ArtWorks CD-ROMs

Richard Hallas looks at the latest incarnations of CC s drawing package

Computer Concepts has released two ArtWorks CDs, and this review takes a detailed look at them both. The ClipArt CD, the first of the two to be released, has highly varied contents (more than 2000 files) but stops short of including the actual ArtWorks program itself. The ArtWorks CD, on the other hand, includes the entire contents of the ClipArt CD, to which is added the actual

An example from the ClipArt CD

ArtWorks program (version 1.53) and its associated utilities and fonts. In fact, some of the files on the ClipArt CD have been corrected on the ArtWorks CD, with some minor bugs fixed and demonstrations extended. However, the practical differences between the two discs common contents are negligible. The full contents are as listed below.

ArtWorks 1.5
Contained only on the ArtWorks CD, this latest version of ArtWorks possesses a number of enhancements, the most important of which is the ability to handle true-colour sprites (with up to 16 million colours). Like the new versions of

Impression, ArtWorks 1.5 comes with a loader for TIFF files and is fully compatible with the Graphics Loaders (available separately from Computer Concepts), therefore making it easy to load JPEG, Clear and PhotoCD images directly if you buy the extra pack.

A few other areas of operation have been rationalised by way of some extra user preferences: you can now make all new text appear in black (rather than in the current fill colour), and turn off the previously enforced default of giving all new objects the current attributes (such as fill colour, line thickness), using instead the attributes set up in the default state. All the new preference options improve the ease of use of the package without greatly enhancing its facilities. The print dialogue box also has some new features: user-selectable colour tables and a new page size control for PostScript output.

A significant new preference option is the Quick Start facility; previous versions of the program were notoriously slow to load in, and selecting this feature speeds up the process dramatically. On hearing about this new option some time ago, I had assumed that one of the motivations for including it was to increase loading speed from the slow CD-ROM medium, and I was therefore highly surprised to find that it is not possible to load ArtWorks directly from the CD: all that is provided on the CD-ROM is the Installer program, and you must use it to install ArtWorks on your hard disc as before. I was very disappointed by this, having hoped to retrieve a significant amount of hard disc space by deleting my previous copy.

IMPROVED FONTS
Provided only on the ArtWorks CD are the 221 outline fonts. When I bought the original floppy-disc version of ArtWorks, I was rather disappointed by the fonts. The vast majority of them provided only the basic alphanumeric characters, and none of the quality-improvement devices available to Acorn fonts was implemented.

However, I am delighted to say that now, on this CD-ROM version only, the fonts are provided in a vastly superior format to the versions on the floppy discs. They are now in RISC OS 3 format with full kerning data, and full scaffolding and hinting has been applied to improve their quality dramatically. Better

still, they also provide very much fuller character sets than before and include the accented characters (although, irritatingly, some useful punctuation marks are still omitted). Whilst still not entirely up to the standard of fully commercial fonts from a dedicated supplier, they are nevertheless transformed in their quality compared with the previous versions.

The addition of kerning data has been extended to the AvantG, BookM and Pembroke families, the commercial-quality fonts which have been available from Computer Concepts since well before the release of ArtWorks. If you are still using RISC OS 2, the earlier versions of the fonts are still provided on the disc. In fact, all the fonts are provided twice: both in compressed (as per the floppy discs) and ready-to-use formats, which does seem rather excessive.

PORTFOLIO

Common to both CDs is a browser utility called Portfolio. This is a handy little program which can be used to record collections of ArtWorks, Sprite or TIFF files. A single window lets you view your clips one by one in thumbnail form, and gives various items of information about each. This utility is doubly useful for hard disc owners, as you can copy it off the CD and use it to build your own clip-art collections: it will let you browse through any directories which are organised in an appropriate form.

Using Portfolio you can only see one image at once, but a separate window lists all the files so you can go to any one quickly, and a search facility allows you to type in a category. This uses an index file, and makes finding all the pictures relating to a particular topic very easy. You can search for an initial topic and then refine your search to look for sub-categories within the current selection. However, I did wish that it was possible to search more than one index at once; currently you have to treat the ArtWorks and sprite files separately.

The save icon in the main window is more flexible than most such icons, as it behaves like a filer icon: whilst you can drag it to a directory or application to transfer the appropriate file, you can also double-click on it to launch the appropriate application and load it in automatically.

ArtWorks FILES

These consist of the entries to last year's ArtWorks ClipArt competition. There are 703 files in total, including most of the files supplied on the original ArtWorks discs. They are organised alphabetically and cover a huge range of topics and a wide variety of styles. The quality of the files is very good on the whole, and sometimes exceptional. All the competition-winning entries are of superb quality, as are a few others which were not featured even as runners-up.

As for the potential usefulness of the pictures, there are relatively few which fall into the 'gosh, that's just

The Portfolio application in use

what I've been looking for' category, although many are potentially useful given the right circumstances. There are, for example, several excellent fruit and vegetable renditions which could be used on recipe cards, including a beautiful border design incorporating blackberries and bees. There are also several fancy borders of various types, and other small selections of clips which could be useful to DTP users. Many of the files, though, are purely artistic.

The only real criticism I had of the ArtWorks files is that a number of them require certain fonts to be installed. Of course you can still view the pictures with substituted fonts; and, in some cases, the correct font appears as shapes even though the file asks for the font itself. It would have been nice, though, if these slightly loose ends could have been tidied up (at least to stop the computer bleeping at

you).

OTHER RESOURCES

128 full-colour pictures are provided in both Sprite and TIFF format. They are all of excellent, photographic quality with good picture composition.

Most of the pictures are of landscapes, plants or animals, with a few cars and other miscellaneous oddities thrown in for good measure, including a small number of computer-generated images. The files are generally large (often 1Mb or more), and some of the pictures exist in big and small versions. The pictures appear to be home-grown: using Portfolio s search facility with the word Gaddesden leads to sixteen shots of Gaddesden Place (Computer Concepts home base)!

The Matt Black directory contains a few (un-indexed) selections from that company s clip-art library: 56 files over 25 directories. The vast majority of these are small, grey-scale images, but they are often potentially useful and of generally good quality. Be aware also that most of these clips have appeared previously on Archimedes World magazine cover discs.

The FontView application shows samples of all 221 ArtWorks fonts, but isn t a great deal of use to anyone who doesn t own ArtWorks (it s provided on both discs). There is also a rolling demonstration of ArtWorks itself. This is nicely presented, though on my machine at least there was a problem which prevented it running correctly.

no more than 20K during conversion. I found all the claims to be perfectly valid; in comparison with other utilities, the speed of conversion was very impressive, and the quality of the converted image was very high. Comparing the quality of conversion of images between ImageFS and ChangeFSI in 256-colour modes, the results were often apparently identical. Occasionally ChangeFSI could produce a marginally better final image, but really the differences were hardly noticeable.

As for speed, ImageFS consistently performed much better than comparable utilities. For example, it converted in 15 seconds an image which took the Computer Concepts TIFF loader (in Impression) 25 seconds to convert. ChangeFSI took about the same time as the CC loader.

CONCLUSIONS

Occasionally someone writes a utility which instantly becomes indispensable. ImageFS is one such program, and I would consider its purchase essential for anyone who wants to use images from other machine formats. It also opens up the possibility of using CD-ROMs of images designed for other systems, which would otherwise be tedious to convert.

Although I received a pre-release copy, I found the utility to be solid and reliable. A few of the release version s features were yet to be implemented - in particular a super-fast pop-up preview of any image.

Other conversion utilities are not entirely superseded by ImageFS, since they can often provide more options and finer control. Having said that, I found that the results produced by ImageFS were usually excellent, so finer controls would not often be

There is a ColourCard demo, for ColourCard and State Machine graphics card owners, which cycles through a series of impressive full-colour pictures, and an AudioWorks demo which includes sound samples.
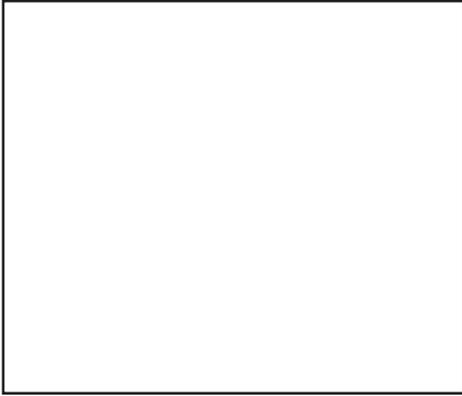
CONCLUSIONS

Obviously if you are interested in getting ArtWorks itself, there is no point whatsoever in obtaining the ClipArt CD, as its entire contents are provided on the main ArtWorks disc. If you intend buying ArtWorks as new and have a CD-ROM drive, there is absolutely no doubt that you should buy the CD version rather than the floppy one: you get more for the same price, and it s far more convenient.

caption

The price of upgrading from the floppy version of ArtWorks to the CD version is effectively the same as purchasing the floppy upgrade plus the ClipArt CD (£10+£20), but for this price you get the vastly improved versions of the fonts, which are well worth having.

As for ArtWorks 1.5, I have to say that the large step-up in version number from 1.2 rather overstates the significance of the new features. Whilst the new facilities are certainly to be welcomed, I would have hoped for something more major (including at least some page rulers) by now.