Review: Delphi RAD Pack

Can't live without it?

reviewed by Bob Swart

If you've worked with Delphi for a while then you can't help but notice that there are a few areas where it might benefit from a little extra support, such as debugging, Windows resource files and an ObjectPascal language reference manual. In that case, you're not alone and Borland seemed to agree when they released the *Delphi RAD Pack*: a collection of add-on tools and manuals for Delphi 1.0.

The Delphi RAD Pack consists of the following parts (one CD-ROM and a total of six additional manuals):

➢ Printed Object Pascal Language Reference Guide,
➢ Resource Workshop,
➢ Resource Expert,
➢ Turbo Debugger Version 4.6 for Windows (with Turbo Debugger User's Guide for Delphi),
➢ Visual Component Library (VCL) Source Code,
➢ Visual Solutions Pack 1.1 (which includes the Visual Solutions Pack Reference Guide, Visual Solutions Pack Delphi Users Guide, Visual Solutions Pack dBase User's Guide and Visual Solutions Pack C++ User's Guide),
➢ Delphi 1.01 Patches.

At first sight, this is an impressive list of add-on tools and manuals. But are they really as useful as they seem to be, or are they merely a collection of programs, put in a box with the label *Delphi RAD Pack* on it? Let's take a closer look.

Installation

As I said before, the box that comes with the Delphi RAD Pack contains one CD-ROM and six books. Four of those books are manuals for the Visual Solutions Pack version 1.1 (and two of those books are not for Delphi but for dBase and C++), the fifth book is the Turbo Debugger for Windows manual and the sixth

is the ObjectPascal Language Manual (it was not part of the Delphi 1.0 package, but is included with Delphi 2.0). The CD-ROM contains 32Mb of files, including both installed as well as installable versions of the programs. The setup program offers a choice of four add-on tools to install (note that Resource Expert is installed as part of Resource Workshop, so even if you've already got a copy of Resource Workshop on your disk, you need to pick this choice to get the Resource Expert).

Resource Expert

After installation of the Resource Workshop and Resource Expert, the latter needs some additional effort to make it work. We need to install RCEXPERT.PAS with `Options | Install Components` in Delphi (the Resource Form Expert is a .DCU expert whereas the Database Form Expert is a DLL expert). As a Form Expert, the Resource Expert will show up in the Gallery, just like the Dialog Expert and Database Expert. We can activate the Resource Form Expert if we want to create a new form (we need to have the `Options | Environment | Gallery - Use on New Form` option enabled to get the Gallery, by the way).

The purpose of the Resource Expert is to convert standard Windows .RC files (Resource Source files) to true Delphi .DFM forms and units. This makes the Resource Expert especially qualified to be used by old Borland Pascal or Borland C++ users (or any plain .RC file users) who want to step up to Delphi. If you have some BP7 code that still needs porting to Delphi, then the Resource Expert will take the first step for you by porting all your dialogs (one very big step that is!). Also, since the Windows Resource Source format hasn't changed between 16-bit and 32-bit Windows (although the

binary format has), the Resource Expert should have no problem converting .RC files to Delphi 2.0 forms as well.

Resource Workshop

Resource Workshop is a useful tool for creating, viewing and editing Windows Resources in source as well as binary format (.RC and .RES as well as other formats such as .DLG, .ICO, .CUR, .FNT, .BMP, .EXE, .DLL and .DRV). The version of Resource Workshop included with the Delphi RAD Pack is essentially the same as the one shipped with Borland C++ 4.5x (so let's hope these guys read the README file to find out they can only get the Resource Expert by installing Resource Workshop again).

Compared to the Borland Pascal version of Resource Workshop (the one many Delphi users will remember), a lot has changed. We have now options to generate 32-bit Windows resources, multiple languages (internationalisation) and – a small feature but with a big effect – we now have a resource preview option which lets us see a particular resource in the list of resources (we used to be forced to actually edit the resource in order to get to see it).

I use Resource Workshop for all my bitmaps and icons, instead of the crummy (and in my eyes still unstable) Image Editor which is part of Delphi itself. If you've ever had a corrupted .RES or .DCR file yourself, then you know what I mean (if the linker complains that your disk is full, check your .RES file – or start to use Resource Workshop from now on!).

Turbo Debugger 4.6 For Windows

Although Delphi is equipped with an integrated IDE Debugger, this doesn't mean we can do everything with it. Debugging DLLs, for

example, is not possible with the integrated debugger, nor is debugging on a secondary monitor or over a network. For these things, we need the stand-alone Turbo Debugger for Windows 4.6. The included Turbo Debugger for Windows manual shows all the other things we can do with this debugger. Incidentally, this version of TDW is again the same version as the one shipped with Borland C++ 4.5x.

VCL Source Code

For those of you who want to write your own components or just to find out how the Visual Class Library itself is built, there is no better way to find out than to explore the VCL source code. Unfortunately, the VCL Reference Manual isn't part of the Delphi RAD Pack – it can be downloaded as an Adobe Acrobat file VCLREF.ZIP in Library 2 of the DELPHI forum on CompuServe, or ordered from Borland as part of the supplemental manual set (together with the ObjectPascal Language Guide which is part of the Delphi RAD Pack). Together with the on-line help, the source can solve enough mysteries and give away enough secrets to be very valuable to just about any Delphi hacker.
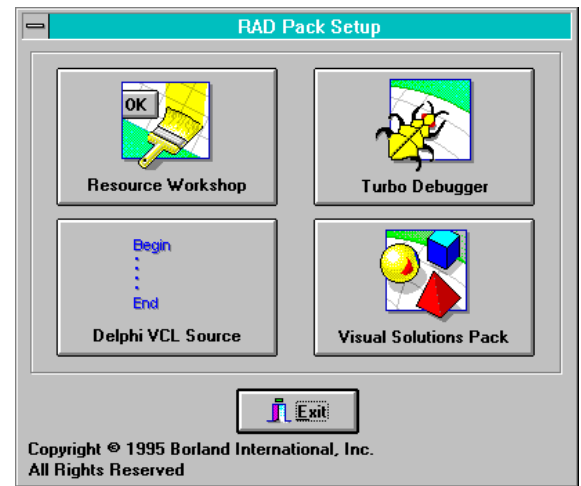
Visual Solutions Pack 1.1

The Visual Solutions Pack version 1.1 is nothing more than a collection of VBX (level 1.0) controls, that can be used with Delphi, Borland C++ or Visual dBase.

Personally, I don't care much for VBX controls (I'd rather use native Delphi controls), but there are two in this package that I've found very useful: the spreadsheet control and the Rich Text Format editor control. For a more detailed overview of the Visual Solutions Pack, please check out the review by Jeroen Pluimers in the first issue of The Delphi Magazine.
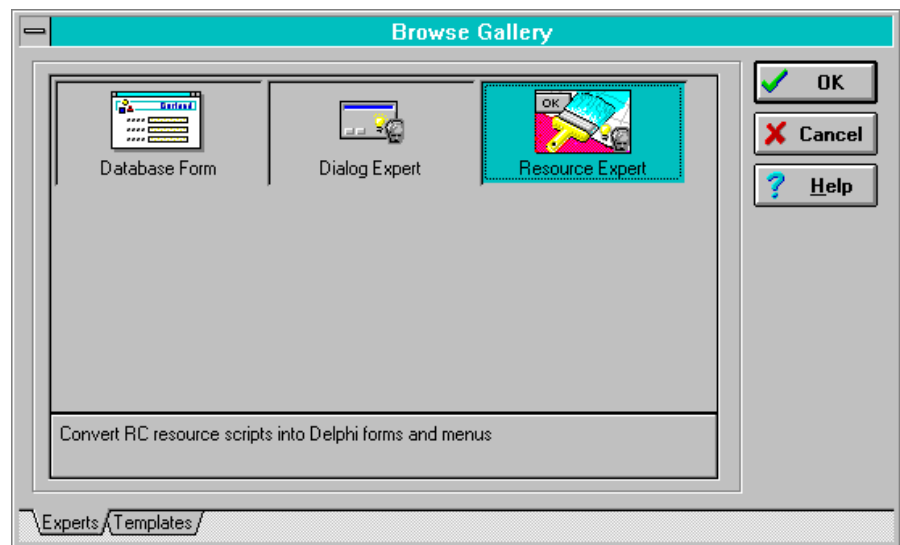
Delphi 1.01 Patches

Another thing that I found on the Delphi RAD Pack CD-ROM are the Delphi 1.01 patches for the regular as well as the Client/Server version of Delphi 1.0. For those of you who

➤ *Right:*
The installation program

➤ *Below:*
Resource Expert installed in the Gallery

haven't bought the 1.02 maintenance release yet, you can now at least upgrade to the 1.01 version. Note that this patch can also be found in Library 2 of the DELPHI forum on CompuServe, and was also on the disk with Issue 2 of The Delphi Magazine, so regular readers should have a copy already.

Complete?

Although the Delphi RAD Pack seems fairly complete, there are a few things that I miss. Why does it include the ObjectPascal Language Guide but not the VCL Reference Manual? Furthermore, I still miss Turbo Profiler for Delphi. The Turbo Profiler version 2.2 from Borland Pascal cannot be used (you get a *file linked with wrong linker version* error) so currently I use the Turbo Profiler from Borland C++ 4.5x to profile my Delphi code!

But, other than those few omissions, which could have made it

even more complete, the Delphi RAD Pack is in my view very helpful and in fact indispensable in my everyday use of Delphi.

Even if you don't use everything on a daily basis, you'll still find that the Delphi RAD Pack offers you a lot for a fair price (it's better than buying Borland C++, Turbo Assembler, the Visual Solutions Pack and the supplemental manual set as separate products!). At about £129 in the UK it's good value.

At the moment, Borland have no comments to make on the contents of a possible 32-bit Delphi RAD Pack. Hopefully they will produce one and it will include the 32-bit Turbo Debugger, a Profiler, lots of OCX controls instead of VBXs, plus whatever other goodies they can think of!

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