

Select and Collect

Looking back at previous Select and Collect articles, several landmark announcements have been used to predict major change in the world of PD; for example the arrival of RISC OS 3.1 upgrades and more recently the Risc PC. Much of the best PD and Shareware is regularly updated due to feedback from users; however, a limiting factor is the proportion of users still using older OS versions or computers.

The Archimedes will be with us for many years more, but as technology at the forefront improves, the minimum configuration of computer needed to use software, not just PD, is gradually increasing. RISC OS 3.1 has become generally accepted as a minimum requirement, with a hard disc and 2Mb of RAM or more being highly desirable.

interest, and in many cases will have an updated version which has not reached your usual supplier.

An increasing trend is for better quality software to be released as Shareware. This is understandable since developing and updating quality software takes a lot of time and effort. Do support Shareware authors by registering software which you use frequently, it will encourage them to keep on developing good software.

Thumbnail

Thumbnail is an excellent new package from prolific author Ian Palmer who wrote WordHound and Image which have been discussed in the past. It provides a very convenient means of cataloguing and displaying picture files of all

sorts, enabling you to choose a picture for a particular purpose very easily indeed.

Simply drag a picture file onto the Thumbnail window and a miniature version of it will be displayed and stored. You also have the opportunity to store a description of the picture and make

various minor changes. It makes use of Acorn's ChangeFSI utility and thus can accept a wide range of bitmap picture formats, as well as Draw and ArtWorks files. The RISC OS 3 Squash module is used to provide compression of thumbnail images if required. Thumbnail is Shareware with a bargain £5 registration fee. Highly

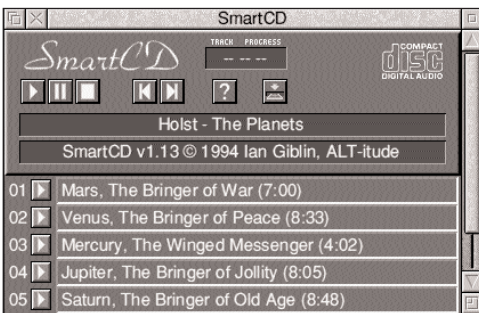
Simon Burrows reviews his latest selection of PD and Shareware available for Acorn machines

recommended!

SmartCD

The medium of CD-ROM is starting to take off in the Acorn World; indeed several CDs containing PD software have recently been announced or published. The CD is already widely accepted in the music world as providing high quality digital reproduction of audio data. Acorn's CDFS software includes an application for playing audio CDs using your computer called CDPlayer. However this only offers the most basic facilities.

SmartCD, written by Ian Giblin of PD group ALT-itude, is a more sophisticated player application. The particular strength of SmartCD is that it allows you to store the title and tracknames of each CD. Whenever that CD is inserted in future, SmartCD automatically identifies it and displays the title and tracknames for you. It includes a range of playing options, including the ability to select individual music tracks by name. By wiring your Acorn computer with CD-ROM drive up to an amplifier and speakers, you can have a system to rival sophisticated hi-fi and audio CD players.

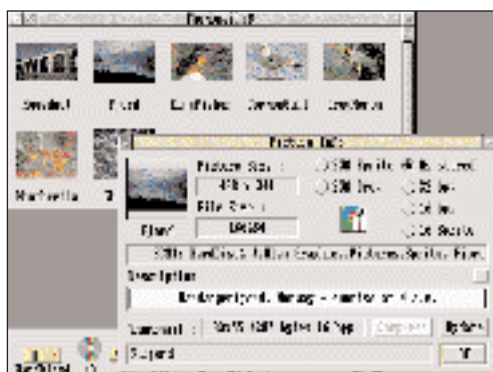


SmartCD

Enhanced Risc PC versions of popular titles are gradually appearing, but sadly a lot of older PD does not function properly on RISC OS 3.5. As usual if you find PD software which does not appear to work on a particular computer or configuration when you think it should, write to its author. Authors welcome your

Wowpixmap

Autostereograms seem very popular at the moment - those dotty pictures with weird patterns which are said to contain a 3D image only visible when viewed in a particular way. Wowpixmap by Tim Brown claims to allow these pictures to be created from user-supplied sprites, either with or without a user-supplied pattern. Once generated, they should be



Thumbnail

printed out as hardcopy for best effect. I must admit to going cross-eyed, literally, trying to make sense of autostereograms, but friends assure me that they can see something...

Risc PC Modes

The Risc PC has brought with it a new way of identifying different monitors and defining screen modes, namely the Monitor Definition File (MDF). These files are difficult to modify by hand, requiring careful calculations to work properly. Two applications have appeared which allow MDFs to be modified, MakeModes by Acorn Customer Services and the PD application CustomRPC by Thomas Olsson. Many of the standard Risc PC modes can be tweaked slightly, particularly if you have 2Mb of VRAM, to create better screen modes for your

particular monitor. Take care, however, to read the warnings contained within the respective applications, since in extreme circumstances harm could be caused to a monitor by badly defined modes.

HourMake

A popular type of PD software is the desktop silly, an application which serves no real purpose other than to show off the programmer's skill and possibly relieve momentary boredom. HourMake from prolific software group Doggysoft is on the borderline between being a useful application and a desktop silly. It allows the hourglass displayed when time-consuming actions are being performed to be modified or replaced, for example

by a rather stylish wood-and-sand hourglass with percentage bar up the side. A series of sprites needs to be supplied for the hourglass, with optional sprites for percentage indicators and hourglass LEDs.

Family

Written by Denis Howe, Family is an editor for family trees. Genealogy seems to be an ever-popular pastime and a computer can help greatly in record keeping, data processing and presenting one's findings to other people. Family is a relatively simple editor but allows detailed family trees to be built up and includes facilities for manipulating GEDCOM format files.

ShareGraph

Another popular use for computers is keeping track of company share prices, but commercial packages can be quite expensive and general

spreadsheet packages difficult to use. ShareGraph by Neil Walker allows the closing share prices of companies to be recorded and saved in Pipedream, CSV or its own special file format. This data can then be plotted as simple graphs which may be saved as draw files.

RiScript

PostScript is a page description language developed by Adobe Systems and used by many high-end laser printers and imagesetters. It is commonly used as a standard for exchanging documents between computer platforms although once created, Postscript files cannot usually be altered. RiScript is a PostScript previewer for RISC OS written in Holland by Roeland van den Bos and Jeroen Medema. The purpose of this is to allow PostScript files (for example, created using the Acorn printer manager) to be displayed on screen to check for any faults or problems without committing the file to printer or film. RiScript goes one step further than this, allowing PostScript files to be converted into Acorn Draw files which can then be edited in the usual ways. While not yet perfect (how much software, let alone PD could be described as such?), RiScript will prove invaluable to PostScript users.

And Finally...

One characteristic of the best PD software is that it is regularly updated by the authors in response to user feedback. It is usually worth obtaining upgrades - for example many of the items discussed in previous Select and Collect articles have since been improved. Sometimes good PD does not appear to reach the mass distribution channels, so if you have written some good PD, don't just keep it to

