I'm sure there are many technically minded users who have bought their Risc PCs and are eagerly awaiting some technical documentation for it. Well, Acorn are about to release a supplement to the RISC OS 3 Programmer's Reference Manual which covers all aspects of RISC OS 3.5 as fitted to the Risc PC.

THE CONTENT

Volume five, as the new supplement is called, runs to just over 300 pages and is split into four main parts, each covering a separate aspect of the system:

The kernel
Filing and networking
The desktop
Hardware support

These sections are further split into a total of nineteen chapters.

Those familiar with the current PRM will realise that these new sections correspond to existing sections in the current four volumes. However, at the individual chapter level, the relationship between old and new is more involved. For example, the new volume contains a chapter entitled CMOS RAM allocation, whereas this is currently buried in a global chapter on Memory Management (which also has its namesake in the new volume). Conversely, the new volume lumps the serial and parallel device drivers together whereas they previously had their own separate chapters. Couple this with the fact that the new volume contains only new or changed information, and doesn't repeat anything from volumes one to four, and it is probably a good idea to keep a red pen to hand for marking cross references.

In terms of actual content, volume five covers all the features of the operating system that have changed, or been added, since RISC OS 3.1. For example, topics such as the new dynamic memory management system and the colour picker are covered. Additionally, volume five includes some information that is relevant

The RISC OS 3.5 Programmer's Reference Manual

David Spencer looks at Acorn's technical documentation for the Risc PC.

to older operating systems as well, for example, details of AUN networking. Sadly, documentation of the Internet socket interface, the lack of which was one of my moans when reviewing the RISC OS 3 PRM, and which appeared in an earlier draft of this supplement, has once again been dropped.

ERRATA

Another useful feature of volume five is an appendix containing errata for volumes one to four. Acorn recommend that you take the information from this section and scribble it in the appropriate places so that it doesn't get overlooked - sound advice indeed.

CONCLUSION

There's not much to say here really. If you need to know about RISC OS 3.5 then you need the PRM supplement - end of story. My only comment is that Acorn have in my opinion done the right thing by producing only a supplement and not a complete new PRM, which would obviously cost a lot more. No doubt though, some people will argue that a complete new book would have been better structured. Still, that's life isn't it.

The PRM supplement should be available from Acorn dealers soon after you read this, though the price has yet to be finalised. It has also yet to be decided if the supplement will be included automatically with the RISC OS 3 PRM in the future.