

# Write-Back

## A CAUTIONARY TALE

Thinking of buying a computer? Consider first the following tale of the secretary of a local residents action group. Since buying a computer, he rarely puts pen to paper. Before owning a computer he rarely put pen to paper either, preferring to enlist his wife to do it for him. The advent of the machine has greatly enhanced her quality of life. Letters used to be hand-written and carbon copies filed in the loft. The computer has not only saved the increasing dangers of the roof timbers collapsing, but searching for a document no longer necessitates changing into overalls.

However, the actual process of the wife writing the letters was accomplished speedily by hand, being perceived as an unpleasant job. Ironically, when using the computer it takes him far longer to do the job. Fonts and layout all have to be fiddled with before perfection is achieved.

The model chosen was an A5000, largely because of its compatibility with the BBC Master already owned (which was rarely used as he preferred not to get his spanners out if he could help it). He found that his daughter had an Archimedes in her classroom making it a simple matter to bring work (and viruses) home.

One of the principal losses of introducing the computer is the lack of space in the bedroom. The machines have taken over, though it's handy in the case of insomnia. The drain on personal income is considerable as the machine is hungry for new fonts, clip-art and the latest video

digitiser. The computer is still not as good as the old system, however, as it has to be operated manually in situ. The old system worked very well from the bath or with eyes shut in the hammock in the garden.

The computer has made a considerable impact on his life besides word processing. Games, desktop publishing and flight simulators take up valuable time which would otherwise be better spent catching up on vital television viewing. Hours now drift by in seconds as he attempts to make sense of the latest article in RISC User. Even a degree course he undertook was based around the educational aspects of computing. He became more and more hooked. To summarise, the advent of the computer not only changed his life to an incredible degree but has resulted in him spending more time, effort and money on the simple job of letter writing than he did before. The final result is, of course, more aesthetically pleasing. His wife now has enough spare time to do all those useful little jobs that never got done before like waxing the dog, varnishing the tortoise and taking the goldfish for a walk.

This is a true story - I know, I was that wife!

Hazel Thompson

## FAN MAIL

I note with interest your reference to the A4 postable (sic) under A4 Window Dropping on page 58 of RISC User 7:7. I presume that this is a variant of the

Risk PC we've all been hearing a lot about, so called due to the risk of damage as it drops through your letter box, or even worse, as it drops from a window as the article's title suggests?

Pete Bready

We think this may be Acorn's long-rumoured new machine codenamed Frank. It uses letter-box screen modes and the Courier font, has an enhanced ENVELOPE command, produces mailmerged documents in a jiffy ... and I'm about to get the sack.

## STYLE DOESN'T ALWAYS IMPRESS

I was very interested to read in Good Impressions (RISC User 7:6) that Richard Grant likes the new facility in Style which enables text to be highlighted by holding Shift and a cursor key; this is the facility that I hate and detest! Not that it is bad in itself but because it has taken away the absolutely invaluable ability to move from word to word using Shift and left or right cursor; I am now forced to use the mouse. I suggest that moving from word to word is needed far more frequently than highlighting?

Style is a splendid program and (mostly!) nicer to use than Impression II. However, another grouse concerns the change made to the method of selecting text. This used to be Ctrl-T, but now it's Ctrl-A which is consistent with Draw and ArtWorks ... BUT did the person who chose to make this change ever try it beforehand on a keyboard? Time and time again both I and my wife, who are

reasonably competent typists, hit Ctrl at the same time as A; the next thing one knows is that the screen contains just a few characters - everything else has gone! Ctrl-A selected all the text, and the next character typed replaced it - at least Impression II asked if one really wanted this!

It's easy to put back, of course - just reposition the cursor and type Ctrl-V (unless there has been an autosave!!); and CC point out that Ctrl-A can be disabled by defining a new style that does nothing and having Ctrl-A as the short cut - this

is fine except that select all is useful!

The obvious answer is to buy a Risc PC with a keyboard that has put Ctrl safely out of the way - perhaps CC would make a contribution to the cost?

Peter Bond

You have raised one of my own favourite grouses. I used to have this problem with Ovation, and I was seriously ready to throw a brick at the computer after years of the Ctrl-A problem (though at least Ovation

asked for confirmation if there were more than a few characters selected). I was delighted when Ovation was updated so that Ctrl-A would only work with the right-hand Ctrl key (and as a bonus, Ctrl-O was added as an alternative to select all the text). Another solution would be to use Quantum Software's KeyStroke to redefine Ctrl-A to do nothing, and define another key sequence (Alt-A perhaps) to take over its function.



## PinBoard

### SPECIAL NEEDS

I currently run a computer loan scheme based on Acorns across Devon and Cornwall. We make available an A3000 or A3010 with a range of software geared not just to the needs of the individual with a disability but to the whole family so that they can experience the benefits for 4-6 months and realise for themselves the opportunities that computers can offer. My own experience in this field comes from working with adults with a wide range of disabilities, and being the father of a 7 year old daughter with Downs syndrome.

The scheme has been running very successfully for 4 years and many of the families who have used the scheme have gone on to purchase their own systems. They keep in touch and form a kind of loose user group that I can call on to assess software and review products for our national newsletter. As word gets around I am increasingly being approached by families around the country who either have an Acorn purchased specifically for a child with a disability, or are considering getting one. I do my best to assist where possible but obviously time and resources are limited. I have recently been involved with setting up another loan scheme in the Bristol area and would be keen to hear from any teachers or Acorn enthusiasts who might be willing to offer occasional assistance to complete novices in that area.

Software available for young children is very good, but finding suitable software for older children and adults is more difficult. I am sure that this is not a unique problem and that there are lots of teachers and enthusiasts who have written programs to meet the needs of individual children or relatives.

I am keen to establish some kind of forum for individuals with a learning disability and those who live and work with them. I would be pleased to hear from anyone using computers in such a situation with a view to sharing knowledge and experience. I am also keen to contact anybody working with Widgit's GridIT, with a view to looking at anything they have written. Finally, I would like to purchase some small hard drives to cut down on the need for people with poor coordination to manipulate floppies. Perhaps someone upgrading to a larger drive would consider offering us their old 20Mb or 40Mb drives?

Bob Black

Anyone wishing to help or establish contact with Bob can write to him at Computer Loan Scheme, 4 Fairfield Road, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2DN.

### CLICKETY CLICK

Can anyone tell me where I can find a good click for a metronome program I have written? The best I've been able to do for a click is 1/20 second of a percussion voice using the SOUND command. This is not nearly as incisive as the click of a traditional, or even an electronic, metronome. None of the voices in Rhapsody seem any better, and its beat option sounds just like my 1/20 second of percussion. I am aware of the possibility of defining new voices as explained in the FRM, but am reluctant to tangle with this.

George Toulmin

If you can help, write to us and we'll pass the