

Pinnacle Liquid Edition 6

PC PRO
A LIST

PRICE £255 (£299 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.dvc.uk.com

VERDICT Much more user-friendly than previous versions, and even more packed with features – all for an incredible price.

For years, Pinnacle lacked a credible answer to Matrox's RT2000 and its successors. But with the acquisition of German video-editing specialists Fast, the company finally had a secret weapon. Although the first few updates of Edition under the Pinnacle label remained niche, with version 5 the software started to show its potential. Now with version 6, it has finally come of age.

As we said in the introduction to this Labs, one of the key differentiators between entry-level and professional software is real-time rendering capabilities. Since version 5, Pinnacle has harnessed the power of your AGP graphics card to accelerate effects rendering. There are, in fact, three types of effect available: GPU- and CPU-powered real-time options, plus the classic non-real-time effects for backwards compatibility.

Canopus EDIUS 2.5 still beats Liquid Edition 6 in terms of raw real-time layers on the same hardware, but Liquid's more sophisticated 3D options and keyframing make it much more flexible. Pinnacle has also re-engineered many



On a fast enough system, Liquid Edition 6 can blend three streams or more of mixed DV and MPEG in real-time – and its capabilities will grow with your hardware.

of the effects to improve quality, so you can't get quite as much in real-time as previously. But with hardware increasing in power all the time, this is only a temporary set-back. In particular, Liquid's use of your system's 3D graphics card will take advantage of the extra bandwidth afforded by PCI Express and perhaps also dual cards in SLI mode, when they're present.

For DV, AGP may already have been fast enough, but Pinnacle is also making claims about



The DVD authoring capabilities within Pinnacle Liquid Edition 6 are a seamless part of the editing process, so you won't have to spend extra on third-party software.

Liquid Edition's compatibility with the MPEG2-based HDV (High-Definition Video) format. The software can edit all manner of MPEG formats, as well as DV and uncompressed video – and even mix them within the same sequence in real-time. With Sony's HDR-FX1 camcorder already on sale, HDV is likely to develop into a favourite format for semi-professionals and enthusiasts. Liquid Edition supports capturing HDV directly, with the appropriate Windows driver for the camcorder. So it's all ready to take advantage of the next desktop video revolution. It can import and export Windows Media Video 9, too, including WMV HD.

A major criticism of Liquid Edition has always been the interface. But Pinnacle has made version 6 more friendly for new users. There are numerous wizards to simplify frequent activities, such as importing media or outputting video. Liquid Edition can now import Pinnacle Studio files, giving users of the entry-level software a viable upgrade path. Best of all, there's a new Windows-like interface, although the classic mode is also available for those familiar with the old style. Liquid still does strange things to your PC, though. As soon as you load it, some white areas, such as Windows Explorer folder backgrounds, turn grey, which can be disconcerting.

Liquid Edition is an unquestionably powerful and responsive editing platform. The effects configuration windows update immediately and

if you stick with the real-time effects, you'll be able to play back the results immediately. Curve graphs are now available to help you tweak your keyframing, and you can apply effects to whole tracks. You can save presets for each of the effects you apply by copying the little icons at the end of the clip and pasting them into

the sequence library. Titling is still taken care of by the capable Title Deko. But new with version 6 is the multi-camera system, which allows you to synchronise up to 16 sources from a live shoot.

There's very capable DVD authoring built-in as well. The menus are placed on a special track on the timeline, making the authoring process an integrated part of editing itself. Plus, you can encode your audio to AC3 5.1 Dolby Digital to save on disk space. Liquid Edition can import unencrypted VOB files for editing – great for redoing DVDs when you only have the finished disc. But we found that some unencrypted VOBs didn't load successfully.

There's one gotcha with the software-only version of Liquid Edition 6: no output of

effects in real-time to DV. Only unedited clips and rendered portions can be previewed. So you can't effectively use your DV camcorder or deck to convert the FireWire signal to analog for viewing on a TV monitor. Instead, you'll need the optional USB 2-attached MovieBox Pro for analog output, which doubles the price. But this is a professional I/O option, with component as well as composite and S-Video interfaces, plus S/PDIF for surround sound. However, outputting to DV tape will require a render, although this is assisted by Edition's background rendering, which gets things ready while you continue to work.

Still, Liquid Edition is designed to work happily with just a PC monitor. Even with no TV screen, the large real-time previews make for a very productive workflow. You can turn on overscan to approximate the effect of the bezel on a TV, giving you an idea of how it will look.

Pinnacle Liquid Edition 6 is a complete package, with comprehensive file format support, including forward-looking options like HDV. It's a great real-time editor, able to mix at least three tracks of DV. And, apart from the lack of real-time FireWire output, its export options cover all bases, with particularly good DVD authoring. To cap it all, it's nearly half the price of Premiere Pro 1.5.

PC PRO RATINGS

EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★