

The 80 Column

Our regular round-up of printer-related items, compiled by Alan Wrigley

A4 CONTINUOUS PAPER

In this month's *80 Column* I want to deal with a couple of problems which were raised by visitors at the BETT exhibition back in January. The first of these relates to the use of A4 continuous fanfold paper with a desktop publishing package. When using continuous paper, each time a new page is reached in the document being printed, the paper must be moved up to the top of the next sheet. This is known as the "top of form position". Obviously this position must be the same for every sheet of paper or else the printing will creep up or down the page on each subsequent sheet. For this reason, printers have dip switches to set the form length so that each time a form feed is encountered, the printer can calculate the exact distance from the last form feed or from the start of the document, and move to that position.

However, some printers only allow lengths of 11" or 12" to be set from the switches, because most fanfold paper is supplied in these lengths. Since A4 paper is 11.69" long, either of these settings will cause the printing to be displaced by an unacceptable amount which will accumulate with each successive sheet. Thus the problem is not, as some users believe, due to the package producing the output but rather to the printer itself.

Fortunately there is a solution at hand, which is that most printers also recognise a software code to set the form length. If this is sent at the start of each print job it will override the dip switch setting. It is quite

easy to do this by modifying the printer driver's PrData file. Towards the beginning of this file is a line starting *job_prologue:*. Assuming you have an Epson-compatible printer, simply alter this line to read:

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job_prologue:      "<27>C<70>"
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This sets the form length to 11.67" (70 lines) which is as close as it is possible to get to the actual 11.69" required.

PRINTER PINS

The second problem concerns printer emulations in the PrinterDM printer driver - specifically the difference between 9- and 24-pin printers. As supplied by Acorn, PrinterDM has a number of emulations already incorporated. The most important of these are the two groups providing Epson FX and Epson LQ emulation, since most printers nowadays claim to be Epson-compatible.

Epson FX series printers have 9 pins, while the LQs have 24 pins. By and large the codes for all the various printer functions are the same between the two types, but there is one crucial difference: because of the different spacing between the pins, the print head on an FX is moved vertically in increments of 1/216", while on an LQ it is 1/180" (or 1/360" in high resolution). However, some of the codes to move the print head are the same for both types of printer. For normal text printing this is irrelevant, since both operate to a standard text spacing of 1/6". For graphics printing, however, or if you want to deviate from standard spacing while printing text, the result will be different for each.

A problem has arisen because it seems there may be some 9-pin printers on the market which claim Epson LQ emulation. This may very well be true if you simply look at the printer codes recognised by the printer, but if you try to print from, say, a DTP package onto a 9-pin printer using an LQ emulation, you will almost certainly hit trouble. Even text printing from a word processor could be affected if the package allows the line spacing to be altered from the standard. So if you have a 9-pin printer, you must use the FX emulation in PrinterDM, or alternatively add a definition to the PrData file for your own printer.
