

CDFast

Richard Hallas tests out a performance enhancement utility for CD-ROM drives.

CD-ROM is an inherently slow storage medium. Even the double-speed drives which are now commonly available seem very sluggish when compared with most hard discs. Any performance increase which can be gained, therefore, is very welcome. The new utility, CDFast, from Eesox claims to increase the performance of most CD-ROM applications significantly by using intelligent data caching

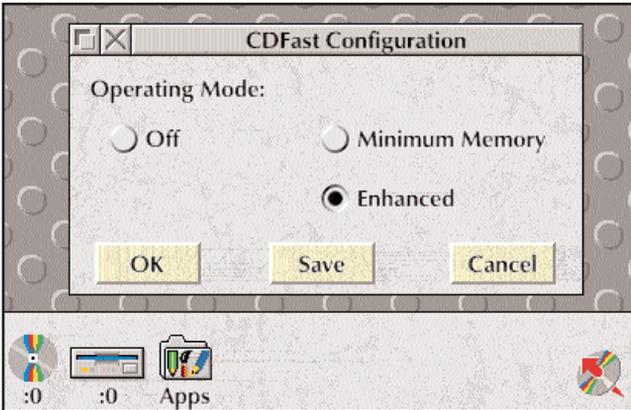
CDFast comes on a single floppy disc in a good quality plastic wallet with an extremely brief but clear user guide. The brevity of the guide, which includes some performance figures, is a good indication of the simplicity of use of the software.

IN USE

All you have to do to load CDFast is to open the disc directory containing it, and the software announces itself with a banner detailing the mode it is configured to use. The utility itself takes the form of a small relocatable module housed in a configuration application. There are three possible modes: Off, Minimum Memory and Enhanced. Enhanced is the default mode, using 36K of memory, whilst Minimum Memory is supposed to give almost as good a performance using only 8K of memory. Running the CDFast application lets you choose which mode to use and saves the choice to disc, but there is no need to run this application other than to change the setting: the small module itself is all you need.

DOES IT WORK?

The performance figures quoted by Eesox concern five tests, ranging from opening a root directory to performing a complex search. The results, taken on average, suggest a speed increase of around 25% for minimum mode, and 35% for enhanced mode.



Configuring CDFast

Timing comparisons in seconds showing percentage improvements resulting from CDFast

CD-ROM Title	Test	CDFAST MODE			
		Off Time	Minimum Time	Enhanced Time	%Inc
PhotoBase Landscapes	Search: Huddersfieldfl		13	12	8 %
ArtWorks ClipArt CD 1	Search Gaddesdenfl	1*	1*	20 %	50 %
Tekkie Disc	Search Wimp_GetIconStatefl	448	142	315 %	322 %
Tekkie Disc	Search BFont charactersfl	750	243	308 %	313 %

techniques.

THE PACKAGE

I tested CDFast on a variety of CD-ROM applications using my Cumana SLCD

interface and 300-series drive. Overall, there was indeed a feeling of speedier accessing, although the extent of the speed-up was difficult to ascertain. The main problem was finding a CD-ROM application which took control for a significant amount of time. CD-Fast can only increase disc accessing speed, of course, not the processing speed of the computer; and the point about most well-written CD-ROM software is that it performs as little searching through disc files on the CD-ROM as possible, preferring to search through index files in memory, precisely because CD accessing is so slow.

Most of the CD-ROMs I possess only spend brief amounts of time accessing the disc, so the search times are brief and difficult to measure. However, the one exception to this is the Tekkie Disc (see review in RISC User 7:4), which has extremely slow search routines and spends a great deal of time accessing the disc (if you are not using its Quick Index feature). I performed two tests using this software, involving searches which took up to 12* minutes without CDFast; with CDFast in operation, the performance increases were striking and very worthwhile. I would also have expected very disc-intensive activities, such as the copying of large files, to be significantly faster; however, I found that copying a 10Mb file was actually slower with CDFast running than without it.

CONCLUSIONS

When I heard about this software I was highly sceptical, but the huge performance increases with respect to the Tekkie Disc have convinced me that it does work, and a slight speed-up can

be noticed with most applications (in fact, with a pre-release copy of the Tekkie Disc software, the

PRODUCT INFO	
Product	CDFast
Supplier	Eesox, 5 Hillfield Road, Comberton, Cambridge CB3 7DB Tel. 0223 264242

