Titler

Ian Robinson reviews a new video titling application to liven up all your old home videos.

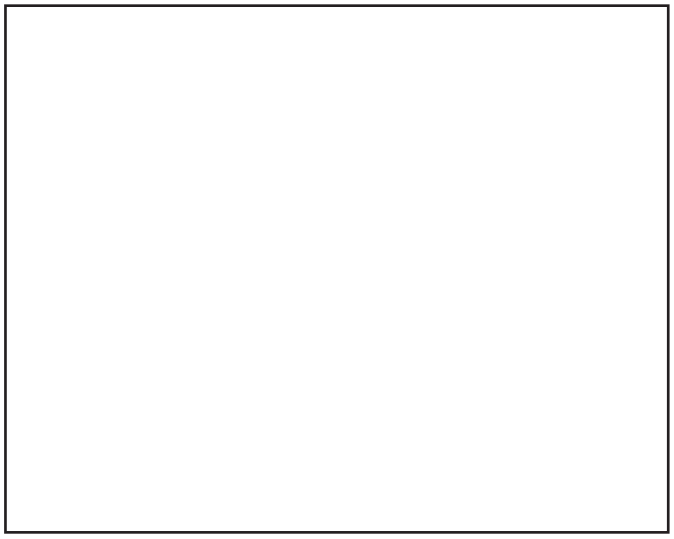
In a world increasingly dominated by multimedia, new applications to extend the scope of your trusty Arc appear all the time; the latest is a video titling package, *Titler*, from Clares. Written in New Zealand and currently in use there to produce television programmes, the two applications that make up the package, Titler and Sequencer, promise much. But what are video titles all about?

Every television programme you watch has text and logos superimposed on it, but have you ever considered how they get there? With film, the predominant method is to place artwork manually on transparent celluloid sheets, locate them over a projection of the frame of film where they are to appear, and then re-shoot the entire thing: a painful process which is still the best way to achieve the quality required for movies.

With the advent of video, electronic solutions needed to be developed. The earliest, still employed in certain circumstances, was to use one video camera for the live action and another for shooting the titles. An editor would mix these together, frequently during a live broadcast! With video becoming commonplace, the technology of editing improved significantly and dedicated titling hardware became available. The expense of this hardware has kept versatile titling in the professional realm, until now. The Archimedes and A3000 can accept Genlock expansion cards, and in combination with Titler, you can now accomplish video overlays in your front room.

GENLOCK

In the UK and other countries the 625 line 50Hz PAL television standard is employed. This gives 600 lines of picture and 25 of soundtrack and control signals. If editing more than one video source together (like cameras, playbacks and titlers) the frames need to be synchronised, and this is what Genlock achieves. With a Genlock card, the video output from your computer is synchronised with any video source fed into the card, by reference to their control signals. If you have a video camera you can see what happens without Genlock by pointing it at your TV while a broadcast



Titler - a finished script

programme is showing. The unsynchronised frames of the camera and the TV result in a wide black line appearing on the image of the TV in the camera

viewfinder.

Genlock is not essential to Titler since output can be displayed on any Arc for its own sake. However, to add titles to video the minimum you will need in addition to a Genlock card are a playback VCR, a record VCR and a television (camcorders can replace the playback VCR).

USING TITLER

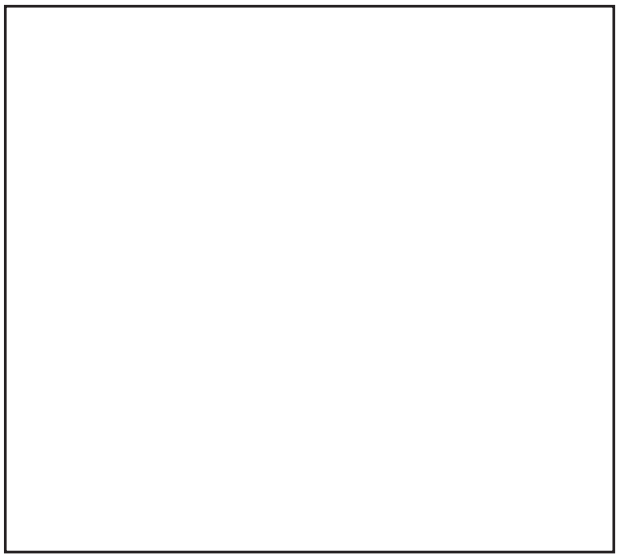
Clicking on Titler when it's installed on the icon bar displays the program window containing six icons with sprites depicting their purpose (e.g. a hammer and a spanner representing tools). Each icon provides RISC OS menu access to a set of program options; alternatively clicking Menu within the program window produces a menu of these six option categories from which the submenus can be reached.

There are submenus to cover the following: file saving and receiving, fonts, text justification and line spacing. The fun menu is effects, which I certainly played with most, and includes drop shadow, underline, and rubout boxes. A colour menu offers a choice of nine standard and three user definable colours, all twelve being available in 256-colour modes at any one time. User colours are set using Palette.

Genlock is the first option you come across in the tools menu, and is only relevant to owners of a Genlock card. Unfortunately, I did not have access to such a card and so I'm unable to report on the application's performance in this area; however the manual does give enough detail on the subject. Essentially a Genlock Map window allows you to select which colours in your script are to be 'video transparent' (this is usually set to the background colour). The other tools include gridlock, to assist precise positioning of items with respect to each other.

A seventh program window icon provides entry to the Titler work screen (called a "script") where the action takes place. The manual offers a tutorial which guides you clearly through exploratory stages, shows you how to produce and manipulate text at the carat and lists the keyboard block editing functions. The function keys (listed on a keystrip) allow fast and convenient choice of such options as font and drop shadow colours, font size, justification, drop shadow, underline and rubout effects. The keystrip doesn't currently cope with all the options one may want quick access to, such as background colour, but minimal re-design could include these in future versions.

Items such as text or sprites can be moved around the script freehand via the mouse, and fixed in place where desired. In addition an item can be unfixed for further



Sequencer - editing an effect

editing. The directory of examples supplied with the package illustrates the use of the program options well, makes one feel at home with the software and doubtless will result in professional looking scripts in a very short time.

SEQUENCES

So, you have produced some credit scripts for your wedding video, or have designed some snappy slide-show scripts for your talk on fly fishing to the local primary school, so where do you go from here to complete your creative concept? How do you link the scripts into a presentation to stun your audience? Prepare to enjoy yourself because this is where Sequencer comes into play.

The similarities between the two applications and their manuals ease introduction to Sequencer. Loaded files are displayed as a list attached to the bottom of the program window. The files can then be displayed in order of appearance, or in a user defined order via Sequencer programs. These programs use a simple set of commands and examples exist to assist you.

The display of a script is enhanced using the many available effects, which include fade, cut, shadow, stretch, blinds, blocks and drags. In addition, effects can be customised with the user definable 'function' effect; the default function is a rather nice one giving the script the appearance of being unrolled like wallpaper down the screen. The application provides extensive access to the timing of aspects of a sequence, and the variety of effects produced are numerous and require long experimentation to appreciate fully. The tutorial refers to examples which illustrate the potential of effects.

A good tool for the imagination is the Random Play window, with which you can have your scripts displayed with random effects and pauses while you sit comfortably with your coffee and let what you see inspire you. To complete your presentation, there is an Audio option with which one can add modules from SoundTracker or Tracker and samples from Armadeus to augment the default Internal sound option. Sequencer can save a presentation in different forms, for example with all data or in a run only form.

PACKAGING AND INSTALLATION

Titler comes on two discs, containing the applications Titler and Sequencer, and these and the A5 manual fit neatly into a slim A4 folder. This is a neat package and one I prefer to plastic "video" cases that never seem to close properly once opened. The manual is really two in one, each application having its own section, cleverly identifiable by the use of white pages for Titler and non-white for Sequencer. They are clearly executed and sensibly divided into chapters which lead one carefully through tuition, program windows, menus, and advanced usage. The keystrip completes the package.

It's a temptation to insert the disc and examine the contents before even considering looking at the manual, but a warning sticker on the folder advises that the initial access to the disc through the Desktop runs registration and copy protection routines which if avoided could result in damage. Registration displays a window with name and address fields to be completed by the purchaser, which binds

the package: only registered discs are considered for any upgrades. Security is always an issue for software houses, and Clares report that they are considering developing registration for future products.

Installation is either onto a hard disc or onto floppy through two methods (the first needing two discs and providing extended work space). The manual takes you through your choice step by step, but increased automation would be an improvement.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that Titler will prove useful in many areas. Without Genlock you can still produce professional sequences for exhibitions, talks, lessons and much more. With the addition of video, the uses multiply. For home video enthusiasts, they can add that finishing polish to cousin Jenny's wedding or little Sam's first words. Video laboratories in education could employ Titler to extend the skills of pupils and teachers alike. The effectiveness of commercial videos distributed to retailers as point of sale support material could be enhanced with Titler. It could find a role in TV advertising as well as in displays used by game shows. Titler is already being used by a provincial Police force for their school presentations, and by a secondary school for its video information network. I'm sure that its versatility will make it successful in ways not yet thought of.

Titler is a straightforward package which is easy to use, well organised, well documented and reasonably priced, and one which provokes the imagination from the word go.

Product	Titler
Supplier	Clares Micro Supplies 98 Middlewich Road, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7DA. Tel.(0606) 48511
Price	£149.95 inc. VAT (with Genlock card £345.00 inc. VAT)