

Three Card Poker

Just what is it? Three Card Poker is also known as Tri Card Poker, Trey Poker and Poker Three but why all the names for the same game? Well, it all started out as a name protected casino table game called 3 Card Poker that became very popular. Then it seems that others wanted to offer the game without paying the royalties due so they just renamed it. So whether it's called 3 Card, Tri Card or just plain Tri Poker, the rules are the same, the optimal playing strategy is the same and a lot of players love it.

Three Card Poker is two gambling games in one. You are usually allowed to play either one or both games at the same time, but some casinos will require you to play both. The two games are "**ante/play**", where you compete against the dealer, and "**pair plus**" that has different bonus payouts for hands of one pair or better. When both games are played at the same time, players may wager different amounts on each game.

The games are played with a standard 52 card deck. The cards are distributed to the dealer in groups of three by an automatic shuffling machine. The player's table layout is shown at the right. The rules are also printed on the table at each player spot, just like this: (note :) The rules listed below are **FULL PAY**. Always look for these!

- Play **MUST EQUAL** Ante
- Dealer Plays With **QUEEN** High or Better - At some casinos dealers play with a King High or Better. The result is a much higher house advantage.
- When Dealer Does **Not Play**:
 - a. Play Pays: PUSH
 - b. Ante Pays: 1 to 1
- When Dealer **Plays**:
 - a. Play Pays: 1 to 1
 - b. Ante Pays: 1 to 1

3 card hand values: The first thing you will probably notice from the hand rankings list below is that a straight has a higher ranking than a flush. That's simply because there are fewer ways to make a 3 card straight than a 3 card flush. As in most poker games, aces play both high and low to a straight. An ace high straight flush is the highest hand you can get and some casinos have also added a mini-royal flush to the ante bonus and pair plus pay table.

Rules - Ante/Play & Pair Plus

This game starts with the players placing bets in the "ante", "pair plus" or both spots on the table layouts. The ante and pair plus wagers can be any amount within the posted table limits. The players and the dealer all get three cards, face down. The players all look at their hands and either fold by giving their cards back and losing their ante bet, or play by placing a bet, equal to the ante, in the "play" spot on the layout. Note that even if the player folds, pair plus wagers are still paid on any pair or better.

Hand Rankings	Full Pay Pair Plus Table	Full Pay Ante Bonus Table
Mini-Royal	-	-
Straight Flush	40 to 1	5 to 1
Three of a Kind	30 to 1	4 to 1
Straight	6 to 1	1 to 1
Flush	4 to 1	-
Pair	1 to 1	-
High Card	-	-

The dealer then turns over his cards. If he does not have queen high or better, he doesn't "qualify" to play and pays the active players even money on their ante bets and those with a straight or better are paid the additional

ante bonus shown above. These players get a "push" on their play bets. If he does have a qualifying hand, those who cannot beat it lose their antes and their play bets, but can still win the ante bonus with a straight or higher. Those who can beat the dealer win even money on their ante and play bets plus the ante bonus, if any.

Strategy - Ante/Play

In Three Card Poker ante/play, the only thing the expert player needs to know is how high his or her hand should be to produce the best possible long term results, if played. The answer to that question is Q-6-4 or higher.

High card hands between Q-6-4 through K-Q-10 are loss limit plays. These are hands with negative expectations. They will lose less if played than they will in ante forfeiture losses if they are not played. Ace high hands and better have positive expectations. The house advantage for ante/play, against the optimal strategy shown below is a comfortable 3.37%. Not too bad for the player.*