.Inf Formation

How to purge those troublesome redundant drivers from your system, and Plug-In presents you with a full system enhancement. With Tim Nott.

TWO MONTHS AGO I PROMISED that we'd take a closer look at third-party .INF files and how they can help you weed out redundant drivers from your system. Last month I broke that promise in order to fulfil another one made in December 1993, concerning DDE. So here comes the inf on the .INFs.

On a non-networked Windows 3.1 installation, there are three .INF files used for setting up:
● **SETUP.INF** contains all the general information needed, including lists of all the possible options and where to find the relevant files. If you run Setup from within Windows and choose Add/Remove Windows Components, you'll see the lists — for instance, Wallpaper and Sounds — that are stored in SETUP.INF. It also contains details of the Windows generic video drivers such as VGA or SVGA, as well as the standard mouse and keyboard options.
● **APPS.INF** contains information on third-party applications for setting up the correct PIF and icon settings.
● **CONTROL.INF** contains the list of standard printer drivers and international settings that are set up from Control Panel. The INF files are organised much as INI files, with section headings in square brackets, each containing keynames and values. They can be edited with a text editor, though you'd really only want to change them if you were custom-installing Windows on multiple machines.

No place like OEM
When a third-party video, printer or other hardware driver is installed in Windows
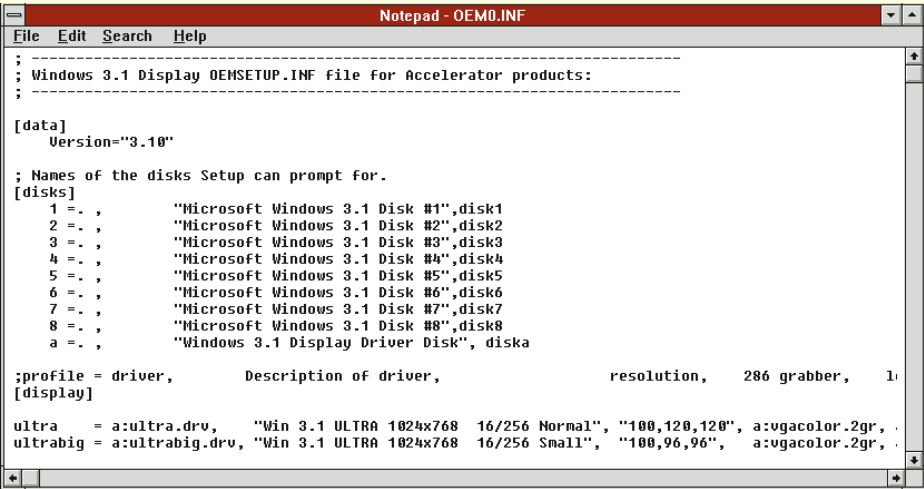
An OEM .INF file in the spotlight

3.1 it should come with its own .INF file, which is stored in the Windows\System subdirectory so it can be read by Windows Setup in "maintenance mode" — i.e. when you're changing system settings rather than installing Windows. If this has the same name as an existing OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) file, then it is renamed to OEMx.INF (where x is a number). These OEMx.INF files are linked to the Windows SETUP.INF file, so that all available display options are listed in one place. So, even if you've removed the driver files themselves, if the OEMx.INF file remains, you'll still see the driver listed as an option when you run Setup.

If you open an INF file in Notepad, one of the first sections you'll see will be "[disks]". This lists all the disks that the

setup program is likely to need, each identified by a number or letter. Obviously this will include the disk(s) supplied with the hardware, but may also include some of the Windows installation disks for resources such as screen fonts.

The next section — assuming we're looking at a display driver .INF file — should be "[display]" and this contains the nitty-gritty on the driver and supporting files. There may be just one line here or several, depending on whether separate drivers are used for different resolutions, or one "catch-all" driver is supplied with a separate utility for switching resolution. Each line is divided by commas into several sections. First comes the keyname or "profile" of the driver, used to refer to it elsewhere. Next follows an equals sign and the disk ID and filename of the driver (.DRV) itself. After that, in double quotes, comes the description — what you see listed in Setup, followed by three numbers that define the "aspect ratio" of the system

Looking Shifty

Some of the following have appeared before in this column, but here are ten really fascinating things to do with the Shift key.

1. File Manager
To tile Windows side-by-side, press Shift + F4.

2. File Manager
To save settings, press Alt + Shift + F4.

3. Program Manager
The same Shift + Alt + F4 trick works here, too. Unlike an unshifted Alt + F4 it doesn't close Program Manager. If you want to make sure the settings stay saved, untick Save settings on exit from the Options menu.

4. Starting Windows
Holding down Shift stops the Startup group from loading.

5. File Manager
Highlight a file, hold down Shift and select another: all those between will be selected as well.

6. Write and Notepad
Shift + Arrow keys selects text rather than just moving the insertion point. The trick also works with the Home, End, Page Up and Page Down keys.

7. Pasting
Shift + Insert pastes from the clipboard — handy for southpaws as you don't have to let go of the mouse.

8. Write
If you highlight some text then hold down Shift + Alt, the selected text will be moved to the location of the next mouse-click.

9. Program Manager
Shift + double-click starts an application minimised.

10. Paintbrush
Dragging a cutout with the Shift key held own paints the image with multiple copies of the cutout.

fonts — generally 100,96,96 for standard VGA or 100, 120,120 for large fonts. Next come five more disk IDs and filenames. The 286 "grabber" (*.2GR) is used for copying data from DOS windows in standard mode, and the *.LGO file contains code for the windows startup screen.

Next comes the Virtual Device Driver (*.386), also used for DOS sessions, followed by the (*.3GR) "grabber" for enhanced mode. There may follow an "ega.sys" entry, but usually this is skipped — you'll just see two commas.

Then comes the *.RLE file, the actual bitmap of the startup logo, as some OEMs like to install their own to remind you that you're using their wonderful equipment. And finally, an optional field to point to another section in the .INF file, that may contain details of other files that need to be installed.

Drive away
So, let's assume you've installed a new video card and want to get rid of the excess baggage from the old one. The first step is to create a "safe" directory and copy SYSTEM.INI and all the OEM*.INF files there. Next, open all the original OEM*.INF files with Notepad. You should then be able to pinpoint the redundant files and move them from the Windows\System directory to your "safe" directory.

If a file appears in both the old and new .INFs, then obviously it's not redundant — most *.FON files, for example, are the Windows standard. Check, too, the optional field mentioned in the previous paragraph: if a separate section appears in the old .INF for this, there may be further redundant files. The entries here have the format: File, Destination, System.ini, Section, Keyname, Value. If a line starts with two commas, it means there's no file involved, but there is a section or key in SYSTEM.INI that can be removed. When you've finished, you can delete the redundant OEM*.INF file — keep the "safe" backups until you're sure everything is working properly. You'll no longer see the old drivers listed when you run Setup.

VGA holds sway
Finally, there may be more. If your old card had its own icon in Control Panel, there will be a redundant .CPL file lurking in the System directory. Alternatively, if there is an icon in Program Manager, you can hunt the .EXE down with the File/Properties... command. It is not a good idea, by the way, to remove the standard Windows VGA driver files — VGA.DRV, VGA.2GR and VGA.3GR.

Plannet Crafter's Plug-In — a customiser's delight
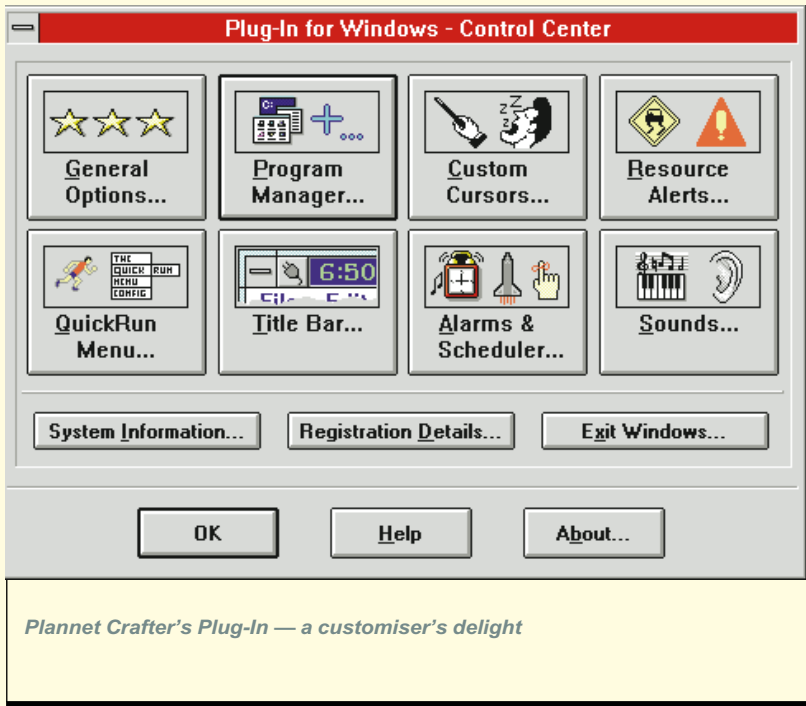
Even if you never use standard VGA resolution, it's a great diagnostic aid. When a program (or Windows) won't run properly, the first thing to try is "does it work in VGA?"

Keep on Plugging

In September 1993 I was raving about Plannet Crafter's Plug-In, a shareware utility that added all sorts of enhancements to Program Manager and the Windows Interface in general. Since then it has won several awards, and this month brought a disk with version 2.6.

You can have nested Program Manager groups, groups can have their own icons, and you can have all sorts of additions — including date, time, resources, memory and disk space — shown in the title bar of applications. You can change the title-bar font, there's a range of wacky cursors and even a talking clock.

A little plug icon attaches itself to the title bar of all applications, with a configurable cascading menu system, so you can run one program directly from another without having to go via Program Manager.

What's really cool is that the menu is also available from a right-mouse click on the desktop, and you can use Plug-In as
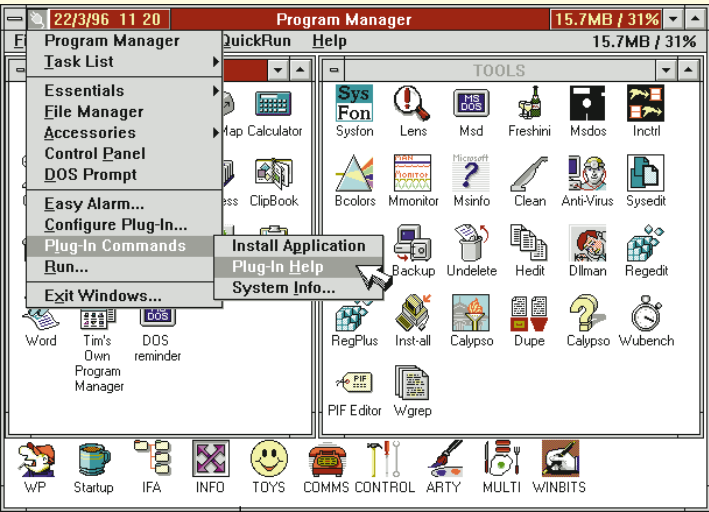
Plug-In's cascading menu allows you to run programs directly without having to go to the Program Manager

your "shell", the program that kicks off and exits Windows, instead of Program Manager. This is a strange experience when you first try it, as you start with a completely clear desktop (Windows 95 users, eat your hearts out). When you right-click, the shell — Plug-In's menu system — reveals itself. It's on this month's CD, or can be downloaded from ftp.uu.net (/vendor/plannet). ■