

# Abort, retry, forget it

**DOS gets a look in as Tim Nott passes on some handy tips. Plus, the latest accessories for Windows and a close up on the alt key.**

Our embracing of *Hands On DOS* has had a mixed reaction. Hoi Lam, of Hook in Hampshire, says: "Please don't look back to the DOS commands..." Ulrich Schneider, on the other hand, writes from Germany to say: "I am a very keen reader of your contributions to *Personal Computer World*. I especially like the old DOS — er, sorry, Windows 3.1 — Hands On section." Well, Ulrich, flattery will get you anywhere; so the DOS stuff stays.

## Permanent deletion

Ulrich also included three DOS tips, the first of which covers deleting files. As you no doubt already know, deleting a file doesn't remove the data from your hard disk — it just marks the sector available for writing. If nothing has been written to the sector since the deletion, the file can be recovered with the DOS or Windows undelete utility.

But if you truly want to delete a file completely and immediately, Ulrich suggests overwriting it with a series of null characters. The relevant command is:

```
COPY NUL FILENAME.EXT
```

Replace FILENAME.EXT with the name of the file you want to get rid of and use with care.

## No more empty messages

Ulrich's second tip is one I've never seen before and seems to be undocumented. If you add the /F switch to the end of the Shell= line in CONFIG.SYS, then DOS behaves in a rather more friendly manner when you try to access an empty floppy disk drive.

If, for example, you type DIR A: from the C: prompt, and there is no disk in the A: drive, you get the "Abort, Retry, Fai" message. I don't know about you but it

always takes me several attempts to abort, fail or whatever and get back to the C: prompt. With the /F switch (which actually is a COMMAND switch that is passed on by SHELL) DOS gets back to the C: prompt automatically. You can return to the old way by starting a new command processor, COMMAND /D.

Finally, for those for whom every second counts, adding SWITCHES=/F to your CONFIG.SYS file shaves two seconds off the delay when the "Starting MS-DOS..." message appears.

## Accessorise

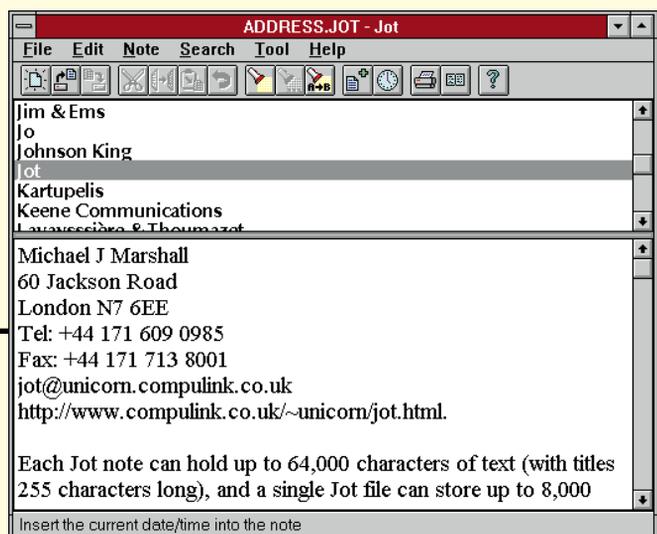
And now to please everyone else, let's get back to Windows. Two version 3.x accessories I continue to use under Windows 95 are Write and Cardfile. I use the former because it is much, much faster than its native Windows 95 counterpart, WordPad, both at loading itself and documents. Rumour has it that Microsoft lost the original source code to Write, which may explain why WordPad is such a dog.

I still use Cardfile for several reasons. The first is sheer laziness. I've had an address book in Cardfile format for more than six years. Since those early Windows 2.11

days, not only has Cardfile remained exactly the same, but I've never found anything that made me want to change. All the personal information managers I've seen, ranging from Organiser to Windows 95 Exchange Address Book, are simply too complicated and too inflexible. Microsoft Schedule, for example, has room for eight phone numbers but no room for an email address.

I like Cardfile because it's quick and easy to copy and paste addresses into other applications, it autodial phone numbers, and if there's too much information to fit on one card, you can open another one with the same title.

This month brought with it two challengers. Both are shareware, both are British and both are available in 16-bit and 32-bit versions. Michael Marshall's Jot 1.2 costs £20 to register. Weighing in at 725Kb in contrast to Cardfile's 91Kb, Jot's first advantage is the size of each record. Each entry can be 64,000 characters long with a



*Jot — a simple database for long-playing records*

### Yet more keyboard tips...

In the June issue, we admired the shine of the Shift key, in July the complexities of the Control key, and this month, in the third and final part of the trilogy, it's time to consider the allure of the Alt key.

#### 1. File Manager

Alt + drag will move, rather than copy, files between drives.

#### 2. File Manager

Alt + Enter summons the Properties dialogue box for the highlighted file or directory.

#### 3. Program Manager

Alt + Enter summons the Properties dialogue box for the highlighted icon or group.

#### 4. Clipboard

Alt + Print Screen copies an image (or screenshot) of the current window to the Clipboard.

#### 5. Write

Select some text in Write, release the mouse button, press Alt, and wherever next

you click the mouse, the text will be copied. Hold down Shift, as well, if you want to move rather than copy.

#### 6. All applications

Alt + <letter> opens the menu which has that letter underlined in the menu bar.

#### 7. All applications

Alt + Tab switches to the next window on the desktop. Keep Alt held down and you'll see the title of the next window each time you Tab — release Alt when it's the one you require.

#### 8. All applications

Alt + F4 closes down.

#### 9. All applications

Alt + Spacebar produces the System Menu — equivalent to clicking on the little bar at the left of the Title Bar.

#### 10. Text entry

Alt + <number> returns the character whose ANSI code is <number>. The numbers must be typed from the numeric keypad and start with a zero. For example, Alt + 0169 produces the copyright symbol ©.

255-character index (Cardfile's limits are 400 and 40). It's also got a much smarter interface than Cardfile, with a button bar, a status line, a time stamp and other goodies such as context menus, a choice of fonts, columns and print preview.

It imported my Cardfile database beautifully, but I was less impressed with the navigation. Unlike Cardfile you can't press Control + Shift + W to go to the start of the Ws in the index. In addition, although the search feature handles wildcards and regular expressions, it doesn't wrap. In

other words, if you're looking for entries containing the word "Scunthorpe" and you start from the Ps, it will only search from P to Z. Finally, unlike Cardfile, you can't include pictures in a record.

#### Clever clogs

The second new offering is Oakley Data Services' SmartAddress V3, a hefty 1.6Mb of executable plus a sprinkling of .DLLs which costs £25 (plus VAT) to register. As the title suggests, this is a specific address-book application although it does include a diary and calendar. It bristles with buttons, tabs and features, and includes auto-dialling, call logging, labels and a DTP-like designer. There's so much to SmartAddress that there simply isn't room to describe it all here, so I'll confine myself to its address book facility.

Each record has five tabbed pages. Address is self-evident, as is the free-form Notes. Reminders

*Smart Address — everything you could possibly need*

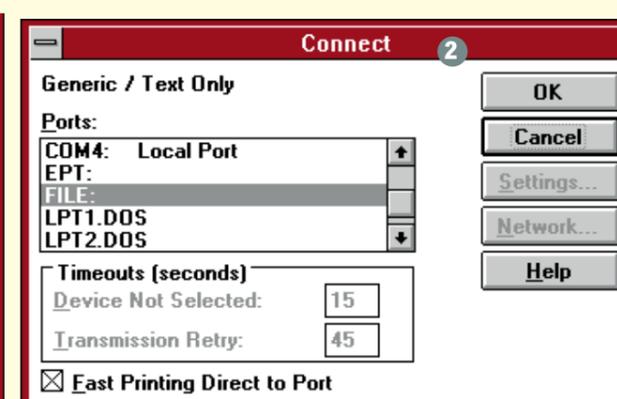
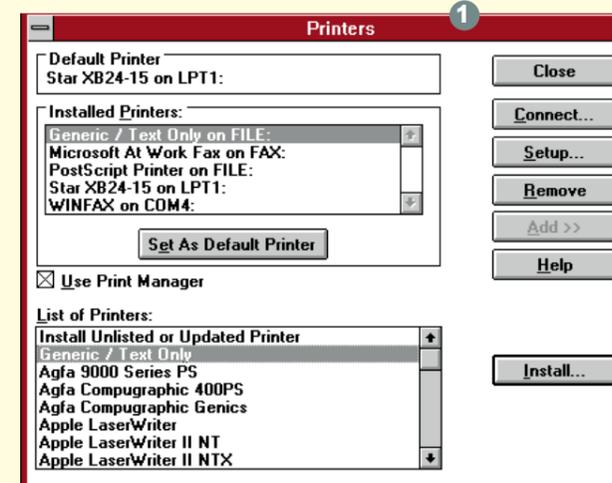
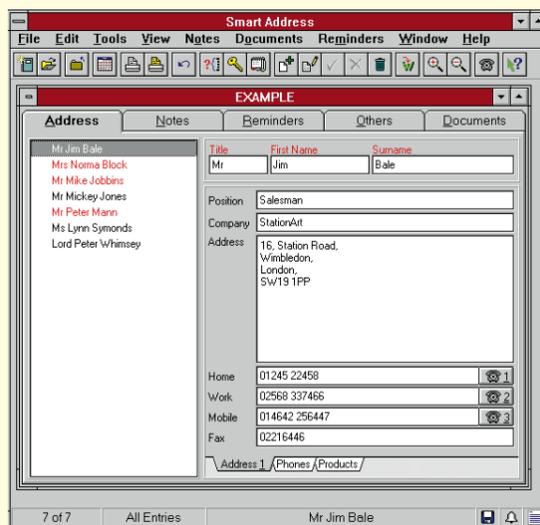


Fig 1 (left)

Installing the text-only printer driver...

Fig 2 (above) ...and

connecting it to "FILE:"

links to the diary and calendar, Others contains additional information such as the date when someone last telephoned you, and Documents lets you add OLE links to any other file. This last facility is great — an accountant could have links to clients' spreadsheets, a builder could have links to estimates and so on.

The address page itself can have additional sub-pages, such as those dedicated to home and work addresses. In addition, you could have another page containing a price list, club membership data or list of favourite foods, for example. These extra pages are defined on a per-record basis, so you can mix and match family, friends, suppliers and customers, all with their own custom pages.

There's a neat feature for inserting an address into a variety of word processors.

Because the data is separated into fields, I could not import my Cardfile, but apart from that hitch SmartAddress seems to have everything you could possibly wish for — other than the ability to show pictures. Both Jot and SmartAddress are on this month's cover-mounted, CD-ROM, so see what you think.

#### Latest export

Finally, although we've had this tip before, it's a very useful one and deserves another outing.

If you want to export a Cardfile as a plain text list, then the simplest way to do it is to print it to file. To do this you first need to install the Generic/Text Only printer driver from Control Panel/Printers. Windows will prompt you for an installation disk: when the driver is installed, hit the Connect button in the Printers dialogue

box and select FILE:.

There are a few options to play with for sending control codes to the printer, or mapping the extended character set, but these are not relevant to this operation.

Go back to Cardfile, and select Specific Printer — Generic/Text Only on FILE: from File/Print Setup. If you open the Page Setup dialogue box you can change (or get rid of) the header and footer for each page. Then select Print All and you'll be prompted for a file name. And that's it — you'll get a text file, which although rather over-rich in leading spaces and carriage returns, is still readable and editable.

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