Into the Arc: A Masked Ball

By Mike Williams

In my article in this series in RISC User 7:1 I described a method of creating a stencil, based on text, which could then be overlaid on a picture so that the image was visible through the letters of the stencil. What I was trying to illustrate at the time was the extent to which imaginative use of Paint and Draw combined could create effects that neither of these applications was capable of on its own. What I had to say in that article inspired RISC User reader Terry Nottle of Bishops Stortford. He has adapted my original idea to provide a whole library of masks, which you can use in a similar way, and these are included on this month s magazine disc. They are mostly based on geometrical shapes, and the benefit of Terry s work is that these masks come in very handy in any DTP work where you want to present an illustration in a more interesting frame than the normal rectangular one. The technique is therefore applicable to DTP packages like Impression and Ovation, which can import both sprites and Draw files.

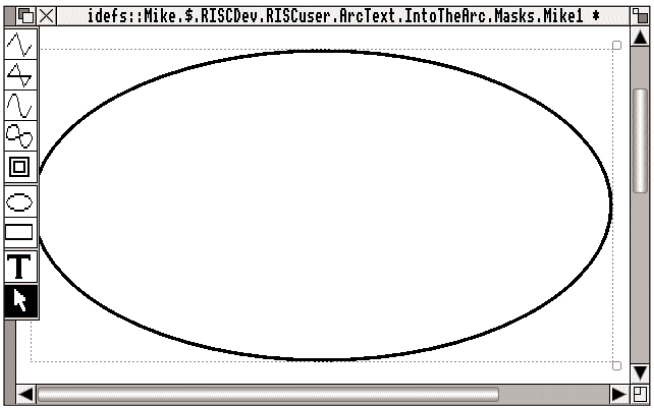

Figure 1. The initial ellipse created in Draw ready to be grabbed and dragged into Paint.

The technique for producing masks for use in this way is not really that complicated once you know how, so it is worth spending some time going over the rudiments of the process. Then, if you have reason to need an alternative to the masks supplied in Terry s library, you can easily set to and make up a mask of your own. As always, the description takes longer to read than the tasks being described!

CREATING YOUR OWN MASKS

Let s look at how we would go about creating a simple elliptical mask. We will assume in this case that we have a particular image (sprite) which we wish to crop to an elliptical shape. We will further assume that all the work is to be accomplished using Paint and Draw alone - alternative approaches are possible where Impression, Ovation or similar are involved, which I ll mention later.

Drag your sprite image into a new Draw window. Then select the ellipse drawing tool and drag out an ellipse of the size and shape required to suit the image. Remember that an ellipse starts from its centre, and that the drag then determines its shape and radius . If you don t get it right first time, either delete the resulting object and try again, or use the bottom right-hand ear (which is visible once you have selected the ellipse) to change its shape and size to suit. Once the outline ellipse is complete, select the ellipse by clicking on it, and drag it away from the sprite to an empty area of the Draw window. While the ellipse is still selected, use the Style option of Draw s menu to set the line width to 2 units - we need to make sure we have a really solid boundary for subsequent fill operations in Paint. That s stage one complete (see figure 1).

Make sure that Paint is loaded on the icon bar. Back in the Draw window click outside the ellipse s bounding box so that this red rectangle disappears. Click with the Menu button over Paint s icon on the icon bar, select the Snapshot option, click on OK , and drag out a rectangle to enclose your ellipse. When the Save box appears, drag the sprite icon directly down to Paint on the icon bar, and the sprite file window will open showing a miniature version of

the ellipse. Double click on this, and from Paint s main menu, select first Show tools and then Show colours from the Paint option.

Select black as the colour, and the Fill tool, and click inside the ellipse, producing a solid black ellipse - this gets rid of the border, assuming we don t want one. From Paint s main menu select Edit and then Mask. You will now find that the Colours window can be pulled down (or scrolled) to reveal a seventeenth colour which is the mask (or transparent) colour. Select this, and in the Tools window select Global (and check the Fill option is still selected). Click inside the ellipse to fill this shape with the transparent colour (see figure 2). This process can take a considerable time to complete, so be patient - it also pays to make sure the ellipse is correct before you start!

Once this process is finished, the ellipse will now look a shade of grey. By using Paint s Save option, drag the mask (in sprite format) back into the Draw window containing the original image. By positioning the mask over this image, adjusting as required, the final result can be achieved (see figure 3).

If you are working with the likes of Impression or Ovation, then simply create two graphics frames which can eventually be positioned one (the mask) over the other (the picture), making sure that the background colour of the mask frame is set to transparent. Drag the picture sprite into its frame, and the mask into the mask frame, and slide one over the other, again resizing and rescaling as required.

Once you begin to get the hang of this process then all sorts of possibilities open up. In our example, the mask has no visible border, and the area outside of the mask is white (thus usually invisible). Both of these could be changed, with a suitable border being created in Draw, say, and an outer colour being applied in Paint. The possibilities are enormous.

USING THE MASK LIBRARY

Terry Nottle s library provides eighteen different masks, and should certainly give you ideas on other masks which you might want to create for yourself. These masks are supplied as a set of sprites embedded in a single Draw file. To try one out, load a picture sprite into Draw, and open the mask library (by double-clicking on its icon, or by dragging the file into Draw). Make sure that the Select tool is activated in the mask library window and click over the mask to be used (a red dashed bounding rectangle should just about be visible).

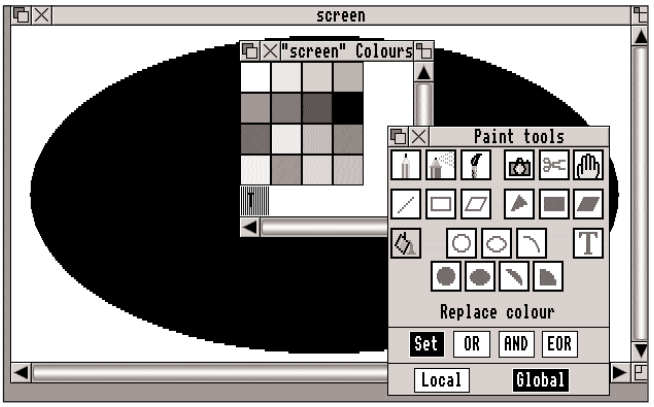

Figure 2. The ellipse in Paint about to be filled - note choice of mask colour, and global fill.

From the Draw menu, use the Save option, and by moving right, the Selection option, and drag the Draw icon from the Save box into the Draw window containing the picture. Provided the selected mask is positioned over the picture the effect of the mask should be clear.

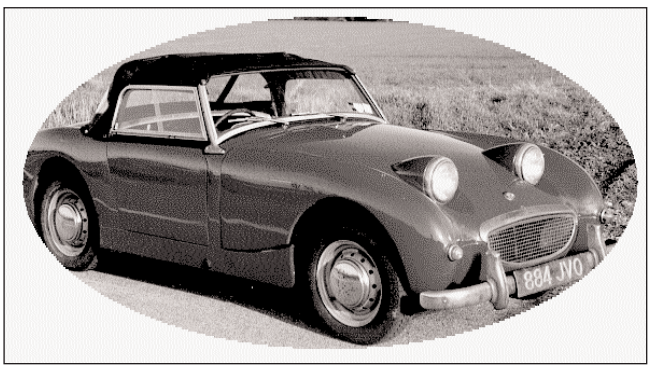

Figure 3. The resulting elliptical mask overlaid over a picture.

You can, of course, resize the mask within Draw, but if you do this other than by quite a small amount you will see the potential disadvantage of pixel-based images. When sprites are magnified, what were smooth images become much more jagged. You will find you get the