

Although they clearly add to *Excel's* standing as perhaps the best single piece of shrink-wrapped software in history, these incremental improvements are not what makes *Excel 4.0* so exciting. Users with scads of .XLA add-in functions will be happy to see the new Addin Manager, not to mention the inclusion of many examples of the technique; the Analysis ToolPak gives engineers and statisticians as much of an arsenal as they could hope for, and the Scenario Manager extends the "Solver" metaphor to new levels. *Excel* has added a slide show module (also in .XLA format), easy management of color palettes, and another extension designed to manage and print frequently-used reports.

Excel now includes two examples of the Wizards technology introduced last year with Microsoft's *Publisher* and *Works for Windows* packages, and although they aren't as helpful as the models found in those products, many users will relish the aid they do provide in creating graphs and data cross-tabulations. The graphing suite has been expanded to include radar (spider) and 3-D surface options, cell notes can now include embedded .WAV sound files as well as text, and in the interest of keeping pace with the Joneses, *Excel 4.0* can make formatting changes across multiple worksheets—a feature introduced by Lotus in *1-2-3 3.x*. Microsoft has also expanded *Excel's* Workspace feature, used for nothing more than arranging documents on screen, to a more-robust "WorkBook" focus that adds the ability to physically bind separate files together and expand sub-data filenames to thirty-one characters.

The best is ahead. *Excel 4.0* sets new standards for ease of use, by adding a trio of automatic formatting and selection options. In fact, AutoFill, AutoSelect, and AutoFormat are so good that Lotus felt compelled to emulate them with SmartPak, a hastily-assembled add-on package for use with *1-2-3 for Windows*. AutoSelect is no more than the ability to navigate to the far reaches of your worksheet with only a couple of keystrokes, but the others may have you rubbing your eyes in near-disbelief. With AutoFill, *Excel* can continue partially-completed date ranges, logically-delineated data series' (Q1, Q2, . . .), and the like, with no more work on your part than dragging a selection box from the area that's already been defined over the region that needs to be completed. The feature is not limited to working with data, though. The traditional copy-and-paste action used to duplicate formulas is emulated by AutoFill, as well; just drag the cell containing the formula you need copied over adjoining cells, and the formula is copied, with relative values changed appropriately. AutoFill also works as a quick and easy erase function—just drag a selected area inward upon itself.

AutoFormat is one of those features that you may turn your nose up at, but for many people, it's a godsend. Essentially, AutoFormat is the spreadsheet equivalent of predefined color/style sets in presentation graphics packages, set up to work after the fact. Just select the range you need formatted, invoke AutoFormat, and **voila!** Instant presentation-grade worksheet.

The ease enhancements don't stop with *Excel's* "auto triplets". As introduced in *Word for Windows 2.0*, *Excel* now sports more attractive (thus more easily navigable) dialog boxes, gives you direct access to the search feature in on-line help, supports a simple click/drag action when you want to move data from one area of a worksheet to another, and has made the secondary button on your mouse worth the space it takes up. In an implementation similar to the Object Browser being used by Borland in their *Windows* applications, *Excel* uses the previously-unutilized resource to pop up the most likely set of commands for whatever you've clicked on. The feature is impressive the first time you use it, and just gets better as you come to realize that the commands being presented do indeed change, and the set you are offered usually includes what you need.

Microsoft has addressed two concerns we expressed in our review of *Excel 3.0* (*IYMSR*, 5/91), by improving print quality on graphs embedded in spreadsheets, and making it easier (at least a little) for users to add commands directly to *Excel's* menus. We still think some more