RANDYS RUMOR RAG

MISCELLANEOUS

WordPerfect is beta testing a new WordPerfect Executive. This program hasn't seen an update since May of 1987, so it's about time.

Included will be LetterPerfect, communications, database, spreadsheet, and fax applications.

Novell's new Netware Lite is apparently having some difficulties, especially when trying to run Windows. Performance is poor and some say that even DOS performance is nowhere close to the more expensive Novell packages.

WINDOWS NEWS

I hear that Borland's demonstration of Quattro Pro for Windows at Comdex was interrupted by applause when the demo was halted by an Unrecoverable Application Error.

I went to order my upgrade to Ventura Publisher and was told that the product would not be available until January - after I've seen full-color two-page advertisements in all the magazines for the last month.

Real mode will be dropped entirely when Windows 3.1 debuts soon. So what's the loss?

By the time you read this, Adobe Systems will have released a new version of ATM which supports Windows 3.1. Features will include additional printer support for PostScript and LaserJet III printers, modified font installation routines, and improvements to font rendering speed. According to Adobe, ATM 2 runs twice as fast on 386 and 486 computers. Since Type 1 fonts appear to compete with Windows upcoming TrueType technology, "We want to make it clear that Type 1 fonts will co-exist with TrueType [and] that it is absolutely compatible." says John Kunze, director of product marketing for Adobe's applications division. Upgrade price to current owners will be $27.50.

Borland has introduced a new product called Screenery. Included are wallpaper designs, screen saver routines, and product icons. Wallpaper images include an Escher-like scene, Polynesian tikis, parched sand dunes, an ornate Chinese dragon, and a jazz jam session. Retail price is $34.95 and free with registration comes an additional disk of more wallpaper, icons, and screen savers.

Looks like Microsoft may not have done a thorough job of beta testing with their new Entertainment packs. When playing Tut's Tomb, I've had several occasions where I'd select a card from the pile and it would highlight the one underneath.

Hewlett-Packard is delaying release of NewWave for OS/2, but the Windows 3.1 compatible version will ship on time. HP says that development has been scaled back on the OS/2 product, but it has not been abandoned.

OS/2 NEWS

Things are getting itchy waiting for the new release of OS/2. Apparently, WordPerfect, Lotus Development, and Micrografx urged IBM to wait on shipping until all the promised functionality could be fully implemented and tested. Of course Microsoft continues to poo-poo the whole thing, so the war and the wait rages on.

I think of a joke I heard recently. If IBM had designed the phone system, every time you added a new phone, everyone in the world would have to hang up.

Speaking of OS/2, I finally managed to install Version 1.3. It would not install with only 12 megs of memory, but when I got the system up to a full 16 megs, it finally went. I guess it's an OK operating system, but it's tough to judge when you don't have any applications. The speed seems decent enough, but it's like a mixture of Windows 2.x and Windows 3 with not enough of Windows 3. This thing takes 19 1.44M disks, but without the LAN Requestor, Communications and Database Managers, you only use eight of the disks. IBM suggests that you have 16 MB of free hard drive space for the Base Operating System. That's a bit much to ask of anyone, I think. But if OS/2 1.3 is any indication, I'm still keeping my mind open about Version 2. Jeez, I hope they do it right.

WORDPERFECT FOR WINDOWS

The wait was worth it!

You've all heard the specs for months so I won't go into detail there. I think it better if I just give some of my impressions after working with the software.

Installation is done through DOS, similar to other WordPerfect products.

I don't like GUI word processors. Ami Pro is nice, but the icons are too cryptic

to figure out. Word for Windows just plain sucks like it's DOS cousin (I haven't seen Version 2 yet). But WordPerfect has done it right. When I load a word processor, the last thing I want to see is a busy screen. I don't want to see a bunch of menus, borders, or any other crapola.

The Button Bar can be turned off, but even with it on it is not imposing. I do feel that having the Ruler displayed tends to make the screen too busy. You're probably best turning it on only when you're going to use it.

With most Windows word processors, when you type something the current line flashes as the program attempts to update word and character spacing. WPWin doesn't do that - in fact I can't out-type it.

The File Manager is a work of art, sure to imitated by others in the near future. I like the Viewer which lets you preview not only documents, but also graphic files. Moving through your directory tree is also easy, as are copying, deleting, and moving files.

I've only gotten a UAE once - while trying to print a DOS 5.1 document. When I switched to the WordPerfect printer driver, everything was OK though.

I've also noticed that the speed can slow down if you're running other tasks. But my biggest concern is with hardware. I've installed WPWIN on SX systems, and if you've only got 2 megs of RAM, it pages to disk too much to be productive. An upgrade to 4 megs or more makes the situation better. Also, be aware that if you install the complete package (with tutorial, sample macros, and graphics) it will eat up 9 megs of hard drive space.

There are some anomalies I've found that need to be corrected. Sometimes the typing is slow to appear on the screen, my default font changes sometimes and needs to be changed back, but overall they've done an excellent job in bringing their DOS product to a graphical environment. Try it, you'll like it!

PC WORLD - HUH?

The current issue of PC World highlights pieces of hardware that they think are what you should buy. Their choice for CPU is the 486SX. Huh? Who would buy this piece of crap invented by the marketing department? Since when do the marketing nerds control technical development? I'm getting really torked at the TV ads which show a close-up camera roaming through the innards of a computer, ending up at the CPU with a big motel- like vacancy sign pointing toward the co-processor socket.

And speaking of magazines, I've never really cared for PC World anyway.

Their articles are too superficial without any real substance. They don't tell you anything.

I've always preferred PC Magazine. The articles contain plenty of information, although I can do without some of the more esoteric theme issues (Lan-Fax-Pen-Notebook special issues). I've also found it odd that products from major advertisers are rarely given poor reviews . . . hmmm. But overall, PC Mag has an excellent blend of technical information, reviews, and information on new technology. Of course, the first thing I read after tearing out 5 pounds of inserted advertising, is Dvorak.

One of the newer magazines that isn't too bad is PC Computing. It's put out by the same people who do PC Mag and many of the regular columnists cross over. Dvorak vs. Seymour is typically pretty good. The articles aren't as technical, but there are usually some good tips on various subjects ranging from memory management to software tricks. It's a good expenditure of three bucks.

The Windows Magazine isn't too bad, although some issues are better than others. The focus is, of course, on Windows with reviews and information on the explosion of Windows hardware and software.

There's another magazine called PC Publishing that has really good information for those who are into desktop publishing. The subscriptions aren't too pricey and the illustrations are printed on good quality stock.

TELL ME WHY

Can anyone tell me why you can't import an XLC file into any Windows application? Each month, I have need to create a report which contains a graph. Being a Windows person, I've been using either WordPerfect in combination with Ventura Publisher or PageMaker. When I try to bring in an Excel chart through the clipboard, the alignment on the labels usually gets messed up and I have to resort to using a dedicated charting program. Why doesn't anybody allow you to import an XLC (Excel chart file) directly?

The same thing goes for Corel Draw. As popular as Corel is, you'd think that somebody would be able to use a CDR file.

WINDOWS 3.1 UPDATE

Beta testers report that the latest beta release of Windows 3.1 is very stable and has several new features not found in earlier beta versions.

Among the new features are an interactive tutorial, an object packager for embedded or linked objects, a character map utility for inserting special characters into documents, and a registration information editor that maintains a database holding information about applications. Apparently, performance boosts are very evident also. Networking has been improved. The product is expected to ship on time (whenever that is).

Beta testers are raving over the new file manager which not only is faster, but supports multiple windows and works well with network drives.

Unrecoverable Application Errors are nearly eliminated with selective reboot as I mentioned last month.

The registration information editor is a critical component of the new printing powers built into the new Windows. With 3.1 you can drag a document icon, drop in on the print manager icon, and the document will print. The print manager uses the registration database so it will know which application to open to enable printing of the file.

The object editor, located in the program manager's accessories group, is a utility used to create a package, which is then inserted into a document supporting OLE. A package "is an icon that represents an embedded or linked object" according to the Windows 3.1 online help documentation. Double clicking on such an icon invokes the application associated with the embedded or linked object.

Look for all of this to happen sometime in the first quarter of 1992.

INTEL-LIGENT ALTERNATIVE

Have you noticed the price on math co-processors? These things are getting to the point where they're almost worth it.

Well, I couldn't resist and recently bought one. I have a 386-33, so I knew it wouldn't be cheap. But do I buy a real Intel chip or one of the others like IIT or Cyrix?

I decided on the Cyrix and to date have experienced no compatibility problems. The FasMath co-processor works great and seems to be faster than the Intel chips I've installed. I have found one program that won't work with it, however. The Intel 387DX diagnostic apparently looks for some type of Intel signature and refuses to continue. It figures . . .

Unless you have need for AutoCAD math, I'd recommend against buying one of the 121-pin enhanced co-processors. Unless you have need of such a

thing, you're going to pay about double the price. Spreadsheets don't need that kind of power.

MODEMS EXPLAINED

MNP

MNP (Microcomm Network Protocol) levels 1-4 are methods of error correction in which the two modems connected verify the integrity of the data transmitted. Error correction is required for several streaming protocols such as Ymodem-G in which the protocol sends a constant stream of data and lets the modems do the error correction. This requires a clean, noise free line as streaming protocols will abort if line noise interferes too much. These MNP Levels are used in almost all High Speed Modems Made today, But Just because two modems both have MNP it does not ensure that they will both talk to each other (at over 2400 baud).

MNP Level 5 is for data compression. Since All BBS's have their files archived in ZIP, LZH, GIF or some such compressed format (try to ZIP a LZH file), MNP5 can actually increase the overhead by attempting to compress the file further. Therefore BBS's leave MNP5 turned off, and so should the BBS callers.

HST

HST stands for "High Speed Technology" - a method of communicating at high speeds whech was developed by US Robotics in 1984. HST is a proprietary method so currently only US Robotics is allowed to Make HST Compatible Modems. The original HST modems were 9600 bps by using a 9200 bps channel in one direction and a 450 bps "back channel" in the other to send ACK/NAK signals for confirmation of data - a half duplex mode - often referred to as "ping-ponging". In 1989 USR improved the HST to run at 14400 bps by further optimizing their proprietary method. All HST's sold now include the 144k speed as well as the original 9600 mode. Because the HST 14.4k is a raw speed, It allows the HST to transfer pre compressed files such as ZIPs at faster speeds then any other 9600 modem: over 1700 Characters per second.

The HST has become the "BBS-Standard" in high-Speed Modems. More BBS's use the HST then any othe type of modem, including the V.32.

As of January 1st 1991 all HST modems also include the V.42/V.42bis error correction and data compression (not to be confused with V.32).

The HST's can also be upgraded to the HST "Dual Standard" allowing it to also be V.32bis compatable. The price is significant for this upgrade however, and in very few cases is any speed gained.

V.32

V.32 is a 9600 Baud standard that was established by the CCITT back in 1984. V.32 is full duplex (9600 bps in both directions at once). Normally this would be impossible, but using a technique called "echo cancellation", one modem can filter its own tones from the phone line, enabling it to pick out the signals from the other modem. However, echo cancellation requires that high speed modems include built-in digital signal processor (DSP) chips, which is the main reason V.32 and V.42 costs so much.

V.32 also includes a fallback to 4800, if line noise becomes a problem at 9600. The V.32 standard also provides an optional error-reduction sceme, called "trellis-coded modulation (TCM). TCM allows 9600 modems to check for transmision errors with a redundancy bit, which results in fewer errors on noisy lines. Most V.32's include this option, but some do not.

V.32bis

It was first realized in 1989 that it is feasible to push V.32 up to 14,400 baud, the same speed as the HST now runs. This requires even better echo cancellers and an overall improvment in reciver quality, so it will be more costly to produthen the V.32 to produce. V.32bis has not yet officially been finalized CCITT, but as of January 1st US Robotics has started shipping a new

version of their Dual Standard Modem which includes V.32bis in an early but functional form. USR plans to update their DS ROMS when the CCITT actually release the completed V.32bis specification, scheduled for mid 1991. It's expected that other Modem manufacturers will not be able to offer the V.32bis technology untill the 4th quarter of 1991.

V.42

V.42 is nothing to do with actual modem speed, but how how the error correction and data compression schemes interface. When the CCITT approved V.42 in 1988, they desided to include two differnt error correction and data compression schemes. The first one is MNP,(short for Microcom Networking Protocol). MNP classes 2, 3, & 4 which handle error correction. Note that MNP-5 was not included in the V.42 standard because it is only used for data compression. MNP was made an offical standard due to the large number of modems that currently use it. The Second method is the prefered method, known as LAP-M (Link Access Protocol-Modem). A modem with only MNP is called "V.42 Compatible" and one with LAP-M its known as "V.42 Compliant". If a V.42 Compliant connected to a V.42 compatible, it would first try to Handshake with LAP-M, and after it relized that the othe modem is not Compliant, it would try the MNP Method, and they connect.

Most V.42 modems are fully V.32 compatable, but they do NOT have to be, according to CCITT guidelines. So when purchasing a V.42, make sure that it is really a V.32 Modem that is also V.42 complient or compatable. There are now some 2400 baud modems which are also V.42bis compliant, so since the LAP-M gives 4:1 data compression they are advertised as "9600 throughput", which really can be misleading and confusing.

V.42bis

V.42bis is a new CCITT standard for data compression techniques, which was appoved in late 1989. To Support V.42bis, a modem MUST support both LAP-M and MNP-5, unlike the Standard V.42 in which LAP-M is only an option. V.42 provides a maximum data compression of 4:1, giving a 9600 bps modem a throughput up to 38400 bps. MNP only offers 2:1 Compression. Like MNP-5, LAP-M and V.42bis will not be effective when transfering compressed files from BBS's, such as ZIP files. Since V.42 is implemented in firmware, many V.42 complient modems can be upgraded to V.42bis with a new ROM.

Speedmodem

A less expensive method of 9600 bps communication can be achieved without using the CCITTs method of "echo cancellation", so that the a digital signal processor is not needed, making the cost much less expensive. This method is used on the Compucom Speedmodem. The Speedmodem also

uses Dynamic Impedance Stabilization (DIS) to increase the relability of the telephone interfaces signal-to-noise ratio of the telephone line by increasing the clarity and power of the signal, and automatically compensating for impedence variations on the phone line. This reduces the probibility of line noise, allowing the Protocols to transfer files with less overhead It also has a faster fallback rate of 7200 bps if too much line noise exists for 9600 communications. This makes the Speedmodem stand up to worse line noise conditions at a faster rate then V.32 can handle.

The Speedmodem is also a 9600 bps Group III Facsimile, so with this modem, you can send document and scanned images as a Fax, as well as recive Faxs. It supports BitFAX by Bitcom and any other 3rd party FAX software which uses the standard CCITT AT-FAX command set.

A Data Compression called CSP (CompuCom Speed Protocol) is used to yeld a compression of up to 4:1, giving a throughput of up to 38400 bps. This however, like MNP5 will not be effective when transfering compressed files from BBS's, such as ZIP files.

DIS and CPS are proprietary methods owned by CompuCom, Sunnyvale, CA. Because this modem is inexpensive more people can afford to buy it, and since its both a FAX and a Modem in one, it should gain popularity quickly. It is still a new product, but hundreds of BBS's are showing support for it.

What Next?

By mid 1991 the V.32bis standard will be finialized, and by that years end the several 14,400 Bps full duplex modems will be on the market. There is already talk of the CCITT releasing another standard in 1992, which will be for 192,000 bps. Since these modems are expected to cost consideribly more then the V.32s currently on the market, they will be out of the price range of most BBS users. •