The 80 Column

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

In a previous 80 Column (RISC User 6:5) I highlighted some of the problems that had been found with the RISC OS 3 printer drivers, and invited readers to share their feelings and experiences on the matter. A number of readers have written to the magazine, and most have agreed that there are indeed shortcomings in the latest drivers. The good news is that Acorn has someone looking into reported problems, so hopefully we may see some bug fixes available in the near future.

D.M. Wells has been trying to use the new PostScript driver to print to file for subsequent processing by a typesetting bureau. He found that the driver has a number of problems, which include a bug that apparently prevents a full A4 page width being printed in landscape format, and a restriction which allows only two font encodings. He believes that this is not a good advertisement for Acorn when they are trying to promote their computers for professional DTP work. Mr Wells has found a perfect solution to the driver's shortcomings for his own work: he reports that the old RISC OS 2 PrinterPS still works perfectly under RISC OS 3, at least when printing to disc.

Brian Jordan uses the HP LaserJet II driver, and while he is impressed by the quality of the dithering when printing grey-shaded pictures, he has observed a variation on the extra page feed problem. If several copies of a document are required, they are all printed in perfect register, followed by an equal number of blank sheets. With a multi-page document the process is repeated for each page - n copies of page 1 followed by n blank sheets, and so on. This appears to indicate that the problem is not due to the page length setting.

I have found yet another problem with the RISC OS 3 drivers (it appears on the NEC and Epson drivers and probably the others as well). If you set Control codes to Standard, you might reasonably expect that any control codes will be sent straight through to the printer without further ado, as was the case with the RISC OS 2 drivers. But in fact it seems that all codes below 32 are simply ignored by the printer driver. This may be a bug or it may be a deliberate feature, but either way it means there is no way of embedding printer control code sequences directly into text files. Applications such as 1st Word Plus and DeskEdit still work correctly because they make use of the so-called fancy text-printing facility (internal character sequences which the driver recognises as meaning set italic, cancel bold etc.). But these are limited to the usual set of printer features (bold, italic, underline, superscript etc.), and if you want to be more ambitious (double-height, unusual fonts and so on), you can't do it by putting the code sequence directly into your file.

It may seem obvious to seasoned users of RISC OS how to achieve background printing - you simply print first to a file, and if you then drag that file to the driver, it will be printed in the background. Printing to a file is often a lot faster than to a printer (depending of course on what type of printer you have), so for large documents this method is worthwhile if you want to get on with your work while printing. E.F. Kelly has supplied some information which clarifies the process.

Install a second copy of your working driver (giving it a different name such as LQFile), and set the destination to File in the Connections window, supplying a pathname for the file. If possible this should be on the RAM disc, since this will speed the printing process up even further. If both drivers are active, you will have two icons on the icon bar. Highlight the file driver and print your document as normal from the application. You can't queue files in this way, because each one will overwrite the previous file of the same name, though you could use the