One Last Compile...

The Joy of SQL

The relationship between SQL and myself has changed quite considerably over recent months. It used to be that writing some SQL was the last resort. When you're doing Paradox-based applications, there comes a time when even the most ingenious combination of filters and `SetKeys` on `TTables` won't give you what you want. It was then, with something of an inward sigh, I would plonk a `TQuery` down.

I don't want to be too mean about Local SQL and the BDE, because for a run of the mill `Select * from Customer` statement it all worked well. It was when you tried something slightly more advanced, altering a table structure, say, that things would become more tricky. It's not that you couldn't do these things, it was just that the BDE got very fussy about you getting the syntax exactly right. And, when you got the syntax slightly wrong, the BDE rarely seemed to feel it was its job to point you in the right direction. I think it had only two error messages: 'Invalid use of keyword' (which meant you'd mistyped a word somewhere, but it was up to you to figure out which one) and 'Capability not supported' (which didn't mean, as you might think, that what you were trying to do couldn't be done, but rather that you hadn't fully specified in triplicate the name of the table you wanted to work on).

And it was slow, and sometimes it would just go off and hang on a relatively simple query, and sometimes it would just plain not work. All of which meant that I regarded SQL with suspicion, and never as an ally.

But that all changed once I started working on client/server systems. The first thing that happens once you make this transition is that a kind, fatherly soul takes you into a quiet room and explains gently that, despite the hype, everything you've ever known about developing database applications needs to be thrown out of the window. Fast. (An aside: do you know that series of cartoons where a crowd of horrified onlookers gaze aghast at an unfortunate individual, usually with a caption like 'The man who said tweed trousers and a pink cardigan are a positive fashion statement' or 'The man who said that Visual Basic was a proper programming language'? There should be one that says 'The man who said he was still using `TTables` in a client/server application'.)

So SQL starts to play a big part in your life. But, here's the thing, after the first couple of weeks, it becomes an absolute joy. It's fast. It's reliable. It's flexible. OK, it's not as nice and straightforward as reading and writing from a `TTable`, but it's nothing like as painful as you imagine. For those few of you who haven't yet dabbled in SQL, let me tell you: you never forget the magical moment of your first proper `Sum` and `Group By` statement. Want to know totalled sales figures for all your customers? Forget about looping through a table. One statement (one!) does everything you need. Rarely have I spent so much time at my desk cackling happily.

One of the reasons I love SQL so much now is that it takes us back to the good old command line days. There's a real sense of discovery and, not least, of knowing more than somebody else Any fool could do a `TTable` based application. But SQL just sits there, oozing power, waiting for you to unlock its hidden commands, Left Outer Joins, Right Inner Joins, Inside Leg, Silly Midwicket. I keep discovering new words. `COALESCE`, for example, and then, like a precocious child, look out for opportunities to drop them into my SQL conversations with the server.

Ooops, I'm out of space, and Ms Barnard is looking thunderous. Let me quickly summarise. Firstly, SQL is great. Secondly, please:

```
Select Happiness, GoodWill
  from Christmas, NewYear
```
One and all.