamers and non-gamers alike. In addition to building props and custom player logs, I also refined a few of the existing rules to make them easier for newer players to understand, and faster for when I ran bigger races with more than 10 charioteers.

Several of these house rules were created to take the 3-D nature of the miniature circus into account, but work just as well with the original board game; the rest came about in an effort to streamline game play and keep races from getting bogged down, which could easily happen when you had 14-16 players in a game, many of whom had never played before. All have been rigorously playtested over the last 20 years. Here then are the collected changes for *Streamlined Circus Maximus*.

#### WHAT'S DIFFERENT

1. **Lane change movement** (p.4, rule 6.4) — This is the biggest adjustment to the rules.
2. **Chariot starting locations** (p.2, rule 3.1) — Due to the change in the above rule, this is now also different.
3. **Players may not attack each other until the far corner.**
4. **Lash attacks now have one less step** (p.7, rule 9.3, 9.4)
5. **Ramming attacks against horses are now outlawed** (p.7, 9.5)

#### WHAT'S NEW

6. **Chariots must now 'get up to speed' from a dead stop.** This includes the start of the race.
7. **There is now no wall in the corner between the spina and the starting gates.** Chariots that swerve beyond the outside lane in the near corner have special rules for "spinning out."

#### 1. CHANGING LANES

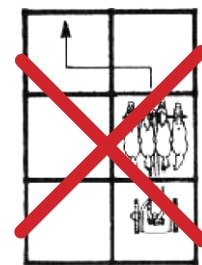
Movement has been simplified, and after a player begins moving their chariot, changing a lane only requires a single Movement Factor (MF), whether they are moving to the outside **OR** inside. When the player changes lanes, they move diagonally forward, either left or right. As in the original rules, there must be at least two unoccupied squares in the lane moved into — one for the team and one for the chariot.

A chariot evading an attack will only pay one movement point to change lanes as well, whether they move in or out on the track.

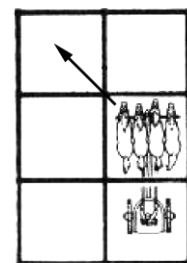
Please note, the first square a chariot moves into at the beginning of a player's turn must be straight ahead — meaning a chariot directly in front of the player's team will block their movement, requiring a sideslip (p.5, rule 6.7)

Also note that changing lanes in a corner will still require the chariot to move "back" one square when moving in, and "up" one square when moving out; it is simply that the cost of this change is now one MF.

**Reasoning:** *I can understand why the original designers of Circus Maximus made lane changes cost 2 MF to move in, but only 1 MF to move out, but it is often confusing to young or novice players, and after several years of having to explain it again and again and still having to make players do over turns because they miscounted squares, I decided to streamline things. Once the starting positions are adjusted (see below), this change actually has very little impact on the flow of the game, the positions players take regarding inside or outside lanes, or the final outcome of the race. Experienced players will have to adjust their movement strategy a little, but will quickly discover this change has no negative impact on the game, and greatly speeds it up.*



**OLD**  
(2 MF to inside)

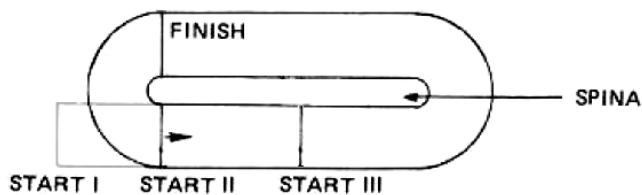


**NEW**  
(1 MF to either lane after 1st square)

#### 2. STARTING POSITIONS

Because of the change above and the removal of the additional MF cost to move in toward the spina (and hence, a reason to stay in your starting inside or outside lane), there is no longer any reason to have the chariots in a staggered start in the gray squares at the beginning of a race — in fact, this setup must be removed from the game because it would give an unfair space advantage to chariots in the outside lanes.

Therefore, all chariots will begin a race all on the same straight starting line. This can either be at the first straight line on the straightaway, or at a line in the middle of the straightaway (a la the beginning of the race in *Ben Hur*). Or you can use the gray squares, as long as all chariots start at the end of the lanes.



## 2a. STARTING POSITIONS FOR MORE THAN 10 CHARIOTS

As per the Enlarged Field rules (p.10, rule 18), if you decide to run more than 8 chariots in a race, keep the faction color chits for the additional vehicles out of the draw cup until the first row of chariots has gone, and then line up the 2nd row of teams on the same starting line. In this way, everyone starts from the same squares. (By the way, the most chariots I ever ran in a race was 16.)

## 3. TEMPORARY LIMITS ON ATTACKS

Because chariots are now closely packed together at the start of a race, we do not allow players to attack each other until a certain marker is reached. In most games, I only allow attacks after the first chariot has entered the far corner, though I have also used the halfway point of the straightaway. Either way, as soon as that first team crosses the marker, it is open season for everyone.

**Reasoning:** While I love the combat in *Circus Maximus* as much as anyone, this is still a racing game, and too many attacks during the first few turns of the game tends to bog things down — especially in a dense field of a dozen or more chariots. Also, on rare occasion, we've had a player in the very inside lane who, at the end of their first move had only just left the gray boxes and whose driver was subsequently lashed, causing them to swerve and crash on the first turn of the game. I run this game so everyone can have a good time, and crashing right out of the gate, while funny, isn't it.

## 4. FASTER LASH ATTACKS

Lash attacks take place faster because we have dropped the defense procedure (and subsequent dice rolls) when a player is using his whip on another charioteer or team of horses. Now if a player announces a whip attack, the defender does not have the option of first braking or evading. Instead, both players immediately move to the step where they roll two dice, add their Current Driver Modifier and compare results.

The rest of the lash attack is per the original rules: use the Driver Lash Attack Table for driver vs. driver, or the positive difference of attacker vs. defender to determine the MF addition/ endurance loss for a team of horses.

(Optional lash outcome: For a number of years, we used a rule for lash attacks verses horses where the attacker, if they rolled higher than the defender, would then roll a single die for the whip result — just as if they had whipped their own team.)

**Reasoning:** If you have ever seen the chariot race in *Ben Hur*, you know the lash attack is a sudden, vicious thing that comes out of nowhere, and I felt the original rules did not convey this. In addition, this eliminated one more dice roll players had to make, speeding up the game a little bit more.

## 5. RAMMING HORSES IS NOW OUTLAWED

In Streamlined *Circus Maximus*, ramming another team's horses with a chariot is now illegal, and any villain who resorts to such a dastardly attack is immediately disqualified from winning the race.

Note that I didn't say players could no longer declare this sort of attack — just that they could no longer win the race if they

do. (And yes, this means they can't win even if they are the only surviving team to cross the finish line.)

I often gave out prizes to the winner of a convention race, and this simple change to the rules — and the loss of a potential award — had a profound effect on player's behavior. It also did a lot to speed up the game, as players now had more movement factors to use, and fewer injured or dead horses helped to keep the race from getting dragged down to a bloody crawl. Of course someone stuck in last place, or a bruiser in a heavy chariot who is only looking for trouble, has nothing to lose and is free to attack.

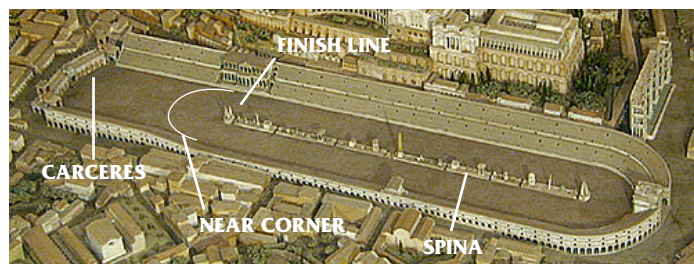
Finally, if a player ends up hitting a team of horses due to an involuntary ram attack, they are **NOT** penalized. After all, accidents do happen.

**Reasoning:** This rule came into being after a particularly ugly and dull race that I had to call after 5 hours — even though the players had yet to complete a second lap. The main culprit was a continuous stream of deadly attacks on horses that was so bad even the lead chariot's speed was in the single digits. In addition, if you look at history, Romans often treated their horses better than they did the slaves who made up most of the pool of charioteers.

## 6. GETTING UP TO SPEED.

We added a new rule to represent the effort and coordination it took to get a team of four horses up and running from a standstill. Whenever a chariot starts moving after having a speed of 0 the previous turn, they must roll a d6 and subtract that amount from their marked team speed. This includes voluntary stops and stopping after a horse is killed, and, most importantly, at the start of the race. A player may attempt to whip their horses to make up for this loss.

**Reasoning:** This is actually a variation on an optional rule first presented by Alan Moon in an old issue of *Avalon Hill's The General*. We did this mainly to keep players from simply "parking" their chariot and walking off, which sometimes held up a game ... even a speed of 1 will do the trick. But also, I always thought the idea of a chariot going from 0 to Max Team Speed in a single turn a bit silly, even in a beer-and-pretzels game like *Circus Maximus*.



## 7. SPINNING OUT IN FRONT OF THE CARCERES

There is now no longer a wall along the outside lane of the near corner (the one that extends from the finish line to the start line where the gray squares are.) If a chariot in the outside lane in this corner is forced to leave the track because of a swerve, they now "spinout" instead of flipping. In a spinout the driver is automatically jostled. In addition, the chariot will automatically go last the next game turn. (If they haven't yet moved this turn, they go last this turn, and have their faction chit drawn normally the next turn.) Finally, when it is their turn to move, they do not set a turn speed, but return to the outside lane 2-12 squares from the spot where they spun out.

**Reasoning:** Historically there was no wall along the outside lane of the near corner. (Heck, there weren't even hard and fast "lanes.") Instead, there was a large open area between the spina and the carceres, or starting gates.