

About

Black Maria is a variant of hearts that can be played by four players and is especially good for three. Like all games based on Hearts, it is an evasion / trick avoid game, with the objective of avoiding capturing penalty cards in tricks. The 'Black Maria' is the queen of spades – which is the largest penalty card in the game. In Black Maria, all hands are played at no trump (there is never a trump suit).

Players

Three or four players. All playing for themselves.

Cards

52 (2 – A) (♥♦♣♠)

For 3p remove the 2♣ leaving total of 51 cards.

Deal

- Deal 13 each to 4 players
- Deal 17 each to 3 players

Passing

All players examine their hands and choose 3 cards to pass to their right. They must place the cards they wish to pass face down on the table before picking up the cards received from the player on their left.

Rank

Card rank is the same in all suits: A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Note: If 3p there is no 2♣

Penalty Cards

All ♥s = 1 penalty point each
 A♠ = 7 penalty points
 K♠ = 10 penalty points
 Q♠ = 13 penalty points

Play

Player left of the dealer leads to the first trick. Players cannot play penalty cards in the first trick, unless penalty cards are all they hold. Players must follow suit if they can. If unable to follow suit, they may play any card.

Scoring

At the end of the hand, players score their penalty points.

e.g. Player 'A' has **4 Hearts** (the 6♥, 9♥, J♥, K♥), the A♠ and the Q♠

Player 'A' score for the hand would be... 4 + 7 + 13 = **24 points**

The aim is to have the lowest score possible.

Note:

If a player takes zero points, and all other players take at least 1 point, then the total game score of the player taking zero points is reduced by 5 points.

Finish

Agree on a number of deals (divisible by 3 or 4).

OR

Play until one player's score reaches an agreed amount (like 50 or 100 points).

The player with the lowest total score is the winner.