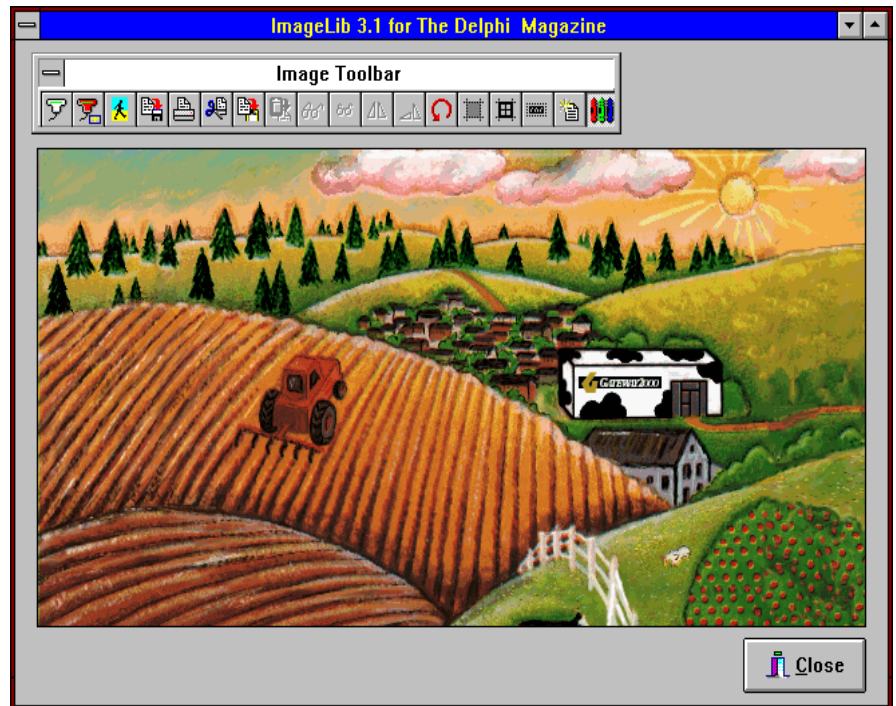# *Review:* ImageLib 3.1

by Chris Frizelle

ImageLib is a library of components for handling bitmap image files in Delphi, plus various multimedia formats, and image scanning too, produced by SkyLine Tools of California. Back in February (Issue 6) we reviewed LightLib Images, a competing image file toolkit; how does ImageLib stack up against it? Read on and we'll tell you.

Installation

The version I tested was the 16-bit 3.1 for Delphi 1, with most of the key files dated 12 March 1996 (I mention this because SkyLine sent us several updates by email so it might be worth checking you have the latest release if you purchase ImageLib). The full 32-bit version for Delphi 2 (ImageLib 95) was in late beta at the time of review and as you read this it should be out.

The install program is a SkyLine one, for which the source is included (handy) and is very quick and straightforward. After copying the files it tells you how to install the Help file and components into Delphi. Helpfully, it does tell you to copy the component files into the directory where your other 3rd party component files live. This is better than doing component installation from 3 levels down in the directory tree. The readme file also warns about the short Delphi search path and gives advice. A further improvement could be to ensure unique names for the various files to avoid conflicts with other packages (how about having a 2 character prefix to each file?). If I bang on about installation for long enough (grin) then component developers will get the message!

There is just one component file to install into Delphi which registers all 15 of the actual components onto a palette page, PMultiImage. Only one compact DLL is used, of less than 340Kb, written in C++ (boo, hiss!) from Borland (oh, well, you're forgiven then!). Budget for about 3Mb of disk space.

➤ *Another three minute example program!*

What Do You Get

The components fall into 4 groups:

➤ Images

`TPMultiImage` displays and stores image files in the following formats: JPG, BMP, GIF, TIF, PCX, PNG and Windows Metafile (just the preview header it seems and I had a few problems with WMF files). It seems that each format is supported up to its maximum colour capability, up to 24-bit, with compression of GIF and TIF (optionally for the latter, with various schemes) only, although JPG files can have quality and smoothness set and PNG files can be interlaced (but not GIF).

`TMImageToolBar` provides a toolbar which allows you to scan (using TWAIN), open, save, print, cut, copy, paste, zoom in/out, rotate, flip, reset and stretch an image, plus palette correction and message editors for scrolling text and credit boxes (these are built into `TPMultiImage`). The toolbar has its own floating window and you need to make sure you set the coordinates for the top left corner so it displays in the right place on start up. I'd have much preferred either a fixed toolbar or (really nice) a dockable floating toolbar.

`TPDBMultiImage` is just like the `TPMultiImage` component but works with the contents of database BLOB fields. `TDBImageToolbar` is just like `TMImageToolbar` but is for use with `TDBMultiImage` (for images in BLOB fields).

➤ Multimedia

`TPMultiMedia` is like `TPMultiImage` but as well as working with images it can also store and play AVI, MOV, MID, WAV and RMI files.

`TMultiMediaToolbar` is similar to `TMImageToolbar` but includes multimedia file support *as well as* image support.

`TPDBMultiMedia` is just like the `TPMultiMedia` component but works with the contents of BLOB fields. `TDBMMediaToolbar` is just like the `TMultiMediaToolbar` component but is for use with `TDBMultiMedia` (for working with BLOB fields).

`TMIMediaPlayer` is derived from Delphi's media player component

but has the bonus that if the relevant driver is not installed your program won't crash if you try to play a file. `TDBMediaPlayer` is like `TMIMediaPlayer` but plays the contents of BLOB fields.

➤ Icons

Three data-aware components provide facilities to use icons from BLOB fields in tables: `TDBIconComboBox` and `TDBIconListBox` list and display such icons in a combo box or list box respectively, whilst `TDBIconEdit` edits them.

➤ Files

Customised File Open and File Save dialog box components (`TMMOpenDialog` and `TMMSaveDialog`) are provided which include a preview of each image file or a trial-play of each multimedia file as you browse through a directory. Nice idea, but I couldn't get the Save dialogs in my programs or the sample programs to save files to the required directory, only to the root.

Off And Running

A simple example is only a few minutes of click and drag away, as it should be with all good Delphi component libraries. I found simple things quick to do, but had to dig a bit more for the rest. There is lots of sample code. I think you'd have to do a little more hand coding with ImageLib for more complex applications than might be the case for LightLib Images.

I had problems getting the image flip and rotate features to work, despite receiving a couple of updates. With some file formats and

some colour levels everything was fine, with others not. Printing works, but takes a long time and gives you no progress information. The images I tried came out absolutely tiny. If you want to print be prepared for some extra work. To be fair, Delphi is not very good at printing support.

If you want to call the DLL from your code (masochist!) the DLL Delphi import unit is included (as file DLL95V1.PAS not as stated in the manual Help file). It has minimal commenting so be prepared for some digging, or suss it out from the C section of the Help file.

Documentation

Included with ImageLib is a printed Programmer's Manual (110pp) plus a Help file. The printed manual is more or less identical to the Help file, except that it includes an index. They give a brief overview of the package and then describe the properties and functions of each component in turn.

The documentation and help is adequate. Like much of its kind it is property and function oriented, not task oriented. I'd like to see more of the latter: discussion of how to use the components in applications, with tips, ideas and tutorial material. There's a good market out there for skilled manual writers with a flair for documenting developer tools (the best I've ever read are for TurboPower's DOS products).

Distributing Applications

To distribute applications using ImageLib all you need to include is

the 340Kb DLL file (the filename varies depending on the version you have). I guess that SkyLine assume we're all clever folks because neither the Help file nor documentation actually tells you this! The licence does tell you that you can distribute the DLL.

Conclusions

I liked much of ImageLib, but have to confess I struggled with some parts of it and some things didn't work properly. I didn't like the floating-only toolbar. Clients have an annoying habit of, when you give them a new version of their app with some (you think) really clever goodies in, saying "Fine, but could you also make it do...".

I do like the fact that there is just one version, with everything in, with good image format coverage, at a good price. And it has to be said that the vast majority of the library works just fine.

So, if I was going out to buy an image handling library, would I choose LightLib Images (see the February review) or ImageLib? It's a difficult decision. I had some problems with both, but perhaps of a more important nature with ImageLib, which on the other hand does have a single much smaller DLL, comes with printed documentation and costs less. I'd be inclined to test ImageLib (there is a trial version) to see if what I wanted to do worked OK and if so save my money and buy this one. If not, I'd probably buy LightLib Images, or perhaps both, as insurance!

As with any product, pricing varies widely depending on where in the world you are and who you buy from. SkyLine's direct pricing is $139 and $169 for the 16- and 32-bit versions respectively and $199 for both together (the Combo). In the UK, QBS and Grey Matter sell the Combo at £155.

ImageLib is produced by SkyLine Tools of North Hollywood, California, USA; Tel: +1 818 766 3900, Fax: +1 818 766 9027, or Email: CompuServe 72130,353