Hatching a Plot

4Mation s Hatchback reviewed by Mike W illiams.

W hile colours look excellent for screen displays, good quality colour printers are still relatively expensive, and most users still prefer a mono printer, such as Canon s BJ series. Printing colour images to a mono printer is, of course, perfectly feasible, but the rendering of screen colours in shades of grey often gives indifferent results. While not a universal answer, an alternative colouring technique in such cases is the use of a variety of cross-hatching patterns.

While a few packages for the Archimedes range already provide cross-hatch patterns, Hatchback from 4Mation now allows any colour to be replaced by the user s choice of hatching pattern. Clearly this will be most appropriate where there are large areas of a single colour, as in charts and graphs, but its capabilities range much wider. It works with Draw files, compressed Draw files and with Poster files. All objects can be patterned, except single lines of text, text areas and sprites.

Hatchback is supplied on a single disc with a 16 page manual. It is installed on the icon bar, and any suitable file can be dragged to it. The selected objects then appear in Hatchback s main window, with a toolbox to the left (see figure 1). The toolbox determines the choice of pattern (10 of these), the target area (local or global, and inside, outside or overlapping a boxed area), and choice of colour for foreground and background. It also provides a magnifier for precise positioning.

Clicking with the Menu button over any of the ten patterns allows the angle, density and frequency to be varied. Thus vertical lines could be angled at 30 , 45 , 60 or any other angle; relative thickness of line to spacing can be changed; and the pattern can be fine or coarse, or anything inbetween. Thus the number of possible patterns is really enormous, and many interesting visual effects can be obtained.

Colour can be selected from a 16 or 256 colour palette, from a 256 grey scale, or from an RGB colour cube. Colour can also be picked up and copied from an object in the main window.

There are a number of other built-in features, including Redo and Undo functions, and a save function (in Draw, compressed Draw or Poster formats).
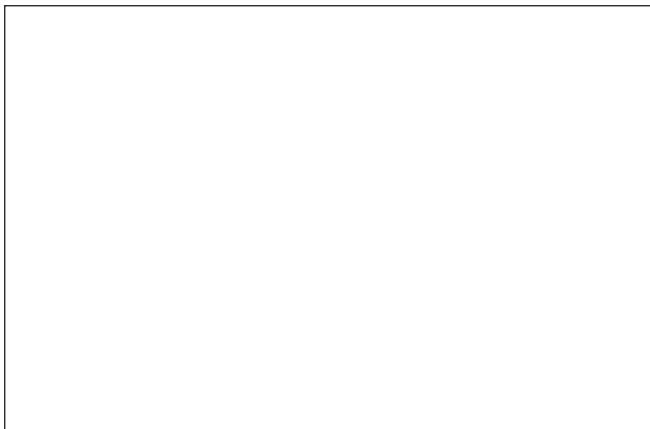

Figure 1. Using Hatchback to shade in a graph from Chartwell. Note the colour and parameters windows.

In use, the package takes little time and effort to master, and there are a number of example files (undocumented) on the disc for playing with. I have one minor quibble, and one rather more significant one: first, the colour editing window uses three radio icons for 256 colours, 256 grey shades, and RGB colour cube. Switching all three off isn t an obvious way to select a 16 colour palette. It could also have easily been changed.

My other criticism concerns positioning. One example file supplied is a map of the British Isles showing counties. Positioning the pointer in one county (and checking the accuracy of this with the Magnifier) resulted in a neighbouring county being shaded in several instances. Apparently this is a function of how Draw handles objects with overlapping boundaries,

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