



Lying in wait

Howard Oakley remains laserless and disillusioned with Apple shipping delays, so to cheer himself up he considers buying a colour scanner. Plus, top ten SCSI tips.

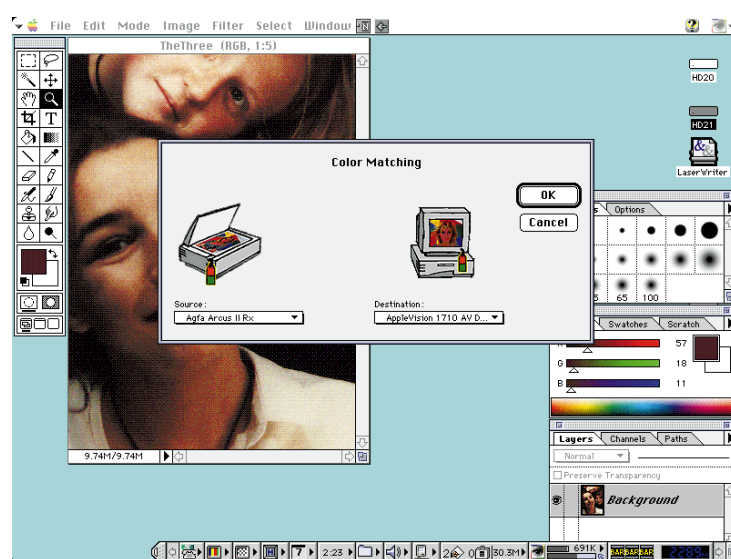
It is frustrating when a product is available yet for the lack of something simple, it cannot ship. Last month, I was still waiting for my new Apple LaserWriter 12/640PS duplex printer, which was to have been delivered imminently. I am still waiting. The delay seems to be because there is no 500-page sheet feeder — a few bits of plastic which condemn me to plod on with my old and highly simplex LaserWriter II.

Similarly, Apple promised many of us its Apple Internet Connection Kit as recompense for the demise of eWorld last spring. Although I have seen and touched this product in the USA, the closest I've come to it here is a series of apologetic letters promising its eventual arrival and tempting me with web sites which I already know, from my long-standing use of the internet, to be overused and choked. A few copies of version 1.0 of the Kits were distributed to dealers but the production run was quickly terminated. I now await version 1.1.5, which is promised for delivery in a few days' time.

System 7.5.5

Apple has been skipping version numbers a lot recently, a worrying trend. Not only has the near-legendary Internet Connection Kit mysteriously leapt from 1.0 to 1.1.5, but we are now being tempted to upgrade from System 7.5.3r2 to 7.5.5, missing an ill-fated 7.5.4. Needless to say, our friends in the US (we should admire their fortitude as beta-testers for later European versions) have been reporting many bugs and incompatibilities, including an accepted inadequacy in the size of the Finder's heap allocation. Thankfully, John Brisbin has

Software support for the Agfa Arcus II scanner is nicely integrated into Adobe Photoshop, and supports professional-quality colour management



produced a control panel, prosaically called "Finder Heap Fix 1.0.1", which fixes this, so if you are brave enough to make the leap to 7.5.5, only to discover the Finder whingeing about there being insufficient memory, download this from an internet archive or CompuServe and rejoice for John's kindness in the face of Apple's myopia.

Although 7.5.5 does have some incremental improvements, including LaserWriter 8.4 and Apple's first serious attempt at high-performance virtual memory I might, for once, watch the dust settle a bit before upgrading.

System 7.6, and 8.0?

News of Mac OS 8 is more encouraging now. System 7.6, internal codename "Harmony", looks due to ship in January, the next step on the long road to OS 8.

What is certain is that it will not incorporate the new customisable human

interface which has been so widely touted since we first got to learn of "Copland". Apple has justly taken great pride in the Mac's human interface, in spite of gathering criticism that it is now old-fashioned and less rich than other, more recent, pretenders. Rather than betraying its principles, it has now decided to hand over power to the user. Knowing, from meticulous experimental work, that clean and impeccably-designed interfaces are most productive, it is giving us the choice of whatever else we want. This is accomplished by the user setting preferences which then become their personal flavour for the interface.

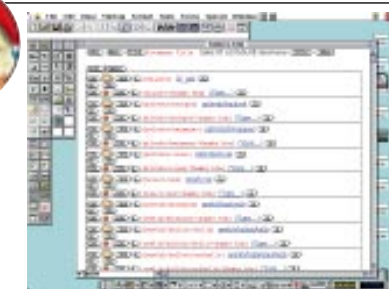
When we can finally enjoy Mac OS 8 in its fullness, we will be able to make it look and behave more like Windows (of 3.x or 95, if not 97, variety), any of the range of Unix windowing front-ends, or whatever. Controls should extend beyond mere

Dear Santa...

Top of this year's Christmas wish-list are those products for which I am still waiting: the Apple LaserWriter 12/640PS duplex printer, Internet Connection Kit and a faster Newton with a larger screen. The last is perhaps the most important as my old MessagePad is rapidly turning into a dead end: given more poke, a screen on which I can write and see more words and do useful sketches, it may be less pocketable, but it will be certainly more useful.

Next (but not first, because of its impossibility) is Mac OS 8. Not for its features but as tangible proof that, in the end, Apple can deliver. To go with it, there should be a sensitive port (to run native on the Power Mac) of Microsoft Word 4 and Excel 4. Both versions had achieved the zenith of their usability, providing good compromises with raw features. But now Word 6 torments me by seemingly being unable to select portions of words, often forcing me to resort to the delete key when the mouse could have done it better. Excel 5 is little better, turning graph production from a couple of mouse motions into an animated display of dialogue drama.

Above all else, I would love to come downstairs on Christmas day to find a really good WYSIWYG web page editor: something technically brilliant like HoTMetal Pro, with its extensibility and parsing potential, but which provided consistent tools for the direct manipulation of tables, frames and graphics. It is a sad indictment of the software industry that no-one has yet achieved this relatively easy goal despite more than ten years experience developing pre-press applications. Adobe's new version of PageMill promises to be a big step forward, but beta versions have had a rough and inconsistent interface and cannot be extended to cope with future enhancements to HTML. What we have to do now is comparable to having to embed raw PostScript in documents to be printed — quite unconscionable.



SoftQuad's HoTMetal Pro 3 is a technically excellent web page editor but has not reached full WYSIWYG standard

appearance, but include some of the features currently offered in At Ease, for instance. A range of standard flavours, intended to start different types of user on their personal quest for GUI nirvana, should provide ideas.

Scan and SCSI

Having been prevented from enjoying my first duplex printer, I had urgent need of a good colour scanner, and was tempted into buying (a novel concept, perhaps) an Agfa Arcus II flatbed model. Not only is this a capable beast which makes my old greyscale OneScanner look like an ageing toy, but it also reminded me of the vagaries of the SCSI standard and the black art required to successfully install a new device.

At first, I hooked it up to the external SCSI bus of my Power Mac 9500 as the sole device. As Agfa provides only one Centronics-type SCSI connector on the Arcus, I placed a terminator between the cable and the scanner: a standard way of ensuring that the bus was correctly terminated at both ends. The 9500 took grave exception to this. Although it powered

up perfectly, the auto-sensing AppleVision 1710 monitor decided that there was no video signal, and refused to turn on.

Driving a Mac without a mouse can be tricky, but when you cannot see the screen at all it is a true test of ingenuity. I could hear the rattling of drives as various extensions were loaded, including FWB's rumbling hard disk callisthenics. Then all went quiet, as the invisible desktop awaited my command while I wondered what to do next. If I shut the power off, I would risk damaging the contents of my hard disks and would almost certainly have to wait for hidden files to be rebuilt when I restarted. So I pressed the Power key which, in my mind's eye, I saw displaying an (invisible) dialogue, in which the default button produced an orderly shut-down. Pressing Return, it was a relief to hear the disks whine down as the Power Mac powered down, in perfect order.

The answer to getting the scanner to work was to remove the terminator and allow it time to complete its power-on self-test routines before turning the computer on. Well, it's reasonably standard, I suppose.

Ten Top SCSI Tips

1. Put a terminator at the far end of your SCSI chain. If the chain is short, it may work better without an external terminator.
2. Avoid using internally-terminated devices.
3. Check that all devices have IDs set between 1 & 6, and that none are duplicated.
4. Keep all cable lengths as short as possible.
5. Use only the highest-quality SCSI cables.
6. Make sure that all connections are home and secure before starting anything up.
7. Never connect or disconnect SCSI devices when any device is turned on.
8. Turn on all peripheral devices first and let them run up to speed before starting up your Macintosh.
9. Shut down your Mac first, before turning each SCSI device off in turn.
10. Keep a copy of SCSI Probe handy in case of problems.

Cheap programming

Macs have always attracted new and experimental programming languages, including Object Pascal (designed for Apple by Wirth) and the purely visual language Prograph (early 68K versions are now free).

There is no shortage of free or nearly-free development systems to enable enthusiasts to start creating their own programs. Among my current favourites are Concurrent Clean and Python. Concurrent Clean is a functional language with an impressive academic pedigree. It is remarkably efficient as far as functional languages go, and to demonstrate this a full-featured spreadsheet and nifty text editor have been written in Clean.

Python enables fuller access in a more conventional syntax (not unlike C) with objects, modules and more. Being interpreted, it is not quick, particularly when crunching numbers, but for this there are specialist mathematical languages, including MuPAD from the University of Paderborn which I will report on subsequently.

PCW Contacts

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Apple Computer 0181 569 1199; web home pages www.apple.com and www.euro.apple.com
System 7.5.5 is available as an update to 7.5.3 from www.support.apple.com.
Agfa Arcus II scanners (around £1,700); Agfa 0181 231 4200
Concurrent Clean from ftp.cs.kun.nl/pub/clean
Python from ftp.python.org/pub
HoTMetal Pro 3 from **SoftQuad** 0181 387 4110