

Choosing a Monitor for the Risc PC

Lee Calcraft compares Acorn's AKF 60 and AKF 85 monitors, as supplied with the Risc PC

The Risc PC is supplied with one of two monitors: the 14" AKF 60 or the 17" AKF 85. The first, manufactured by Microvitec, has a 0.28 dot pitch, while the latter, from the Philips corporation, has a marginally better 0.27 dot pitch. Both meet the so-called MRP II certification for low radiation emissions, and the EEC Display Screen Directive, though the AKF 60 additionally offers an Energy Star compliant power-saving mode in which power consumption drops to 20 watts when the monitor is not in use.

Both monitors come in a Pantone Cool Grey casing which closely matches the Risc PC, and both have a tilt and swivel base. But there are some differences! The most obvious is bulk: for although the screen diagonal of the larger monitor is only 3" greater than its Microvitec counterpart, it really is rather a big brute. It weighs 21 kg, as against the modest 12.5 kg of its rival, and is all but 17" in height, compared to the diminutive 13" of the Microvitec. This means that if you stand it on a two-slice Risc PC the combined height is a towering 24" - so much for miniaturisation! The Microvitec by contrast sits very neatly atop the Risc PC. In fact it is positively discreet by comparison.

DON'T YOU JUST LOVE TO BE IN CONTROL ?

But with indiscretion comes greater control. The AKF 60 has a set of four controls on the front, allowing adjustments of picture height and horizontal position as well as the usual brightness and contrast. There appears to be no easy way to adjust the width or vertical position, and there are no dedicated adjustments for individual screen modes. Having said this, the model under test largely retained its settings during all screen mode changes.

The AKF 60 and AKF 85 are supplied with the Risc PC 600. They are also available separately from Acorn dealers at £325.00 and £999.00 (ex. VAT) respectively.

However, the Philips monitor does offer a major improvement here. It boasts a 16-character LCD display, and this provides a continuous readout of the pixel resolution of the current mode, which lights up when mode changes are made. Better still, you can fine-tune the settings for each mode, using a simple set of controls on the front panel. Just press a button, and the LCD display lights up and cycles through the options, which include horizontal centring, screen width, screen height, vertical position, pin cushion/barrel distortion, and trapezoid distortion. Each can be adjusted using the Plus and Minus buttons, and the setting can be memorised by pressing a Memory button. This is trivially easy to use, and ensures that in every mode (and there are 15 user definable monitor modes), you can have an utterly square and properly centred picture.

SCREEN RESOLUTION

Both monitors provide SVGA performance, and offer the same set of screen resolutions when used with a Risc PC sporting 1Mb of VRAM:

1280 x 480
1600 x 600
480 x 352
640 x 480
800 x 600
1024 x 768

Additionally, AKF 85 users blessed with 2Mb of VRAM are offered the opportunity of matching pixel resolution to OS units with an ultra-high resolution mode of 1280 x 1024 (which the lack of sufficient VRAM sadly prevented me from experiencing).

In comparisons made in the available modes the heavyweight outperformed its more compact rival in two ways. Firstly, the Microvitec showed a greater softening of focus at the corners of the screen. For example, I found that reading system font in Edit in a 1024 x 768 mode was just a little uncomfortable on the AKF 60 when the text was positioned at the top left of the screen. By contrast the softening effect was almost imperceptible on the Philips.

The second factor concerned the apparent screen resolution in the highest resolution modes. For although both monitors provided a good stable display in all desktop modes, the Philips gave a clearer picture in the more challenging modes. For example, it was no problem to type and edit text in 14 pt Homerton medium in the 1600 x 600 mode on the Philips (in fact I am doing exactly that at the moment). And while this was also possible on the Microvitec, the text was less distinct.

