A **wish** come true

Tim Nott was longing for one of the more useful facilities of Win95 until he discovered that it *was* available for Windows 3.1 — soon his screen was sprouting more buttons than a Christmas panto.

One of the more pleasant aspects of Windows 95 is that you can do practically anything from the common "File Open/Save As..." dialogue box: rename, copy, delete and move files, view them and create new directories. No — there hasn't been a printing error, this is indeed the *Hands On Windows 3.1* column.

Such a feature has long been high on my wish list. In fact, I was going to include it in my "Dear Santa" section until, much to my surprise, I discovered that it already exists for 3.1 users. Even more surprising, it has been around for some time — the version 3.01 that I downloaded from the Windows/Files topic on CIX, dates from May 1994 (although there is a more recent beta version in circulation). With commendable respect for one's system, it doesn't add any files to the Windows or System directories, but adds just one line to WIN.INI and leaves SYSTEM.INI well alone.

Run Instant File Access (IFA) — the authors recommend you put it in your Startup group — and you'll find that your File Open/Save As... dialogues have sprouted a row of buttons and a status bar.

The latter, which is simpler, gives you the number of files, total size and creation date of the selected directory, or the details of a selected file — not vital, but nice to know. Turning to the button bar, this is indeed a thing of wonder: the first two buttons produce lists of recent files and directories accessed by the current application. Next, four more buttons let you rename, delete, copy and move files. Then there is the magic Create Directory button. I've lost count of the times I've taken screenshots in Paintshop, and realised that I should have created a separate directory for them first. This saves the chore of having to stop whatever you are doing to fire up File Manager. Then it starts to get complicated, but fortunately each button has Tooltips which offer a brief description if you hold the pointer over it. More detailed pop-up help panels are available from the Windows 95-style What's This? button.

The authors at Alexoft of Quebec obviously can't leave a good idea alone as there are all sorts of options available for each application's database of recent files. You can make items permanent or display the list in a floating window, and if the application supports different file formats (such as .txt and .wri) you'll get separate lists for each. There's a button to edit file attributes as well as a search and, rather dangerously, replace feature for text within files. Finally, if you have an aversion to buttons, you can access the features through a right-mouse-click menu.

I was going to have a moan about it replacing the "added value" file dialogues of Word and Excel, but they've though of that, too: hold down shift, and the original dialogues appear instead. Instant File Access should be on this month's CD and the documentation also gives Alexoft's Compuserve address: 72154.15@compuserve.com.
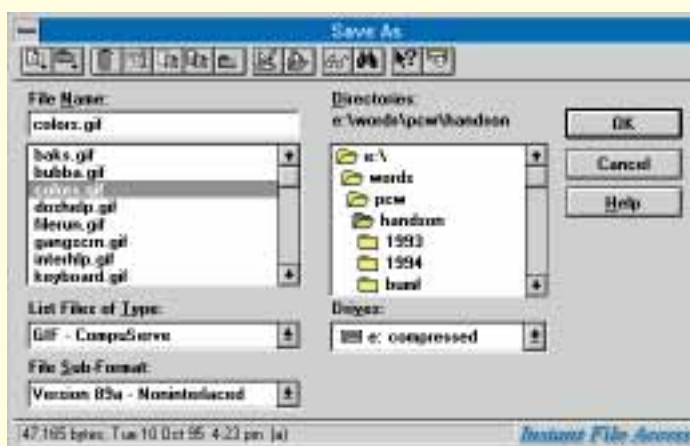
Five easy pieces

Another feature that Windows 95 users can play with is Scraps. These are OLE objects, created on the desktop by dragging and dropping, for example, a selection of text. One use for these is as a multiple clipboard; dragging sections of text in and out of WordPad or Word.

I've often pined for a multiple clipboard — without the inconvenience of having to save clips as individual files — and Ron Cox's Xboard seems just the thing. It's by no means new, judging by the file dates, but it's the first time I've come across it and it comes in both 16-bit and 32-bit versions. It's strictly text only, and consists of a little window divided into five panes; each can be filled from the clipboard by right-clicking, or re-loaded to the clipboard with a left click. And that's all there is to it. Neat, simple and on the CD. It's also

Left *Xboard gives you up to five chunks of text ready for instant access*

Below *All that Windows 95 users have and more, from IFA's common dialogue enhancer*

Top Tips for Windows

Registration Database The registration database editor (REGEDIT.EXE) will show you a list of all registered file types. It's worth going through this occasionally and removing entries that relate to applications no longer on your hard disk.

File Manager You can use the "Select Files…" command on the File Manager "File" menu in all sorts of ways. Entering "b*.*" in the box will select all files beginning with "b". Similarly, "*.EXE" will select all executables. Selections are cumulative so you can repeat the process, or use multiple criteria separated by a comma. "*.WRI, *.TXT, *.DOC", for example, will select all the Write, Notepad and Word documents in a directory.

Colours Mix your own Windows colours by going to Control Panels/Colours. Click the Colour Palette button, then the Define Custom Colour button. Click on one of the 16 empty Custom Colour swatches and define the hue by dragging the cross horizontally across the spectrum. Adjust saturation by dragging vertically and luminance by dragging in the narrow bar to the right. When you find the colour you like click the Add button. To get pure rather than dithered colours you'll need a display card capable of showing more than 256 colours.

Paintbrush You can edit any of the colours in Paintbrush's palette by double-clicking on the swatch. You can then save or reload custom palettes from the Options menu. Again, you'll need better than a 256-colour display to obtain pure colours.

Memory loss If "Help/About…" reports your free memory to be around one-thousandth of what you expected, check the Control Panel/ International/Number Format button. If you don't have a thousands separator defined, then Windows will exhibit this peculiar,

Fine tune your desktop colours from Control Panel

but harmless, bug. It also affects the Word for Windows word-counter, according to which this column consists of just one word.

Christmas wishes

Dear Santa,

Could you please make sure developers carry on developing for Windows 3.1? Not everyone can, or even wants to upgrade to Windows 95. And seasonal good wishes to Lotus, which has just delivered the latest version of SmartSuite, with new Windows 3.1 versions of WordPro, ScreenCam and Organiser.

I'd also like a really, really nice display card. It has to be fast, capable of displaying 65K colours at 1,024 x 768 pixels, with a utility to switch resolution without restarting Windows. That's the easy bit: it must also come provided with both Windows 3.1 and 95 drivers that support all aspects of both platforms, not conflict with COM ports, not throw a wobbly when returning from a full-screen DOS session and not be prone to mysterious General Protection Faults. (That, I realise, probably is asking too much).

An all-purpose drawing package that combines the ease of use and precision drawing aids of Autosketch with the speed, transparency and image quality of Xara Studio would be nice. Let's make it difficult by asking for accurate perspective, as well.

Pure indulgent whimsy, but I'd like a screensaver of a waterfall. This would be written using some clever fractal coding, so it produced a near-photographic image of tumbling water that changed constantly without repeating itself, complete with suitable sound effects. In the same box would be a more tranquil Babbling Brook saver, and another of Drifting Clouds.

I'm only allowed five wishes this year, so I'm going to cheat by asking for a Software Users' Charter. This would provide draconian punishments for companies that release software without an uninstall routine, CD-ROM multimedia titles that copy more than 100Kb to the hard disk, or that don't copy the program icon so that it's lost when you change resolution, and any application that insists that you decrease the screen resolution and/or colour depth before running. Thanks.

Tim

in the Windows/Files topic on CIX, as I have uploaded it there. According to the readme file Ron Cox can be contacted at roncox@indirect.com or 71722.3175@compuserve.com.