Total Amiga

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Descent: FREESPACE

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For Amigans, By Amigans, On Amigas!
The Chairman Speaks

In these frugal times it is difficult to gauge just how many Amiga users there are, while on a daily basis I view on Amibench whole systems being tested complete with high quality original software. That of course means that all of Amiga users for good, not keeping their software means they don’t expect their hardware to be as well, so Amiga OS XL or Amilton which saddens me. Based on these indications it made the decision even more difficult as to whether or not to put on a show in 2001. After the fairly successful SEAL-O-RAMA in 2000, it was hard to know how to approach putting on a show for 2001 (way back in April when I started to consider it). There seemed to be a lack of interest about Amiga and little prospect of being able to have two shows in the South East (Kickstart and SEAL-O-RAMA). A few weeks later I was approached by a good friend of mine Mike Carroll who founded and helps run ANT (Amiga North Thames) about setting up this very magazine (at the time called SEAL-O-RAMA) and enjoying chatting to the community. There was one concept of the show that got stuck, was that the show had been long awaited and was not too late to cancel or re-schedule the show for another date as the venue had been paid for and it wasn’t possible to find any venues with excellent rail links to London, close to the M25, with a bar, and capable of handling 100 people to see what it costs!

Oh well once again lets make the best of it was our attitude and I must say that I’m glad we did. Although the AmigaOne and OS 4 wasn’t available to either see running or purchase there was plenty to see such as the excellent Mediator team showing various hardware configurations, the demonstration of Amiga OS XL/Amilton and Clontos’s Amiga forever 5.

I will not go into lots of detail about the show because the details are covered in our show report, but I think that the vast majority who attended the show were most interested (new products maybe) and affordable to the community and had a large user group. Well the last bit was easy enough as there were four user groups organising and making it to make it commercially attractive to the dealers all we had to do was get large numbers to attend (and I believe we made the tables affordable, and last but not least for the community, the show had to be well priced less than the cost of a packet of fags) and something new (OS 4 and AmigaOne) to drool over and purchase. Just before the show it was announced that OS 4 and the AmigaOne wouldn’t be released until early next year (2002), just our luck I thought, but it was too late to cancel or re-schedule the show for another date as the venue had been paid for and it wasn’t possible to find any venues with excellent rail links to London, close to the M25, with a bar, and capable of handling 100 people to see what it costs!

Write On!

About Total Amiga

We’d like to make Total Amiga more “interactive” so we need your input!

We’re interested in the following information on your Amiga

Contact us

If you have any queries, suggestions or want to contact us for any reason please use one of the following:

Email: editor@totalamiga.org
WWW: http://www.totalamiga.org
Postal: Total Amiga, 26 Wincot Drive, BENFLEET, Essex, SS7 5AH, ENGLAND.

We’d like to try and make Clubbed better for you.

Legalise

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SEAL members arrived just before nine in the morning to start preparing for the show (which opened at twelve). Soon after some of the ANT guys arrived and we started with the first job, getting out all the incredible heavy tables and setting them out in the hall, this went smoothly because we had done a dry run a few weeks before. Mick Sutton (who is a power engineer in ‘real life’) then laid out the power cables (assisted by Sam Byford) from the sockets at the side of the hall to the central corals and protected them with safety strip. Robert Williams put up the various posters he had prepared around the venue. During the time before the show the other user groups (coming from further afield) and vendors started to arrive. Nick Darley-Jones of GAG (Glos Amiga Group) deserves a special mention as he arrived very early with his young family in tow and worked hard through out the show as well as putting on an excellent show on the Mediator support stand.

Mike Woods of ANT organised the PA system in the presentation hall and the ASA guys got the Sensible soccer tournament ready. Michael Carrillo (Mikey C) brought along a laptop and printer and was hard at work producing badges for the exhibitors and a few last minute signs. Last but not least the hard working Lesley was busy in the kitchen making sandwiches to feed the crowds. As the doors opened we were still making the final preparations, with All Whitfield and Robert Williams still putting skirting (which had only been found at the last minute) around the dealer’s tables. Then the crowds arrived and suddenly the hall was too packed to do anything more! Throughout the day (as you can see in some of the photos) there was little room to move, which gave the show a great atmosphere. Working our way around the hall from left to right we came to the KickSoft stand where Ray McCarthy was in his element demonstrating his range of software to anyone who showed a glimmer of interest, and in most cases he got a sale! KickSoft sell a wide and growing range of applications and utilities, at the show he was heavily promoting Pagestream 4, a recent addition to his range.

On the next stand we had Pagan Games who demonstrated the excellent Earth 2140 for the classic Amiga and Belbula for Amiga DE. They were also promoting Quingua a new DE game. The Huddersfield and Blackpool user groups shared the next stand and were busy promoting ANT and SEAL, eldest member arriving just before nine in the morning (of course with subscriptions). They were also demonstrating the recently released Myst style game Aqua.

The Virtual Programming stand attracted a great deal of attention because they had both Bill Hoggett demonstrating the new Amithlon emulator and James Daniels of Apex Designs with the fantastic Payback PPC-Warp3D (once he had rushed home to get the CD’s!). Also on the VP stand was Mark Hinton of Amiga Active selling their back issues and explaining the change to “digital”.

Behind Virtual Programming the Mediator Support Team put on an excellent demonstration despite the fact that Elbox pulled out at the last minute (collus interruptus). Three machines were on show, owned by Nick Darley-Jones of GAG, Sam Thomas of www.amiga- mediator.co.uk and Sam Byford (who didn’t receive his logic board in time for his mediator A4000 to be active), graphics cards, soundcards, TV cards and Ethernet were all demonstrated. A DVD player displaying through the TV card into a window on Workbench really wowed the crowds!

On the SEAL front sales of Clubbed went exceptionally well with loads of new subscribers and it was great to meet many readers in person (however briefly). We had a variety of hardware and software to sell for club funds including a rare A3000T which was snapped up.

ANT had a very nice SCALA presentation advertising their group running on an even nicer flat screen LCD monitor, they also had some second hand goodies for sale.

The Kickstart table was very quiet which was very unusual as it has always been packed at previous shows.

ASA who organised the games areas at the show had yet more on their own table in the form of a Dynamite tournament. Like ANT and SEAL, ASA members took the opportunity to sell previously abused gear :) During the show you could take part in the ever popular Sensible Soccer tournament which took place in the presentation hall on the big screen (thanks to HAUG for the loan of the projector). In the main hall punters could try their hand at Hyperion’s excellent Shogo on Mick and Robert’s PPC machines.

In the centre of the venue was Mike Woods of ANT organised a licenced bar which (surprise, surprise) did a roaring trade serving the thirsty Amigans. There was also a cafe area with a range of hot and cold food and drinks being served throughout the show. There was also a place where visitors could collapse and look at their purchases.

During the show Robert Williams and Mick Sutton had a meeting with Alan Redhouse (Eyetech) and Fleecy Moss (Amiga) where they agreed to endorse Total Amiga magazine. At the end of the show Robert made the official announcement of the new name for Clubbed and also said that SEAL will aim to produce the magazine bi-monthly in the near future. Fleecy and Alan then spoke about the Amiga One and signed an agreement for the future development of AmigaOS 4 and beyond.
**Computer City intend to enhance MediaPoint to work on graphics card and sound cards via AHI, in my opinion this would fill a gaping hole in the Amiga market because stalwarts like SCALA are not compatible with modern hardware.

The current version of MediaPoint is available from Schatztruhe/GTI at 34.95Euro (about £22), for more details visit: [www.compcity.nl/mediapoint](http://www.compcity.nl/mediapoint).

In days of yore many of us loved the fantastic graphic adventure games made by Lucas Arts, including the famous Monkey Island series. These games used an engine known as SCUMM (Script Compiler Utility for Manic Mansion) after the first game it was written for. Recently an open source project has been working on a portable engine that will run games using this engine, this is called the SCUMM virtual machine or SCUMMMV. While it is still in an alpha stage SCUMMMV already runs several of the Lucas Arts games including some that never made it to the Amiga such as Day of the Tentacle, it also supports the 256 colour VGA style games that were degraded to run on OCS and ECS Amigas. Two Amiga ports of SCUMM have been made one by “nogfx” which works on AGA and graphics cards and another by Rudiger Hanke which is for MorphOS.

Rather like Quake 2 you will need to copy the original game as SCUMMVM only provides the engine, not the game data files.

Sebastian Beloch has set up an excellent website which aims to support all the ports of SCUMMVM for the Amiga and also has demo version of some of the games for download so you can give it a try even if you don’t have the originals: [http://www.scummvm.org](http://www.scummvm.org).

Since Mick’s review in Issue 9’s PD Paradise section two new versions of Simple Mail have been released and the latest, 0.14 is the first to be declared a beta release. The key new features in 0.14 are:

- Lots of new AREXX commands.
- Automatic deletion of signatures when replying.
- Folders containing new mail are highlighted in bold.
- YAM address book import.
- CC support in the compose window.


**PhotoFolio**

Steeple Software have released an updated version of their commercial picture cataloguing utility PhotoFolio. Version 2.2 features a handy report projects list for quicker loading, an abort button during directory scanning and many user interface improvements. The program now supports the PPM file format and support for CMYK JPEG files has been improved. They have also squashed a number of bugs.


**PageStream 4.1**

After several minor upgrades a new version of the Amiga's premier desktop publishing program has been announced. Grassshopper have rolled the planned table editor add on up with a selection of other new features to make PageStream 4.1. Tables are placed as an object on the page, then you can add and delete rows or columns and join cells together to form a complex table. Cell borders and fills can be customised including all the usual PageStream fill options like gradients and patterns.

A new feature that will be a boon for users of PageStream and those who have a lot of mailing list correspondence is that PageStream will now print personalized letters and envelopes based on a database of information and.

**Computer City, a Netherlands based Amiga dealer and developer have re-launched the multimedia authoring package MediaPoint and have announced that they intend to resume development. Using Mediapoint you can create presentations and interactive multimedia displays some of its key features are:

- Over 150 smooth transitions.
- Spools audio and animations from hard disk.
- Interactive sound controlled by mouse, keyboard and touch screen.
- Scripttalk language to control complex displays with variables, conditional jumps.
- AREXX support.
- Antialiasing.
- Free runtime player.

The most exciting part of this announcement is that...**

**SimpleMail 0.14**

SimpleMail is available distributed by Schatztruhe and costs 34.95Euro (about £22), for more details and to download a demo version visit: [http://www.scouts.org.au/simplemail](http://www.scouts.org.au/simplemail).
**MorphOS Support**

MorphOS support for the Amiga 2001 show held in Margraten, Germany last November. The board showed 3 PCI slots, 1 AGP slot, and room for 2 1394Mb SD-RAM DIMMs giving up to 2Gb of RAM. It also features audio, USB, Firewire 3rd and network ports built-in minimising the need for add-on PCI cards.

- In a recent IRC chat session Salvador Fernandez Gomez of blplan answered questions about the Pegasos and MorphOS, some of the most interesting points were:
  - Developer motherboards should be shipping as you read this and consumer boards should be ready by the end of March.
  - A bare board will cost 650Euro (about £440) with a 400Mhz G3 CPU and a complete system with DVD drive, hard disk, memory and case but no monitor should be about 1000Euro (£625).
  - All systems will be supplied with MorphOS, a compatible PPC Linux distribution will be available for download.
  - The board has on-board sound with analogue and SP-DIF digital output.
  - Open GL (a popular 3D graphics API used in many games and applications) supports MorphOS under development and will ship with the consumer release.
  - The page to sell 1000 to 2000 boards to the Amiga, Linux and industrial in the first year.
  - Developers driven for the G-Rex will run on the Pegasos without recompilation.

Salvador also said that the blplan website will soon be updated with all the new information so take a look at:

- [http://www.blplan-embib.de/](http://www.blplan-embib.de/) for hardware information and:

**Quake Again!**

As they did with Doom and the original Quake, ID Software have released the source code to Quake 2 under the GPL (GNU Public License), in simple terms this means that anyone may download the first, compile it to run on different systems and make changes providing they have their changed code available.

Unlike the original Quake release there hasn’t been a flurry of quick ports of Quake 2 to the Amiga but Steffen Haeseus has announced he is working on a port along with Hans Jorgen and Thomas Frieden. All three of these guys work for Hyperion and have been responsible for porting many excellent games to the Amiga. In a recent Interview with German on-line magazine Amiga-teams Steffen said completion is nearly complete but he is working hard with some beta testers to make sure the end result is of commercial quality, including a proper installation utility and setup GUI familiar from Hyperion’s commercial games. One interesting aspect of Quake 2 is that many mods supports hot plug so devices can be connected and disconnected while they are switched on and it is simple and cheap to manufacture.

E3B plan to offer two models of their interface the SubWay which connects to the A1200 clock port or compatible ports on many other devices and the Highway which is a Zorro II card for big box Amigas and expanded A1200s.

Both interfaces will feature:
- USB 1.1 and 2.0 compatibility.
- No 2.0 highspeed mode.
- Integrated 4 port hub.
- Software compatible with AmigaOS 2.04 to 3.9.
- Two year warranty.

This means it can be connected to an unexpeacted 1200 or other device with a clock port, to the Zorro II card on one of Innovative’s other products such as the Buddha or X-Surf it can run in any Zorro II compatible slot. But that’s not all, when the VarIO is used in a Zorro slot the clock port and expansion port can be used to connect expansions using those ports to the Amiga!

The VarIO costs 49.00Euro which is about £32, there is also a 10Euro (93.50) surcharge for the A1200 version.

More Ins and Outs!

Individual Computers have released a new I/O board with two serial ports and one parallel port. The serial ports are equivalent to the highly praised SilverSurfer and can run at up to 460Kbps with a 16byte FIFO buffer to reduce load on the Amiga. The parallel port has been improved over Individuals previous Hypercom boards, it also has a 16byte FIFO buffer to reduce CPU load and supports ECP mode which Individual claim speeds up modern printers.

However the really clever thing about the VarIO is that it is designed to work in as many Amiga configurations as possible, the board has a clock port, a Zorro edge connector and a 26pin expansion port.

As with the new USB I/O board, the VarIO is the foundation for an exciting future of hardware and software development.

**OS3.9 NDK Update**

The AmigaOS Native Developer Kit that was released on the Amiga Developer CD 2.1 has been updated for OS 3.9.

The ‘C’ and assembly language header files have been updated as have the Inker libraries, Autodocs and Workbench AREXX documentation. The ‘C’ header files were cleaned up and syntax checked so they should compile cleanly with both SAS/C and GCC compilers. The work on the NDK was largely carried out by Olaf Barthel.

Download the updated kit from:

- [www.amiga.com/3.9](http://www.amiga.com/3.9)

**News**

**Pegasos Update**

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At last things seem to be happening on the OS 4 front! As you can read in our World of Amiga South East report, Alan Redhouse and Fleecy Moss of Amiga announced a contract at the show on the future development of the AmigaOS. This historic agreement that contract was Hyperion who will be co-ordinating the software development, primarily for AmigaOS 4. Unfortunately it seems that before this contract had been signed little or no work had taken place on the core of the updated OS, mainly due to the very hard economic conditions in the technology sector.

Since the show Hyperion reports that OS development is now well underway with a full time developers and a further 20 or so part timers working on it, including most of the OS 3.5/3.9 team. One interesting fact that really ties this new version back to the Amiga’s roots is that Dave Haynie (one of the key Amiga designers at Commodore) has taken on the role of technical consultant in part to share his knowledge of the PPC processor. Quite a large amount of information on OS 4 has been made public in the form of announcements and developer conferences but few have tried to summarise that information and the current state of affairs as far as we know them.

Hardware Support

For many Amigans the best piece of news about OS4 (apart from the fact that it’s actually being developed) is that it will now support a wider variety of PPC hardware. The OS will be based on a hardware abstraction layer (HAL) which means that only a relatively small part has to be altered to make it work on new hardware. First up the original CyberStorm PPC accelerators and almost certainly their Blizzard PPC cousins will be supported (Ben Hermans of Hyperion said they are 99% sure) and FPGA and BlizzardPPCs. It will work) this means many existing users will be able to try OS4 without investing in additional hardware. Exbox have already expressed an interest in OS 4 support for their Shark add-on PPC processor card for the Mediator PCI bus and from previous agreements announced with Amiga it seems likely that the pocket-sized Prometheus PCI card will also be supported. Then we have the dedicated motherboards, course OS4 will work on Eyeetech’s AmigaOne and there is a good need for OS4 on the Pegasos front, Ben Hermans has said that Hyperion have plans to get a development kit and to plan to support Iplan's new PPC motherboard.

Structure of the New OS

The aim of the first release of AmigaOS 4 is to move existing Amiga users and hopefully some ex-users on to the PowerPC which offers much higher performance than the 68000 series processors used in most current Amigas. Unlike running a PPC card under the current OS version 4 will only use the PowerPC, existing 68k programs will be supported without an emulator. The emulator will just be used (in JIT) compilation to run existing programs at high speed which should exceed existing 68k processors in many cases (although it will depend on the speed of the PPC used). The OS will be ported gradually to PPC with the important aspects mentioned here being made for this first release. Other parts of the OS will run under Emulation initially and be ported in future releases. OS4 will be based on a second generation version of the Amiga’s kernel Exec, called ExecSG. The kernel is the heart of the operating system which controls multitasking and memory management. Some important features of the ExecSG include the HAL mentioned earlier, virtual memory, new library interface, resource tracking, optional memory protection and WarpX’s backwards compatibility. Before you jump up and down at the dreaded words virtual memory remember that this doesn’t necessarily imply swapping memory to disk or the poor implementation that is found in Windows. On the other hand I would like to understand it if it should mean an end to memory fragmentation? Some features like memory protection will only be available to new programs but as they are developed it should make AmigaOS more stable and crash proof.

New Features and Improvements

Intuition, the Amiga’s basic display system which handles screens, windows and the like, is being upgraded and made PPC native, the upgrade will include enhanced window borders with user-selectable styles, new external plug-ins, in addition both the basic gad-tools and the new Reaction GL building systems will be upgraded and made PPC native which should make them faster, more snappy and reduce the amount of load put on the 68k emulator.

A new version of the last file system (FFS) has already been developed for OS4 again PPC native and supporting hard drives bigger than 4Gb and filenames up to 1028 characters. Complementing the new file system will be a set of disk resident applications (which were lacking in OS3.5 and 3.9) and a replacement for HIFF. One piece of new software included with the OS is a new TCP/IP stack called Barathel. This will be compatible with existing network applications and will include address translation (NAT) will be supported allowing users to share a network connection and it will include DHCP and PPP over Ethernet which is important for cable modem support.

Hardware Support

The OS will include a new retabletable graphics system developed by the Picasso 96 team and Warp3D, drivers for Permedia 2/3, Voodoo, 3Matrox G400 and 3D graphics cards are planned and existing Zorro cards will be supported. Basic USB support will be implemented but it is expected to be limited to keyboards and mice and in the first release. Retargetable audio will be supported by a new PPC version of ALS which will have support sound cards including all current Amiga soundcards and the Soundblaster 128 and Live. A driver will be provided to support SCRIPTS based SCSI controllers. I believe these are the major Symbios/LSI Logic SCSI chips used on many Amiga controllers including the Blizzard PPC and CyberStorm PPC. You can also buy PCI SCSI cards based on these chips for systems which don’t have a SCSI controller.

Overall this seems like great news in length. Complementing the new file system will be a set of disk resident applications (which were lacking in OS3.5 and 3.9) and a replacement for HIFF. One piece of new software included with the OS is a new TCP/IP stack called Barathel. This will be compatible with existing network applications and will include address translation (NAT) will be supported allowing users to share a network connection and it will include DHCP and PPP over Ethernet which is important for cable modem support.

So, When’s all this Due?

When their development of OS4 was first announced Hyperion stated that they hoped for a release this February however that now slipped a little mainly because more features are going to be incorporated into the first release. As I write this at the end of January the latest news from is that they still hope to make a developer release in February and users should get the new OS a few weeks later. So I would imagine we should start getting excited sometime in April!

Where Can I Find Out More?

At this time there isn’t a dedicated OS4 website so the best bet is to surf around the news sites and see what is being reported. For this article my main sources were Hyperion’s OS4 development update posted on http://www.ann.lu on the 21st of January and Ben Hermans’ interview with Boing Attitude on http://games.free.fr/
Taking on the task of finding a new Printer for our magazine, and thinking it was going to be easy, was a bit presumptuous of me, especially when I didn’t really know a lot about the printing business, well if I’m honest my knowledge was non-existent! I didn’t tell anyone that I was taking on the task, it just sort of happened! I was walking past a well known printing shop when I thought I would give it a go. My first mistake was that I had two young children in tow, not a good idea when you are trying to explain about the magazine and sounding knowledgeable at the same time!

As I entered the shop I was greeted by a man in his twenties. I explained to him about our magazine, then went on to tell him the amount of copies that we needed, inside black and white, front and back cover to be in colour etc. He gave me a quote but said that he needed to see the magazine before he could give me the final quote. Second mistake! I had a great idea to take all the material to show the printer! (Well I did say I was just passing the shop) I told him that I would return the next day with the magazine.

The quote he gave me was lower than our previous printers. Could it be this easy! Before returning to the shop, I phoned first to explain about the magazine and made an appointment (I was getting more professional!) I got a technical low-down on the magazine from Robert. The next day I dropped the kids off at playschool (yippee!) and headed straight to the printers. This time I was a lot more confident and told the assistant exactly what we wanted, he flicked through the magazine, he looked quite impressed with the quality, then he threw out the word “Is it done on a PC then?” “No” I said smiling inside. “Mac?” “No on an Amiga” I replied quite matter of fact. “Is that a PC then” he said. Now how would you reply to that statement? No don’t tell me… In a split second all these scenarios were whizzing around in my head, should I explain to him what an Amiga is? Should I go into all the capabilities of the Amiga, as I looked at this man in his twenties all I could see was a blank expression on his face so I replied with “er no” short and sweet I know, but what I really wanted to say is not printable! After taking account into what we required, the final quote then tripled. I looked in dismay, then I thought I would try on the charm by asking for a discount as it would be a regular printing job, but I was turned down, was I losing my salesmanship, or was he telepathic on the Amiga front?

I was feeling abit dejected as I left the shop, but I was not going to give up. I had quite enjoying my challenge, I felt like a Watchdog journalist whose mission was to find the best Printer to do the job at a competitive price!

My next port of call was a local Printing Company, I phoned first to explain about the magazine and made an appointment (I was getting more professional!) Once again I picked a time when the kids were at playschool (I’m learning!) As I entered the printing shop, it was like embarking into a time warp, it was really old fashioned and dingy, an older man greeted me and he looked quite impressed with the quality of the magazine for years. He looked at the magazine then promptly erupted into technical jargon that I had never even heard of, should I bluff my way through or disclose to him that I didn’t have a clue what he was talking about, I decided on the latter. After unmasking my lack of technical knowledge he very kindly explained to me the printing process. Unfortunately the job was too small for him and he quoted some ridiculous price. After thanking him for his time I left.

This was proving more daunting than I first thought, I started to look through the Yellow Pages, there were lots of Printers but they were based out of town. I wanted a printer that was in walking distance, could do the job at a competitive price and didn’t go white with shock when I mentioned the Amiga. I’m not that demanding, well maybe sometimes, but that’s another story!

As I was flicking through, I noticed a Printer that I had used years ago when I wanted to start up a secretarial business. I had my letterheads and business cards printed there, was this too much to hope for?

After the usual rigamarole I found myself standing in a printing environment once more. I had let ten printers and I found myself much more confident almost to the point of being brusque.

Following my carefully rehearsed lines, the printer looked disinterested but interested at the same time! Was he playing me at my own game? I took the game further and asked him for a quote, he quoted me about £150.00 above which we were paying our previous Printers.

I thought to myself that there was room for improvement, I started to haggle (this is Sharon territory). After haggling and congregating for about ten minutes, he eventually brought his price down, “I’ve cracked it hoary hoary!” but I was brought back down to earth when he said “which platform is the mag done on” “an Amiga” I said in a meek voice. He then went on to say that he needed the output on the cd rom to be in PDF or EPS format, I told him that this was not a problem, he wasn’t convinced, it took me quite a lot of persuading but eventually he was assuaged. I left the magazine with him over the weekend to mull things over and he would give me a definite answer on the Monday.

As I walked out of the shop I was walking on air! I had actually found a printer for the magazine, and within a week. After breaking the news to Mick and Robert they both seemed pleased.

When Monday arrived I was feeling a bit apprehensive, would the deal fall through, would I have to start my search all over again. I felt like I had a lot to lose (well my pride anyway) I asked Mick to go back to the Printer for me as I wasn’t sure I had sorted out the problem about the Amiga. After having a boys tete-a-tete (like only men can) The deal was sealed.

The moral of this story is... do your research, never take children with you and haggle like mad!
The idea originated back in 2000 when Napster was still all the rage. Having converted all my own CDs to MP3 format, and having downloaded gigabytes more, I was convinced. MP3 let me have all my music in one place, on tap instantly. Unfortunately, I only had a radio in my car, and Portsmouth is sadly devoid of any good stations. There was only one thing for it, I had to have an MP3 in my car.

Looking around, there were no good solutions. MP3 players of the day were expensive, and limited to 32 or 64MB. SmartMedia cards. Amiga compatibility was non-existent. Even now, CD MP3 players always seem to lack a good display (accessing 1000 tracks sequentially is not a good idea) and the cheapest in car players are even now £450. However, one thing I did notice was that a few brave soles had converted their computers to use in car players. Mostly they used PCs, and the odd Mac. Most were hacks to say the least, requiring you to carefully shut down Windows when you stop and taking up large amounts of boot space. The second issue was a major one for me, having only a small Suzuki Alto, I needed all the boot space I could get. So, I started to look into what I would need. Firstly, I decided I should use an A600 (because of it's small size) and MAS Player as the heart of the system. The MAS Player is a device invented by my great friend and respected hardware engineer Dirk Conrad. It connects to the parallel port and uses a MAS3507 DSP to decode MP3s. This takes the load off the computers CPU and gives a nice 18bit stereo output. I had been working on an MHI driver for the MAS Player at the time, so it was the natural choice. The only downside is that the volume control doesn't work very well, and that it uses the parallel port, and due to the way the interface works you need at least 1MB ROM to run comfortably. Still, that's better than needing an O60 and a 64MB RAM card.

I would need a dash mounted head unit to control the system, and to display information. I was considering using a small portable TV screen for the latter, but settled on an LCD character display. The unit I chose is produced by Crystalfront in the US, and can display 5x5 characters (of which 8 were programmable and the rest were standard ASCII characters, plus some Japanese script). The device also features adjustable contrast, an LED backlight and some built in utility functions like automatic bar graphs and horizontal scrolling. All this can be controlled via an RS232 serial interface, of the kind used for connecting a modem to your computer. The display works a little like one of the old text terminals used for accessing Bulletin Board systems, many years ago, so is very easy to handle. The fact that it uses the serial port also meant that I could keep the parallel port free for the MAS Player.

For the system I was thinking of using a CD32 game pad, but this wouldn't have been very easy to use while driving. Then I came across a little project on the internet called the Universal Infrared Receiver, or URI. This handy little device uses a PIC2C508 microprocessor (2K ROM, 64 bytes of RAM and a 4MHz RISC CPU all on a chip smaller than the end of your finger) to read and decode IR signals for standard remote controls, and send them via RS232 serial to the computer. The advantage of this over a device like the AirLink/EZLink is that the PIC does all the work, all the loading away from the computer. Also, since the display was output only and the URI input only, I could run both from one serial port! I liberated a credit card sized remote control from an old Soundblaster Live, which had plenty of buttons and suited my purpose nicely.

The Amiga was going to need some kind of mass storage unit. A CDROM was an option, but skipping might become a problem unless it was a special laptop drive. I was fed up with CDs anyway, so in the end decided to use a 2.5" hard drive. Since these drives are designed to be used in laptop computers, they are fairly immune to vibrations and bounces. The drive I chose those would need to be, to survive being driven around Portsmouth road! I initially used a 2GB Hitachi drive, but I now have an 8GB IBM. That gives me over 156 hours of music!

The final problem was the power supply unit, or PSU. Cars use a 12V battery supply, which is supplemented by the engine via an alternator. However, it's not that simple, because cars can not only put out up to 14.5V with the engine on, but also tend to produce a lot of electrical noise in the supply. For a computer, this is a real problem since any major fluctuations can crash it, or even do damage.

After much research and a prototype, I eventually came up with a working design. It was based around a switch mode supply circuit, similar to the sort of thing you might find in any number of consumer electronic devices, like stereo equipment, DC or mains AC operated. This supplies the core 5V to the Amiga. For the 12V line, which is not nearly as critical, I used a simple 12V fixed regulator chip and a voltage divider to get -12V from that. All in all, the PSU can supply around 45W of power, more than twice the original A1200 unit. Many thanks must go to Ian Greenway for help here, I really appreciated his help.

Well, having figured it all out I only had to build the thing and write the software. This turned out to be quite a bit of work, and I suffered many set backs. The software was designed to be simple and easy to use, as you don't want to have to negotiate complex menus or key presses while driving. Really, a basic stop, play, next and previous track system is all you need most of the time. Of course, with around 2300 tracks on the system, it is necessary to organise them some way for selection, so I decided to have two grouping systems. Firstly, the software can select tracks by directory on the HD. This is mainly used for selecting either a band or a genera of music. Secondly, you can create play lists of tracks, just like you can in AmigaAMP or WinAMP (in fact, they are all compatible), which are designed for setting up complete albums and favourite tracks lists. To round it all off, I wrote a preferences section with options to set bass, treble, panning, display contrast, and some other misc parameters.

I went through two versions of the software before I had it just right, and spent about a month tracking down an obscure but regular guru inducing bug (for which many thanks must go to Przemyslaw ‘Sensei’ Gruchalski for being the first to figure it out). I had to drop the A600 in favour of an A1200 too, because the O30 card I had for it simply could not provide the throughput I needed to the custom chips and parallel port to run the MAS Player. Some more optimisation of the MHI driver may help here. To house the A1200, I built an aluminium case from and brushed it to look nice. While I was at it, I also soldered on the A1200 PCI card reset, removed the floppy drive and used hot melt glue to hold down any loose connections. I even added a caddy for the hard drive, which allowed me to connect it to either the A1200 or my A4000 (so I can copy MP3s on to the drive) via 44pin d-type connectors. That alone was a total of 132 small solder joints in a very confined space, and was probably the most work to construct.

I spent days installing it, wiring my car with serial and data cables, power relays and switches, and then many more weeks tuning the audio side up. I finally installed the A1200 itself and the head unit I had made with the display, and it was finished! Now I drive around everywhere with my favourite bands pumping out, and all from an Amiga 1200! Needless to say, the feeling of achievement and pride is huge. I am very interested to give it a go. I put all the details of the project on my web site, including software and schematics.

I still have some plans for the system. Firstly, I would like to organise them some way for selection, so I decided to have two grouping systems. Firstly, the software can select tracks by directory on the HD. This is mainly used for selecting either a band or a genera of music. Secondly, you can create play lists of tracks, just like you can in AmigaAMP or WinAMP (in fact, they are all compatible), which are designed for setting up complete albums and favourite tracks lists. To round it all off, I wrote a preferences section with options to set bass, treble, panning, display contrast, and some other misc parameters.

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I spent days installing it, wiring my car with serial and data cables, power relays and switches, and then many more weeks tuning the audio side up. I finally installed a 400W amplifier to my car, and with some help from Paul Harding and Mike O’Hara, friends from the Amiga Support Association, some extra speakers. Finally, I installed the A1200 itself and the head unit I had made with the display, and it was finished! Now I drive around everywhere with my favourite bands pumping out, and all from an Amiga 1200! Needless to say, the feeling of achievement and pride is huge. I am very interested to give it a go. I put all the details of the project on my web site, including software and schematics.

I still have some plans for the future, as I’d like to do a better head unit, the one I made is a little larger than a normal radio) and I have a few ideas for software upgrades. M0D and Octamed playing capability is a possibility. But for now, I just enjoy the look on peoples faces when I show them my in car Amiga MP3 player!
First a bit of History...

When the Mediator PCI expansion system was first announced by Elbox, I was as excited as everyone else by what it would mean for us, Amiga Die-hards. At last - Fast, easy-to-find, and above all - Cheap PCI cards that could be used in our 10 year old machines!

At the time I had two machines: an A1200 (Towered) and a Basic A4000 in a desktop case. I was still at university and did not have the sort of money needed to buy a 1200 Mediator so, instead, I bought the old AteoBus system off him which was a good half-way compromise. A short time after the 4k version on the Mediator was announced I made a decision to start getting the 4k up-to-speed and promptly paid out the money for a Power Tower MkII Computing that came complete with a totally new daughterboard with six Zorro III/II slots, a Graphics slot and five PCI slots - one more than our cousins the 1200 had! (the sixth PCI slot would be taken up by the Mediator Logic Board when released).

Almost a year later and the 4k Logic has Finally been released. To be honest - this is the biggest fault with Ebox/Mediators - everything takes much longer to appear than they predict. I have heard rumours that the logic had been ready for a long while but that Elbox did not have sufficient pre-orders to want to release it (they told me it would be released back in October), which in my opinion is a bit naughty, the 4k does not have as many users but the best way to guarantee extra sales is to release things for it so that they can be reviewed and the other users know it is worth buying! I expect this review (and the others that will doubtless appear) to boost Elbox’s sales three fold!

Initial Impressions...

So what was in the package? Well, let me first say that I ordered the logic off of PowerC along with the update MM CD that allows the latest Sound and TV cards to be used. This CD comes with some new “Mach” chips which you have to swap with certain ones on the Logic Board. However, thanks to Power the Logic comes with the new chips already installed so I did not have to touch a thing on the board itself. Everything came in a plain white box (no fancy cover that would make it look expensive - would also add to the cost) with the Logic wrapped in a Bubble-wrap envelope.

There’s a six page leaflet included guiding you through the installation, even though it’s pretty straight forward.

There are three jumpers on the board, one of which is obsolete until such time as the SharkPPC+ comes out. The 2nd is in case you have a Voodoo4/5 card and the third in case you want to leave a Zorro III/GFX card installed. If you leave this open (no ZII card) with a Zorro GFX card installed then when you boot you will go into AGA mode rather than the ZIII gfx mode.

Both the Daughter Board and Logic are well built, however, the Power Tower’s interaction with the PCI cards is another matter entirely. I may have just been unlucky but another 4k Mediator user spoke with has the same problem as me but on a lesser scale and he can get away without changing anything.

The problem is that the PCI cards will not push fully into their slots because the Fixing plate hits the Towers Backplane slots. This is shown in the picture below:

Basically, if the screw hole lines up then the right hand end of the card pops out of the slot (with the left end barely locating), and if you push the card fully in then you can’t screw it in securely and the left side is not fully located. The only option for me was to remove each fixing plate from the card, use a hammer to flatten the right angle out and then bend it back into a right-angle but 1 mm further towards the end. This of course meant that the hole for the screw to fit through was out of alignment so I had to file that back so that everything fitted again. The cards I have only took about half an hour to alter as the fixing plates are only soft aluminium. I now have perfect PCI cards that sit in the slots 100% and are secured nicely.

The only downfall is that I probably would not be able to re-sell those cards but as I’m unlikely to want to use that it is not a factor in this.

The software for the Mediator 4k comes either on a Disk or (if you purchased the MMCD - which everyone with a Mediator should do!) on CD. The installation is straight forward enough - one icon does the lot and all the option are easy enough to follow. It does insist on installing the sound and TV drivers together though which is unusual because you don’t have both cards then half of that part of the install is pointless!

Once this installer has finished reboot and, if like me you left a Zorro card in the machine without changing the jumper I mentioned earlier you will boot into AGA. From there you should read the Voodoo4 & Guide file in the ‘Graphics & Fast Ethernet’ drawer (read this whichever GFX card you have installed as you still need to follow its instructions.) You will need to do a re-install of Picasso86 from one source or another (OS3.5.9 CD for example) choosing a Cybervision 64-3D as the “Graphics Card” type. The Cybervision Monitor Driver that is in Devs.Monitors/ will then need to be renamed to “Voodoo” and its toloctype changed from “Boardtype=Cybervision” to Boardtype=“Voodoo”.

Now this all seems to be an awkward thing to have to do

when the installer could very well do this itself without the user ever having needed to know that it did it! I also found that the Voodoo card had to be in the top slot (to give it air flow) but it was not recognised. Moving it to the 2nd slot meant it was recognised.

You will then need to spend the next half hour or so editing the Screenmode settings in Picasso96 mode to suit your individual monitor. Most people with AGA monitors get this far but then things start to go wrong.

You should also register the mediator board And the MM CD via e-mail. I did this and received the latest two updates almost immediately! Install the MediatorUP.Pha files first, followed by the MM_CD_UP.Pha files and these will install all the latest drivers and updates.

You will also be sent the new archives as and when they appear.
Elbox have released and installed the Mediator/PCI cards and Software, I tried a basic ethernet link with Robs’ machine but for whatever reason ... a second machine. But I know that other people have it all working fine so this is probably just a quirk of my setup!

With a Voodoo card installed into your computer you will also now be able to use Warp3D in Hardware Render mode instead of (the very slow) Software ... and even getting all of the Warp3D demos to run can be a task in itself, but once it’s working you won’t look back!

The TV Card is a bit of a luxury. It basically means you can watch TV/Video/DVD on your workbench without any slowdown of the system at all. If it works, Elbox isn’t the best in the world at the moment and has been causing a lot of headaches to Mediator users. I kept getting an error popping up when I tried to run the TV program (p6PIP_OpenTagList) failed, the reason for this is that there are not enough free pens available. To solve this go into your Prefs dir and load the Workbench program. Now set the Icon Quality to Good (and if this doesn’t work, to Poor) and save. You should now have a TV window open when you run TV with a bar of static in it!

Also, once you have the TV driver working and opening a window - very hard sly of you to tune it into your local channels. The CD actually has a lot of pre-tuned channels but none of them showed anything but static when I used them.

Good news is on its way though in the form of the new version of Medication that is due out as we go to print. It will help you set the channels up and will include a TV GUI called “Remote” that will make life Much easier for everyone. Medication is not the only program designed to help with the TV channels though, there are several programs available for this: ChannelEd and MedTV. Links for both of these are at the end of the review along with links for other useful programs and sites.

The other PCI cards available at the moment are Ethernet cards. These are extremely useful if you have more than one computer or if you want to link to the Internet via ADSL. Until recently only 10mb cards were able to be used but now Elbox have released drivers for 10/100 mb cards. I only have a 10 mb one however.

At the SEAL meeting where I installed the Mediator/PCI cards and Software, I tried a basic ethernet link with Robs machine but for whatever reason it failed to communicate. As a note ... only had five minutes to test the card out and the Mediator has a thing about having its PCI cards in the correct order in its slots so just naturally I need to move the ethernet card into another position for it to work. Unfortunately I have no way of re-testing the card until the next meeting as I don’t have a second machine. But I know that other people have it all working fine so this is probably just a quirk of my setup!

So really your PCI solution is a matter of taste. Each has pros and cons. In my mind the Mediator was the best solution for me and really it has a Lot less hassle setting the GFX-Sound card up (even though I’m not yet finished doing this!) than some other things are with the Amiga. I’ll give IDE as a rival example - A friend needed me to add a Hard Drive into my chain to copy some things over for burning to CD, but getting the computer to boot with one of my Hard Drives and his at the same time was near-impossible! (take out my IDE HDs and the SCSI boot picture wouldn’t show up for some reason!).

To sum up...

Whatever set up your 4000 is it can only benefit from having a PCI solution in it. You currently have either two or three choices depending on your hardware: with Cyberstorms (like mine) you have a GREX option and all users can use Prometheus or Mediator. If the problem with the GREX is that if your CPU ever goes belly up your entire system is up the creek until you can either repair the card or get a new one. The Prometheus on the other is a lovely card, and one ideally suited to those without a Tower but it kind of throws the “look and feel” of the system out of kilter (in my opinion). The thing is that because it still uses the normal Daughter Board to hold the Prometheus the PCI cards then sits in an upright position and thus don’t have to use their ports through the Backplane housing. You also have to leave the Case off of the construction. Which leaves the Mediator 4k but that’s only viable if you don’t mind paying for a new tower (but once you have a tower you wont regret it - there’s just so much more room to put things!).

Good news is on its way though in the form of the new version of Medication that is due out as we go to print. It will help you set the channels up and will include a TV GUI called “Remote” that will make life Much easier for everyone. Medication is not the only program designed to help with the TV channels though, there are several programs available for this: ChannelEd and MedTV. Links for both of these are at the end of the review along with links for other useful programs and sites.
ImageFX is one of the few Amiga programs that is still with us from the glory days of the late 80’s and early 90’s, and all that time it has been in constant development. The 4.5 upgrade was suprisingly well thought out and installed over my existing 4.1 installation with no fuss. I was impressed with the installer, even my third party shareware VisionFX PPC modules continued to work without problems. Opening the upgraded program reveals the ImageFx’s Interface which was overhauled at version 3.0 but still retains many signs of its pre-graphics card heritage, particularly in the monolithic tool box. But as I’ve already reviewed ImageFX twice in Clubbed I won’t dwell on the fundamentals of the program, let’s dive into the new features.

**Drawing Modes**

A variety of new drawing modes have been added, many mimicking the blend modes already available in the layer manager window. In ImageFX the paint tool can control how the colour or brush you are painting with is mixed with the background image. Some of the new modes are Screen, Subtract, Absolute and Divide. The rest of the modes all combine

**Bug Fixes**

Reading through the change log between version 4.1a (the last free upgrade) and 4.5 it’s clear that many bug fixes have been made and indeed ImageFX generally seems more stable, although to be honest I never had any major problems with 4.1a. One very useful function mentioned in the log is the option to change the height of the layer manager window which is frustratingly small by default. This is a useful feature as the image window is rather large and it allows you to use the LAYERMANAGERHEIGHT tooltype in the ImageFX icon to increase the number of lines. A resizeable window would have been nicer but as the programmer states “Not pretty, but it works”.

**Conclusion**

Much as I like ImageFX (it is by far the most used graphics program on my Amiga) I can’t find much to get excited about in this upgrade. While the new animation feature and drawing modes work well and the bug fixes are welcome they can’t be called a major change or improvement. Nothing has been done to improve on ImageFX’s problem areas, in particular the old fashioned interface and slow learning curve for beginners, this upgrade has even less new documentation than the previous ones which were already poorly described. So I find myself thinking, as I did at the end of my ImageFX 4 review, that if you’re buying ImageFX for the first time it’s still a fine program with lots of features if you’re prepared to learn them, however for upgraders the new features don’t really justify the price.

**Results**

For new users:

Pretty Good!

For upgraders:

Could do Better!

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Nova Design

**Distributor**

Eyetech

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**Price**

Upgrade from V.4.1a £39.95

Full £79.95

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The Basics

Before we start looking at the special features, let’s see how the EZKeyXS performs as a simple keyboard adaptor. For a start multiple key presses are supported with both Amiga and PC keyboards so you won’t have the problem of accidental key presses when using a PC keyboard. The power feed to the keyboard interface is what the EZKeyXS is all about.

For this to work two connections have to be made to the interface. The first is a connector from the ATX power adaptor supplied by Eyetech. The second is a connection from the EZKeyXS. The power feed to the interface is the key that tells the computer to turn the power switch on and off.

When you first run Freekey it opens its interface so you can configure the operation of the additional keys on your keyboard. You have to tell Freekey about all the additional keys available on your particular keyboard, you do this by adding a new key to the list with the “New” button, then entering the name of the key (for example Web Browser or Play). Then to detect a key you click on a button called Grab and then press the key you want to assign. Freekey then picks up the code that identifies that key. You can then add a qualifier such as Shift or Alt, allowing you to program a specific action to each key. Finally you can key in the program or script that will be run when the key is pressed. Note that some of the additional buttons are usually used for special operations such as running a script or program. This is usually done using a button called the “Power Off” key.

I’ve got the Power!

The ATX power supplies used in most modern PCs have a soft power switch (older AT supplies with P8 and P9 plugs have a hard switch), this means the motherboard can signal the power to turn on and off, the switch on the front of the case is a signal that can be intercepted in software. In real terms this means that the computer can be turned off through software and the OS can respond appropriately when you press the power button on the case. While the EZKey doesn’t allow software control of the power supply it does let you switch your Amiga on and off using a keyboard combination or using the front power button if you have an ATX power supply.

Keys, keys and more keys

The EZKeyXS is supplied with a small freeware utility called Freekey which was developed with the support of Eyetech by Alastair Robinson and also wrote FreeWheel, supplied with many mouse adaptors. If you already have an EZKeyXS you can download Freekey from Eyetech’s website however your adaptors must be the current MkII version. If it is not you cannot perform the necessary firmware upgrade for £15.

Freekey lets you make use of the “multimedia” keys found on many PC keyboards. These are commonly marked for functions such as launching a web browser, EMail program and other applications or transport controls such as play, pause, fast forward etc, for music playback programs. Freekey is a commodity which can be run from the WbStartup drawer or as a user startup script. Although it is not supplied with an installer Freekey only needs to be copied to your hard drive.

When you first run Freekey it opens its interface so you can configure the operation of the additional keys on your keyboard. You have to tell Freekey about all the additional keys available on your particular keyboard, you do this by adding a new key to the list with the “New” button, then entering the name of the key (for example Web Browser or Play). Then to detect a key you click on a button called Grab and then press the key you want to assign. Freekey then picks up the code that identifies that key. You can then add a qualifier such as Shift or Alt, allowing you to program a specific action to each key. Finally you can key in the program or script that will be run when the key is pressed. Note that some of the additional buttons are usually used for special operations such as running a script or program. This is usually done using a button called the “Power Off” key.

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For this to work two connections have to be made to the interface. The first is a connector from the ATX power supply. If you don’t have the proper interface for your keyboard then you can’t use Freekey, although Eyetech can perform the necessary firmware upgrade for £15. The EZKeyXS is supplied with a small freeware utility called Freekey which was developed with the support of Eyetech by Alastair Robinson and also wrote FreeWheel, supplied with many mouse adaptors. If you already have an EZKeyXS you can download Freekey from Eyetech’s website however your adaptors must be the current MkII version. If it is not you cannot perform the necessary firmware upgrade for £15.
Because the CDTV controller doesn't have a full QWERTY keyboard Eyetech have employed quite a complex mapping to get full keyboard functionality. The MouseJoy switch is employed to switch between pointer mode where the D pad moves the mouse pointer and keypad mode where the D pad is used to select different character sets on the remaining keys. 13 of the Z4's keys in the centre of the controller are mapped to the letter keys on the keyboard pressing left on the D Pad maps these to A-M and pressing right maps N-Z. up and down on the D pad is used to shift on or off respectively. With the D pad released the numeric keys on the controller allow you enter numbers and their related symbols with shift lock on. The other keys are mapped to commonly used symbols, punctuation and functions depending on the computer specific mapping and shift mode selected. The “fire” buttons are used as either left and right mouse buttons, a pointer mode or return and backspace in keypad mode. Finally there are two special buttons on the remote which don’t change regardless of mode, the CDTV button toggles the xMouse monitor switch if one is fitted and the Power button resets the Amiga if it is pushed three times within one second. With this fairly complex mapping and no new markings on the CDTV controller the keyboard remotely takes quite a bit of learning, I found I had to constantly refer to the installation manual for explanation and troubleshooting. I should note that a full QWERTY keyboard would probably want a get a full QWERTY keyboard (any PS/2 model should be compatible with the EZKeyXS). On the other hand for more simple tasks with minimal text entry like presentations and demonstrations the keypad would be very handy.

Excellent Design

The EZKey XS is obviously the product of many years of experience in keyboard adaptors at Eyetech, it has many neat features that will go unnoticed most of the time but will occasionally be invaluable. For example when used with a PC keyboard it has been designed to allow keys to be set down at startup, for example to disable an accelerator or bring up an early configuration menu, which is only usually supported by true Amiga keyboards. Another unusual feature is the implementation of the reset signal convention which gives running programs a moment of warning when you perform a keyboard reset, some use this to complete hard disk operations before the reset. Normally this reset convention is only implemented on Amigas with external keyboards. Finally the EZKey supports hot plugging of the keyboard while it is running (although you cannot change keyboard types, to Amiga or vice versa without a reset) ideal if you use a keyboard switcher to share one keyboard among several computers. The EZKeyXS includes flash memory so the firmware can be upgraded by Eyetech without replacing any components, this is the function of the edge connector at one end of the board.

Conclusion

The EZKey XS is fairly pricey for what is a simple piece of hardware, however great deal of thought has obviously been put into its design, it is hard to how it could be more flexible or compatible. In all the time we used we had no difficulties and the PC keyboard did everything a real Amiga keyboard would do. The facility to make use of “multimedia” keys and the optional remote are the icing on the cake, this really is the best keyboard adaptor money can buy!

Pros

- Well thought out design.
- Multimedia key support.
- Wide range of features.
- A little expensive.

Cons

- A little expensive.

Conclusion

As I really like this tower, it has most of the good features of the Power Tower, quality fit and finish, easy assembly and compatibility with bus boards and ready for all. An excellent package and good value for money too!

Top Notch!

By Robert Williams
After mentioning a new version in the news pages of several issues of Clubbed, I thought it was about time we had a proper look at Perfect Paint. This application started as a simple Amiga paint program and has now grown and become complex image processing and animation features, more with each update. After downloading and installing the latest version, a simple matter of dragging the drawer on to my hard disk and copying a font, I got stuck in.

Perfect Paint opens on its own screen and initially two windows are displayed, on the left is the main tool bar and along the bottom of the screen is a bar containing a button for each of the images that are currently loaded, up to a maximum of 10 images. The current image is displayed in a standard Amiga window, the image bar at the bottom of the screen can be used to swap between the loaded images. An icon is placed next to the image window that shows the image in a window fixed at 100% and a separate Zoom window. A brush is a portion cut from the current image, once the cut brush icon is selected clicking on a filled shape tool would do the trick. There are two other modes to this function which are unusual in an Amiga package. Burn/Dodge and Saturate/Desaturate. These options are designed for correcting photographs and allow you to lighten and darken, or desaturate and saturate areas of the photo by painting over it with the left or right mouse buttons, this is much quicker than changing effects all the time. The next button in this section of the control bar is for special effects, these include warping a area of the image, applying one of several predefined effects which are combinations of Perfect Paint’s effects, a simple ray tracer which allows you to insert many pre-defined 3D objects and rotation correction which can automatically rotate an image based on a line which should be straight. Finally here with the anti-aliasing control, this is used to smooth the edges of the current image using one of the standard painting tools to avoid jagges. This feature instantly puts the quality of Perfect Paint’s output ahead of traditional paint programs such as Deluxe Paint and Personal Paint.

Progress - Right at the bottom of the control bar are two progress gauges, the top one shows the progress of longer effects and the lower one can be used by an AREXX script to show overall progress if it runs several effects.

Effects
A selection of image processing effects are available and these are applied using the standard painting tools when the effects icon is selected. The effect to be applied is picked from the effect button’s pop-up menu or by clicking on an icon in the tool bar. All the effects are applied at the click of the button, this is much quicker than changing effects all the time. There are also options to produce an outline of the image, this can be used various really nice effects such as drop shadow, glow and bevel.

Controls - This buttons give access to some of Perfect Paint’s more advanced features, when clicked with the left button they toggle on and off indicating whether a feature is in use. Clicking with the right button produces a menu of options to control the feature. The buttons in this section are for: Brush enabling you to cut brushes from the image, the menu has load and save options and allows effects such as rotation to be applied to the current brush. Anim, switches between animation and single image mode. Spin, allows you to switch to a spare “scratch pad” area for the current image. Effects, various image processing effects which can be applied with the painting tools. Stencil, the edit stencil window has various tools that can be used to mask and control the edit stencil. Also applies an outline to the image, this can be used various really nice effects such as drop shadow, glow and bevel.

Misc - Several modes, with this button you can select various painting modes such as rubber stamp, (cloned in many other programs), smear and water colour. All these modes have a fade option which is accessed by right clicking on the icon, this causes the colour to fade as you paint. You could do this with a real paint brush. There are two other modes to this function which are unusual in an Amiga package. Burn/Dodge and Saturate/Deseaturate. These options are designed for correcting photographs and allow you to lighten and darken, or desaturate and saturate areas of the photo by painting over it.

Almost all Perfect Paint’s features are accessed from this packed toolbar.

Reviews

Perfect Paint was found by Robert William to be practically perfect in every way. Stencils, or masks as they are commonly called in other packages, are an important feature of any image editing program, their function is to protect areas of the image from any of the effect applied to it. The stencil function in Perfect Paint’s stencil features are all accessed from the Stencils button in the tool bar. Clicking on the button activates the current stencil and you can click again to temporarily deactivate it at any time. To define the areas protected by the stencil you use the Edit Stencil window which is accessed from the tool bar. You can use a toolbar to mode the areas of the image protected by the stencil are selected using a toolbar, this makes the active selection visible and allows you to click on this packed toolbar.

Toolbar
Perfect Paint’s user interface is rather unusual, none of its windows and gadgets except the image window follow the normal Amiga pattern, and it does not use Amiga menus at the top of the screen. The basic functions such as loading and saving are accessed by short cut keys, except the Effects button, which appears when you left click on an icon in the tool bar window’s title bar or by keyboard short cuts. Many other functions are accessed by right clicking on icons to pop-up menus. The main tool bar is almost all of the program controls, it is split up into seven sections, as these are so important I will mention them in detail now.

Brushes - Much like traditional Amiga paint programs you can choose several sizes of square, round or oblique brush, you can also pick one of 9 brushes cut from an image or predefined round soft edge brushes of various sizes.

Tools - The standard painting tools are provided such as circle, box, line, curve and polygon. For precise results in Perfect Paint clicking and holding down the left button on their icon allows you to choose from various settings, such as a filled version, once you have chosen an option it becomes the default for that button. Each tool has a “folded over” corner, this indicates that the right clicking on the icon will open an additional settings requester, for example the selection tool has a settings requester where you can define a dash pattern. In addition to the standard tools there are several that stand out as offering some interesting options. The new tool palette has a useful tolerance option which controls how close a colour has to be to the area you click for the fill to fill over it. The text tool lets you make a text brush out of any system font including bitmap and scalable types, three levels of antialiasing are available which makes the text look very smooth. There are also options to produce an outline of the text and to apply various really nice effects such as drop shadow, glow and bevel.

Palette - The next area of the control bar is the colour palette, this shows 256 colours which can be picked by clicking on them. There is also an icon which produces a spread of colours when clicked so you can quickly select a suitable one for the current image. There are many packages Perfect Paint has been used for background colour, these are shown in an icon, right clicking here produces a menu of suitable colour options. These include a window where you can define individual colours by using their RGB settings and also create spreads and colour ranges for gradient fills. Up to ten gradients can be defined, each one can use up to 20 different known colours so you can make partially transparent gradients. The menu also stays open on the screen without blocking other operations. The available effects and effect options includes various colour effects such as colour and gamma correction.

Control - The buttons in this section will be instantly familiar to anyone who has used DPaint. We have buttons for symmetry (who hasn’t made a few mistakes when using a perfectly good brush) and grid, both adjustable with a right click. Below them are clear image icons which clear the image to the background colour and Undo which Redoes if you right click. The only new function here is for AREXX, right clicking allows you to select an AREXX script which can then be run at the click of the button. A number of sample scripts are supplied which allows you to perform a variety of tasks such as loading and saving are accessed by short cut keys, except the Effects button, which appears when you left click on an icon in the tool bar.

Almost all Perfect Paint’s features are accessed from this packed toolbar.

Reviews

Stencils, or masks as they are commonly called in other packages, are an important feature of any image editing program, their function is to protect areas of the image from any effects that are applied to it. The stencil function in Perfect Paint’s stencil features are all accessed from the Stencils button in the tool bar. Clicking on the button activates the current stencil and you can click again to temporarily deactivate it at any time. To define the areas protected by the stencil you use the Edit Stencil window which is accessed from the tool bar. You can use a toolbar to mode the areas of the image protected by the stencil are selected using a toolbar, this makes the active selection visible and allows you to click on it.
On one side of the camera is a flap covering the SmartMedia memory card slot, an 8Mb card is supplied which on the lowest resolution will hold over 100 images. The C3000Z's 3.3 mega pixel sensor gives it a maximum resolution of 2048 by 1536 pixels, below this the camera offers over 10 lower quality settings which reduce the resolution and increase the compression to fit more images on a memory card. The upper resolutions available are 1024x768, 1280x960, and 1600x1200, most of these are offered in both still and JPEGM compression. All the resolutions are also available in a reduced quality mode but this takes up much more memory, at the maximum resolution a 16Mb card is needed for one image! I normally use 1024 x 768 for average enlargements as this is quick and adequate to download and process. If I need a bigger print size I reduce the resolution to avoid a blotchy pixelated finish.

The front of the camera has a brushed metal finish and is gun metal grey in colour, the back is black plastic with a crinkle finish. On the back is the built-in zoom lens which gives up to 3x optical magnification which is equivalent to a 35-105mm zoom on a 35mm camera. One of the reasons I chose this camera is that it doesn't retain the settings that you make, it always returns to the defaults when turned on. The LCD uses plenty of power because the LCD uses plenty of power. The camera can run on standard AA cells, Olympus also offer a pair of Lithium cells which last much longer but cost about £10 each and are hard to get hold of. If you don't use the rechargeable AA cells, Olympus are recommended as Alkalines don't last long at all. It's also worth considering the AC adaptor if you do indoor work.

The animation system, showing the control and preview windows.

Three methods of animation creation are supported: Cell animation is the most basic, for this you draw on each frame individually, ideal for making animated GIFs for websites which tend to change each frame. I couldn't find any support for a light table or onion skin tool which allows you to see previous frames below the current one, the feature would have made Perfect Paint more suited to traditional hand drawn animation. Next up is animation using brushes, although there is no support of brushes with multiple free hand shape over them. You can also use the tools to remove areas from the frame by toggling an Add/Subtract cycle. The third and final feature is that if you use the magic wand or eye dropper to select areas changing the tolerance updates the selection instantly, making it very quick to get just the area you want.

Once you have defined the stencil you want there is an option to smooth the edges for painting jagges on in between edited and projected areas. Another neat option is to draw a shadow of the defined stencil (offset and transparency) below the stencil protected area. With the stencil switched on cutting a brush will pick up just the unprotected area, this is a great way to remove objects from their background for composting. The current stencil can be saved and new ones loaded, a feature which could be used to work on several areas on an image separately by loading different stencils.

Animation

In addition to painting and image processing Perfect Paint has another trick up its sleeve, powerful animation support. An animation is quickly created by adding frames to the current image. An animation window control window with VGC style buttons and a frame slider is available so you can easily browse through the animation. All the frames except the one currently displayed are stored on disk minimising the memory requirement, for fast playback a small thumbnail display of the whole animation is kept in memory or you can opt to playback from disk which is slower.

Special Effects

Perfect Paint has several features designed to help those of us who are less artistically inclined to achieve good results. As I mentioned briefly earlier the built in effects are really stunning. There are 18 in total, many of them have translucent elements and use the current drawing colour, some have additional options too which gives an element of depth. There is a range of predefined effects called Alchemy which automatically apply several of Perfect Paint's image processing operators to achieve a certain look. Some emulate painting styles like oil paint or pointilism. There are several different mosaic options and more unusual ones like plastic wrap that makes your image look like it's covered in cling film! The alchemy window has a useful preview but it only uses a predefined image rather than a portion of the current buffer. To address this most impressive of the aids is the built in ray tracer this comes with Perfect Paint. It is a simple ray tracer which allows customisation such as arrows, cones and cubes plus several designed to be used as buttons in menus and presentations. It is also possible to output in 3D text objects. The objects can be coloured or textured with a background number of which can be supplied. The position of the object and lights can be changed to get just the effect you want. A preview gives you an idea of the result before you commit to the final render. Once you're happy that the finished render can then fill the image or be used as a brush.

The animation system, showing the control and preview windows.

Documentation

Perfect Paint's documentation comes in the form of an AmigaGuide file which is largely a reference guide to the functions while everything is listed the functions of many commands aren't described in detail. Most of the time it's easier just to play around with a function to fathom out how it works. It would be nice to have some tutorials to help new users get used to Perfect Paint's way of working which is something we will consider for future issues of Total Amiga. One nice aspect of the documentation is that unlike most AmigaGuides it is very useful as a visual aid for example one shows all the pop-up menus that are available and which buttons they are linked to.

Conclusion

While Perfect Paint's interface is quirky and nonstandard its feature set makes it a good commercial package to shame. It's hard to believe that a program with such depth to its features and complexity is freeware and developed by one person. It is well worth spending the £20 to find out if this is the case. If you're happy that the more you use Perfect Paint the more cool features you find!
Well those Hyperion chaps have done it again haven't they, yet another top class game hits the Amiga. We have all admired the two previous releases from Hyperion, but truth be told the games are in some ways similar or maybe more to be accurate the same genre. Most people who know me will know that I am into flight sims in a big way, so when Hyperion stated that they were going to release Freespace I thought to myself “oh well not a flight sim but at least something different”. Freespace is a space combat simulator in the mould of Wing Commander which was released on both the PC and Amiga many years ago, but of course Freespace far exceeds it in regards of graphics, sound and gameplay by a long way.

Prepare for Launch
Freespace comes packaged in a DVD case (wish all games were packaged like this) with a professionally printed cover that depicts some of the in game graphics. Inside the case is the CD and a registration card, all the documentation is on disc.

Like all the previous Hyperion releases, the Freespace installer uses the graphical features of the OS 3.9 installer utility which in this case is a nice backdrop of a spaceship. The installation was simple, I chose the intermediate level and after choosing where to install it to the only other options were what language to use (English, French and German are supported) and whether to copy the movie files onto the hard drive. With the movie files the installation uses 675 MB compared to 427 MB without, but having the movie files installed should speed up loading. To run the game you will need Warp-Up if you have a PPC card and Warp 3D if you have a 3D accelerated graphics card and want to play it in it's full glory.

Warp Speed?
The really good news is that Freespace has much lower hardware requirements than either Heretic II or Shogo, this means that it will run on a wider range of machines and is beautifully smooth on high end systems. The minimum requirements are an 60MHz processor and a graphics card, but if you don’t have a PPC board, a 3D graphics card is recommended to get a decent frame rate from the game. A minimum of 48 Mb free RAM is required to run Freespace on a 68k machine which can get away with as little as 24 Mb free RAM if you use the VMM virtual memory utility.

Count Down
When you run the game a GUI appears that has buttons to launch the game or to set options required before the game loads. Before you run Freespace for the first time it is advisable to go into the setup window and check the options to suit your hardware configuration. In the setup window there are tabs with the options for video, Warp 3D, audio, joystick, speed, network and memory. Most of these options can be left at defaults but there are a few you will want to change. On the video tab you can choose software rendering for those lucky enough to own a 3D card. If you have a sound card you can select to use AHI on the audio tab. For those of you who don’t like using the mouse and keyboard controls there is an option to use CD32 controller, or connect the joystick directly to the back of the game in the background, I must say it gets you into the mood of the game right away. So lets hit the commit key and get on with it.

Lift Off
You can either plunge yourself into a campaign or go into training missions, and if you want to survive more than five missions I suggest you do the two. The training missions give you hands on experience at flying and dogfighting, they also provide a good way to learn all the keyboard functions and controls (the trains). Your mission briefing is very thorough and relayed to you via both text and spoken from your commander, take it from me to listen all he has to tell you you as in this game orders are to be followed to the letter or face the consequences. Forget intro screens, forget menus for settings, Forget orders (oops better not!) this is where the action starts. On selection of your mission you are plunged into deep space with your wingman (buddies) or trainer close by, these guys are in constant communication with you and are there to help you get through your tough missions, more on this later.

Mission Control
After an intro movie and a couple of nice loading screens a create pilot screen appears where you can create a new pilot or load an existing one, which allows you to continue a saved game. When you commit your choice of pilot the main menu screen appears, and oh boy this is starting to look a bit special. The menu is a rendered image of your ship’s hanger complete with animated sequences and sound effects. You can choose what you want to do by clicking on various items in the hanger which animate as you move your pointer over them... neat! For example moving your pointer over the computer screen to the right of the image makes the screen glow and the commander standing nearby looks at you, clicking on it takes you to the in game options screen.

It is from here that you can set to switch various in game options such as graphics detail, level of difficulty and multi player options. Also from this screen you can access your controls set up and of there are plenty of controls that can be set from basic stuff like what button puts the brakes on or fires a weapon to the very complex number of commands that you can communicate to your wingmen via a touch of the keyboard, you can even control the ships hardware rendering for those lucky enough to own a 3D card. If you have a sound card you can select to use AHI on the audio tab. For those of you who don’t like using the mouse and keyboard controls there is an option to use CD32 controller, or connect the joystick directly to the back of the game in the background, I must say it gets you into the mood of the game right away. So lets hit the commit key and get on with it.

Space The Final Frontier
The in game graphics of Freespace are what I would call pretty accurate looking, although not having been in space myself it looks pretty convincingly real to me. The vast vacuum of space isn’t just black with a few stars thrown in for good measure, you can see distant galaxies, a shimmering haze of blue in the background and when you ship moves asteroids and debris (space junk) passes you by, never knew space looked so busy. The ships themselves are usually big and up from subtle shades of grey as most spacecraft in the real world seem to be, but are very detailed. You can see lots of detail on the surface of the ships including identification letters or numbers, booster rockets light up brightly when fired up full power and look too hot to touch! Your view from the spaceship is a HUD that is totally configurable to your own liking, this gives you all the information you will need during battle against the Vasudan forces such as target locking, enemy ship information, where the enemy are in regards to your position (very easy I can tell you), how much damage you have sustained and all manor of navigation and weaponry information.

So lets take a further look and get into battle, you can target a ship with a simple keystroke (T for any target or H for hostile target) and once this is done you have indicators letting you know where and how far it is from you. Once targeted you can even match your targets speed (pressing M) so he finds it hard to shake you off, then you can try out various primary and secondary weapons to destroy it and from the ones I have seen they look pretty cool. Now for some real eye candy, when your targets are on the verge of total destruction blue flashes of lighting emit all over the vessels body just prior to a massive colourful explosion. During the explosion you will get to see the structure of the craft breaking up and scattering debris around with some pieces ablaze... ultra cool!

Warp Speed???
The reason I cheeped out on the hardware requirements that you receive in the heat of battle, such as requests for assistance or a wingman, is to warning you that you have an unsighted enemy attacking you. While you are in radio communication from your wingman a video window of your ship is shown (you can see him talking to you and react to their situation, this makes you feel even worse when you not only hear them scram in agony but see it too when his ship is destroyed (gulp!). As you can see in this game you are not a solo individual fighting the enemy single handed like in Heretic II or Shogo, no sir, you are part of a team and you depend on each other to get through the missions alive.

Star Wars
Freespace has bundles of game-play, you feel part of the team from the very beginning and have full motivation to do well, there is a system of medals to be won for...
It's a thorough pre-mission briefing with specific orders to be followed and a detailed post-mission de-briefing that details how well or not you did. There is even a suggestions button to click on to give you advice on how you may have performed better if you followed orders to the letter... oops!

So far I haven't mentioned how fast Freespace runs on my system (PPC 240 Mhz/060 50 Mhz & Bvision graphics card), I have to report that it runs very fast indeed with hardware rendering (CVision, BVision or Voodoo 3) at maximum detail.

In conclusion Freespace is one of those games that you will want to play to the bitter end and then be wanting extra mission updates (I know I will), it is just so damn good. It has superbly realistic graphics that make you feel you are in space, the excellent sound and music add to the atmosphere and excitement of the game. If this wasn’t enough Freespace has the best game-play that I have experienced and is playing the first part of Quake to the Amiga. In case you haven’t guessed by now this is a must have game!

**Pros**
- Runs on a range of systems.
- Involving and varied game play.
- Stunning graphics and sound.
- No manual.

**Mission Accomplished**

Even using the 68K executable in hardware rendering mode gives reasonable frame rates as long as you set detail level to medium. What if you don’t have a 3D graphics card I hear you say? I have tried it with the PPC in software render mode and it runs fine, a little slower and a bit harsher looking but still quite impressive. I even gave it a go with the 68K executable using software rendering at low detail and it ran but I felt it was too slow to be playable. I should imagine the maximum performance on currently available hardware would be from a high speed PPC (603 or 604) with a Voodoo 3 graphics card, but it will run adequately on lesser systems to varying degrees.
Could this oddly named utility be the first to bring DVD playback to the Amiga? Robert Williams finds out.

**Top Tips**

Setting up sounds in AmIRC

With IRC, you can have the ability to play sounds or music during your IRC sessions! Others in the same IRC channel will see your sound request, and if they have the sound, they will hear it too! Setting this up is a relatively simple procedure. You can find the Sound settings in the "Misc" section of the AmIRC setup (which can be found in the main menu: Settings -> Setup). In the "CTCP Sound "Getting set" section, you need to select where your Sounds directory is located. (If not, create one first!) There's a volume slider below which you can adjust to suit your needs. Then there’s the Sound player section, the "use external check box should be ticked, then below that you need to select a suitable player, such as Play16 (recommended) or SongPlayer. The command line should be something like "CP:Play16" if you are using play16, and the "In" is for the file name of the sound. And that’s that set up! In order to play your sounds during your IRC session, type something like: "sound: soundname.wav":, where you would put the name of the sound you wanted to play in place of "soundname.wav". Make sure you have the right file extension too (i.e. .wav, .iff, or .mp3).

Using the F Key feature of AmIRC

Once you get to know IRC a little more, you will notice that there are a number of commands to remember, and you may well get to the point where there’s just too many to remember. That’s where the F key feature comes in! This can be found in the main AmIRC menu: Settings -> Setup. In the "CTCP Sound Getting set" section, you need to select where your Sounds directory is located. (If not, create one first!) There is a volume slider below which you can adjust to suit your needs. Then there’s the Sound player section, the "use external" check box should be ticked, then below that you need to select a suitable player, such as Play16 (recommended) or SongPlayer. The command line should be something like "CP:Play16": if you are using play16, and the "In" is for the file name of the sound. And that’s that set up! In order to play your sounds during your IRC session, type something like: "sound: soundname.wav":, where you would put the name of the sound you wanted to play in place of "soundname.wav". Make sure you have the right file extension too (i.e. .wav, .iff, or .mp3).

**Reviews**

**Reviews**

**Amiga Movie Player**

MPEG video and audio files have for some time now been one of the most common ways of providing video and audio on the Internet, and fitting it on CDs and lately DVDs. (Amidog’s Movie Player, not to be confused with AmigaLynn the MPEG audio player) is the latest version of Mathias ‘amidog’ Roslund’s player for these files. AMP requires an Amiga with a PowerPC accelerator and uses Haage and Partner’s WarpUp system.

AMP can be run either from the shell or using a separate MUI utility, either way all the options are available. Using the GUI you can save your preferred settings and given the range of processor power needed to decode movies with audio.

**Play it Again...**

Using the GUI an AMP file can be selected using a file requester, clicking on Play File opens the display you chose. If you choose a window mode a standard Amiga window opens with a scroll bar along the (that is used to show the current position in the file, you can drag the scroll bar to seek forward or back. Although the scroll bar isn’t available in full screen mode, whatever display you choose you can use the number keys to skip through in ten percent chunks, this works fine on shorter movies but is a bit annoying on longer ones where each chunk can be several minutes long. The other options available are pause, resume and exit which are mapped to space bar, return and escape respectively.

**DVD Drives**

When I first tried to use the Pioneer DVD drive attached it to the A3000 SCSI bus along with my own external devices. However I could not get AMP to read any DVD’s and when I mounted it as a CD reader it was erratic at reading ordinary data CDs. When checking with Mathias I found that it often failed to even show up on the SCSI bus. All this pointed to a SCSI problem but the drive was attached to the same bus as my CD-ROM, writer and an additional hard disk all of which continued to work normally. I was nearly out of ideas when suddenly I had a thought which didn’t work. This is probably mostly down to the MPEG standard which doesn’t have different codecs as found in AVI and Quicktime files but never the less AMP seems pretty compatible.

**DVD**

One unique feature of AMP is that it can play DVD movies, and it really works! Of course you need a DVD drive attached to your Amiga to do this, for this review I was able to borrow a Pioneer SCSI DVD-ROM drive. Any drive should work including one of the many DVD units available but a SCSI drive on a DMA controller should give better performance due to lower CPU usage. After setting your options and specifying the device name and unit number of your DVD drive AMP starts and presents you with a list of the titles available on the DVD. The menu offered by most DVD titles are not supported but on most discs the choice of titles allows you to view all the video material. You are then offered choice of the available audio and subtitle options, this means you can choose alternative language and commentary tracks. With that choice made play begins, the movie is going you are limited to the standard play controls, there are no additional options for DVD use.

DVD playback is a very processor intensive process, for a start DVD video is of high quality and relatively high resolution and then there is the better than CD quality sound, both of which need to be decompressed on the fly. I found that my CyberStorm PPC, the fastest currently available PPC card (but not over clocked), I needed to use the lores option and reduce the audio sample rate to 24khz to play back movies without the sound skipping, with these settings the video was slightly jerky, running at around 15 frames per second, but is very watchable. Even then I got the odd skip in the sound when there was little action on the screen. One piece of very good news is that all the DVD titles I tried worked, this included a variety of movies from different publishers and some TV titles. All my disc are region 2, as are the authors so I can’t confirm that other regions would work differently.

On the DVD front I think it is pretty amazing that AMP manages to play DVDs at all, that it works reliably on a range of discs and is watchable on such relatively old hardware is fantastic and a great sign that we will have good DVD support when faster hardware comes along... way to go Mathias!

According to the documentation Video CDs (an earlier standard which puts an MPEG 1 encoded movie on a normal CD) in both standard and CDi formats are supported in the same way as DVDs using the same requesters to pick tracks. I needed to test this as I don’t have any Video CD discs.

During the time I’ve been testing AMP I have had a few crashes and lockups, these don’t happen that often and tend to be when I quit it after a long session, for example after trying several DVD’s. I’m not totally certain this isn’t down to PPC overheating which could be caused by running my 3000 with the cover off to attach the DVD-ROM. However it seems odd that the locks don’t tend to happen during play, when the CPU is under most load.

**Conclusion**

AMP2 is an excellent MPEG player, it played faultlessly all the files I threw at it and the DVD playback if great, although being honest it is a bit jerky. Nonetheless, all the features are there, one, until we have faster processors which allow full resolution and sound quality. Combine this with a GUI that makes setting all the options child’s play and we have a winner, well worth the low shareware fee!
PrintManager is a utility by the prolific Stephan Rupprecht that gives you increased control over the printing process. It does this by intercepting data intended for the printer. As a result, you can set PrintManager to capture your data stream, with the data stored in a spool file. PrintManager can then offer additional control over when and how it is sent to the printer.

An installation script is provided in the archive, but all you really need to do is to drag the PrintManager program onto your hard disk and then you can configure DOSDrivers to mount the drives you require. Example DOSDrivers are supplied that can be used to mount floppy disks and ZIP disks, but if you want to use the fast parallel option, you should be able to access large disc drives. As a test for this I used a 40GB IDE hard drive from a PC with Windows98 installed to one of the IDE ports on my Cx486es 2 and it worked flawlessly. I could see all the files and transfer back and forth, my files were retained both ways. There is a lot of debate due to the differences between FAT and the Amiga’s native file systems, for example FAT had a 15 day comment string and PrintManager used the unused comment field to display an extended date stamp (created date and last accessed date) that the Amiga file system doesn’t support. If you have an Amiga and a PC and need to transfer large files occasionally this is an excellent software package as both types of file systems will be faster than any other method.

You can use Fat95 to format floppy disks, but as long as your file systems are the same, the only difference is that the FAT driver is faster as it is still in the early stages of development and the Amiga’s native file system is native as well. As a test for this I used a 40GB IDE hard drive from a PC with Windows98 installed to one of the IDE ports on my Cx486es 2 and it worked flawlessly. I could see all the files and transfer back and forth, my files were retained both ways. There is a lot of debate due to the differences between FAT and the Amiga’s native file systems, for example FAT had a 15 day comment string and PrintManager used the unused comment field to display an extended date stamp (created date and last accessed date) that the Amiga file system doesn’t support. If you have an Amiga and a PC and need to transfer large files occasionally this is an excellent software package as both types of file systems will be faster than any other method.

When you print from an application PrintManager starts capturing the data and shows the progress in the status dialog box. You can set in tool types whether it should wait until the job is complete, or stop printing immediately. If there is more than one print job in the list you can use up and down buttons in the window to reorder the jobs so the most important one gets printed first (if the gdrgear library is installed you can perform these operations with drag and drop). Once a job starts printing you can’t change its order but you can pause printing, stop the job part way through and print it later or remove it from the list. You can also specify the printer you want to use and further options on the Printer page of the preferences program for PrintManager.

You can set it so the window is opened, or appears iconified on Workbench whenever a print job arrives. As it is shareware the demo version of PrintManager has a couple of features disabled, the fast parallel and save job options, there is also a nag requester that appears occasionally. PrintManager can print multiple copies of a job, this is especially handy with programs that are slow to print or if you want to get on with one document while printing another. In this case you would print one copy from the application and then set the job in PrintManager to the number of copies required, once one lot of data is spooled the other can be printed immediately. If you have an Amiga and a PC and ZIP disks, in the latter case you will just need to adjust the DEVICE and UNIT parameters to point to the drive.

Setting the system clock with Genesis
Are you one of those people (like me) who don’t have a working battery in there Amiga? Don’t you find it annoying when you keep having to set the time for the tasks you do on your Amiga? Then again, there are those who say Genesis is a TCGIP stack isn’t it? So what’s that got to do with the Amiga’s system clock? Well as a matter of fact, Genesis has the ability to query a time server, and set that time on your Amiga! How do I do it? In the Genesis settings, in the services section. You first need to click the two check boxes, query time server and clock (matches the time on your Amiga), and then click to save time (obviously keeps the time). Then you will need a time server to point at, this is recommended: rtp2a.mcc.ac.uk. Save the settings, and the next time you go online Genesis should automatically set the time on your Amiga!
One of the unusual aspects of AmigaOS is the selection of screen modes that allows you to run programs on separate virtual screens. These screens can be at a different resolution and colour depth to the main Workbench screen. There are many advantages to this system, such as being able to choose a suitable and efficient screenmode for the task at hand and also organising the working area so you don’t have to juggle windows while working with several programs.

With the advent of ECS (Enhanced Chipset) and graphics cards Amiga users gradually got more resolutions and colours to play with. In 02 Commodore introduced the display database which holds all the screenmodes available on an Amiga. A screenmode is the definition of display using a particular resolution, number of colours and video standard.

The available screenmodes are defined by the chipset drivers installed in the Devs:Monitors drawer. With the greater number of modes a number of problems emerged, these included what to do about older programs which don’t offer a choice of screenmode and how to view a program set to run in a screenmode which could not be displayed on a particular Amiga.

The answer to these problems is screenmode promotion, this is the process of forcing a program to run in a different screenmode even if it doesn’t offer a screenmode option or is set to run in a particular mode.

When promotion is useful

Programs which don’t have a screenmode requester.

Many older Amiga programs are programmed following Commodore’s guidelines and therefore work perfectly well on a graphics card screen but don’t have a screenmode requester. This means they are hard coded to work in a particular screenmode, often you can’t even choose one of the available native screenmodes such as Multiscan or Super72. In this case a mode promotion utility can be used to force a program to open in the screenmode of your choice. If you leave the utility running in the back ground every time you run the errant program it will be promoted to the correct screenmode just as it had a setting.

Programs that automatically open in a particular screenmode

When many programs are first installed instead of asking nicely which screenmode they should open in or opening on the Workbench screen they just open in a default screenmode. Often this is a chipset screenmode, if you have a setup like mine where accessing the chipset is awkward this can be really annoying. However in these cases a mode promotion utility can be used to force the program to open in a screenmode you can see. You can define various preferred options to select the screenmode you really need, screens can be set up with this in order to provide an interface that suits the way you work. To avoid this make sure you don’t save the setting when you promote the program the first time. NewMode has a “This time” button in its promotion requester for just this reason.

When you change your screenmodes or install a new graphics card

Using the Amiga’s standard chipset the selection of screenmodes you are usually limited to the selection of screenmodes provided by the monitor drivers supplied with the Amiga. In some cases it may be possible to tweak these with a utility like MonId. With graphics cards that are not compatible with the monitor drivers the selection of screenmodes can be much greater, with both GfxPlug and Picasso 96 a utility is supplied (GxProMode and P96Mode respectively) which allows you to create your own screenmodes.

Any new screenmodes that you allocate will get a new model, the outcome of this is that any programs set to use the old screenmode won’t find it and may not be able to open their screen. In these cases a mode promotion utility can be used to view the program and let you change its preferences.

Potential Problems

Forcing a program to run in a screenmode it isn’t expecting can cause some problems. You cannot display in one go but you have to be careful as it may promote programs that are not compatible. In this case you can define a screenmode requester that will not promote to none.

You can opt to have a requester which whenever a program tries to open an unknown screen, here you can select to ignore the program and let it continue as normal or you can select a screen mode to promote to none.

NewMode has less options but fits them all in this neat Promote screen window making it quicker to use.

Promote a screen with NewMode is a two stage process but there are lots of options available.

ModelID

It is very rare that you need to know the model which screen the program you want to screen promote some however programs do ask you to identify a screenmode in this way. To find out what screen you need a utility such as getmodeinfo2c.ha which is in the util/misc directory of Aminet. This simple shell command pops up a screenmode requester and then reports the id of the screenmode selected. This is usually in the form of a hexadecimal number, for example the current screenmode I am using is 0x40c02045.

will find that many older programs and some newer ones particularly in the games and video areas just will not work when promoted, especially if the new screen is on a graphics card. This is usually because they use special features of the Amiga’s chipset which are not emulated by the graphics card and its drivers. Another problem that can occur is that you don’t have a suitable sized screen defined to promote a program to, this is why NewMode includes buttons and buttons not fitting on the screen. In these cases a mode promotion utility can be used to view the program and let you change its preferences.

Promoting a screen with ModePro

A simple mode promotion scheme is available in the IControl Preferences editor supplied with the OS, here you can check the Mode Promotion option which forces modes into their double scanned alternatives and Avoid Flicker which does the same for interlaced modes. However if you want more control, for example to promote to a graphics card screenmode then you will need a third party utility. Fortunately since the release of AmigaOS 2.6 a number have appeared. Two freely distributable utilities screenmodes can become the most popular and certainly have a wide range of features.

ModePro

by Michael Rivers - util/cdity/ModePro.ha

ModePro consists of two programs, the utility that does the promotion called ModePro itself which normally will be installed into the WbStartup to be run at all times and a preferences program which is used to setup new promotions.

There are three methods by which ModePro can identify a screen to promote, program name, screenname and screenmode. The name options both try to identify a screenmode requester. The screenmode requester is useful when you promote the program the first time. NewMode has a “This time” button in its promotion requester for just this reason.

When you change your screenmodes or install a new graphics card

NewMode is an older and simpler program than ModePro, it was last updated in 1995 and consists of a single program file which serves as both an installer and a preferences interface. Like ModePro it can recognise when a program is opened by its program name, screen name or screenmode however it has the advantage that you can use a combination of these, for example promote a program called this only when it opens in a particular screenmode.

When NewMode notices an unknown screen being opened it opens its Promote Screen window which contains a list of the available screenmodes that the program could be promoted to, the number of colours and the screen size to allow you to choose the correct screenmode.

You can also choose not to promote this program by selecting None which made you simply click Save or Use this to add to NewMode’s list of known programs permanently or for this session respectively. As I mentioned before the “This time” button lets you promote a program only once and is handy for sorting out new programs which open on an invisible screen. Unlike ModePro NewMode can’t be used to promote a particular screen mode or to open public screens.

Running NewMode a second time or opening its interface from the Exchange utility produces a new window which lists all the programs you have defined for promotion, so you can edit and delete items. You can also centralize when NewMode will ask you about a screen, you can get it to ask for all programs, only new ones that don’t appear in the program list or to automatically add screens without blocking the program and requesting them (apparently this can be used to get around some badly coded programs which lockup when the Promote Screen window appears).

While NewMode clearly has many less options than ModePro it does everything most people need and its interface and promotion and its interface is much neater. Because all the options are in the first Promote Screen window it is much quicker to set up a new promotion with NewMode than with ModePro.
Directory Opus 5

Directory Opus 5 can be intimidating for beginners but it's well worth the effort to master it. Robert Williams embarks on the first leg of a voyage of discovery!

The Manual

The Directory Opus 5 manual isn't the sort of book you would like to curl up in bed and read, it's very much a reference rather than a tutorial manual. However as Opus has many commands and functions it's well worth having the manual hand as there's no way I will be able to mention all the possible options and command names in this feature. It's probably a good idea to have a browse through the manual in any case so at least you know roughly what it contains.

Workbench Replacement

The major feature of Opus 5 was the Workbench Replacement mode, this meant that instead of running a file management utility separately Opus actually replaced the standard Amiga Workbench providing all of its features and adding many more including far more advanced file manipulation options and much more flexible configuration. When you select Workbench replacement mode during the Opus 5 installation the

LoadWb command (which is also called from the s:startup-sequence to load Workbench) is renamed to loadwb_old and replaced by a new version that loads Directory Opus instead. If you ever want to switch back to a normal Workbench temporarily you can hold down a Shift key while the Amiga boots, the Opus LoadWb command will notice this and run normal Workbench instead of Opus. If you wish to permanently switch back to Workbench just rename the LoadWb command and reinstall loadwb_old by renaming that back to LoadWb.

Screenmode

In Workbench replacement mode one slightly confusing aspect of Opus is setting the Screenmode it runs in, you might think that you should set it on the Display page of the internal Workbench Settings window but because you requester however choosing a Screenmode here leaves you with an extra picture Workbench screen. To solve this set the Display Mode in Environment to Workbench:Use, then Opus will use the Workbench screen and not open its own. If you want to change the screenmode with Opus using the Workbench Settings window just use the normal screenmode preferences program supplied with the OS.

NOTE: On my system, which has a graphics card and CyberGraphX 4, I have never been able to change the screenmode on the fly with Opus running. I always have to select the new mode, save and reboot for it to work. I find the new OS 3.9 screenmode preferences program is particularly good because now I can at least use the test feature to make sure a mode will work before I save it.

Launching Commands and Programs

In this tutorial I’m going to assume that you’ve got to grips with some of the basics of Opus, for example carrying out basic file operations such as copy and delete with the listers. If you aren’t at this stage yet, take a look at Chapter 5 of the Opus manual which explains the major parts of Opus 5 including the Listers. I’m going to concentrate on customising the listers to suit your method of work and some of the additional ways you can activate Opus commands and launch programs.

Editing the Lister

By default a toolbar of action buttons is displayed near the top of each lister when it is in name or icon action mode. You can easily add the buttons that appear on this toolbar, removing ones you don’t use and adding new ones. Just like the floating button bars and user menu sections when you later can you use a lister button to perform many types of action, these can be an internal command, or running an external program or a combination of these.

Make sure the Workbench background or a lister is selected then choose 'Edit List Toolbars' from the 'Lister' menu, a small window with a copy of the current toolbar open along with the 'Button Bank Editor'. Alternatively if you want to edit a specific List toolbar button open a Lister for any directory then just click on the button you want to edit while holding down the Alt key to jump straight to the button editor.

Here a button just button on the Toolbar, a highlighting shows you the button is selected then click on Deselect in the editor. To add a new button just click Add, you can re-arrange the buttons by dragging the button you want to move over to its new position where it will be swapped with the existing button.

When you’ve added a new button or want to edit an existing one just click on the “Edit” button in the Button Bank Editor, this will open the Button Editor window. You can define up to five buttons for a lister toolbar button, these are accessed by a right, left or middle mouse button click. In the Button Editor the buttons are shown in a list at the top left of the window shows the right mouse clicks have a function assigned. To add or edit a function click on the mouse button you want to define then enter a name for the function in the “Name” text gadget and select an image to use for the button. Opus supports Amiga icons (.info) and any picture supported by datatypes for these images, a number of suitable ones are supplied with

The Button Bank Editor for my button bar shown on the previous page, notice I use the Active popup feature.

Button Bars

Floating button bars are very similar to the lister toolbar but because they are not part of a lister they can offer many more options. I find the new button bars (or indeed menu items which we will talk about later) act on the files or directories you have selected in a lister.

To create new button bar go to the ‘Buttons’ menu and select the ‘New’ submenu, here you can choose to create a graphic or text button bar, the only difference is whether a graphic button will have a text label or an icon identifying it - graphic buttons would be like, I’m going to choose text, and a new window appears with one button in it. Before we give this button an action let’s take a look at some of the options that are available on one of the “Button Bank” Editor window. If “Full Border” is checked the button bar is inside a normal Amiga window, you may prefer to uncheck this which makes the button bar floating, you can drag furniture and replace it with a slim drag bar so you can still move the window. Using the “Drag” cycle gadget you can move the window. The drag bar will appear or even remove it all together.

Tip: Setting “Drag” to “None” means you can’t easily move the button bar or access its right click menu, to do so hold down “Ctrl” and click on the button bar to temporarily show the drag bar so you can move the window. Holding “Ctrl” while you right click on the button bar will show the menu.

Selecting Borderless Buttons removes the 3D effect border
that Opus usually draws around each button, whether you want to do this usually depends on the design of the button images you’re using. The No ‘Drag’ option removes the folded over corner usually added to buttons that have a middle or right click function. Auto Close or luckily hides the bank in the selected way once you have chosen an item and actions. This lets you to use buttons to show menus which I’ll talk about a bit more later.

For now let’s give the button in our bank a function, this time we’ll run a Workbench program. Click on the blank button in the new bar so it’s highlighted and click ‘Edit’ in the editor window, enter the name of the program you want to run in the Name text field (this is purely a description, we will choose the program itself later). As I selected text buttons the name is automatically copied into the Label gadget which is actually shown on the button. Now click ‘Edit Function’ and the standard Function Editor appears. Open the Utilities Bank and select the Workbench partition and find the clock icon, drag this over to the Function Editor. Please note that the name is already filled in. Notice how the command is added and the correct type is filled in. (Workbench) and then click the close button to close the window. Automatically you could also set the type to ‘Workbench’ using the drop down arrow in the lower section of the window.

Try adding some other programs you would like to run easily to the button bank. To add more buttons use the “Add” or “Insert” options in the “Button Bank” gadget, note that you can choose to add both columns and/or rows enabling you to resize the size of bank you wish. The Xform buttons are used to swap between vertical and horizontal orientation. If you want to delete a button be careful button you click on one of the “Delete” buttons, as they remove a whole column or row which may delete more buttons than you bargained for! To clear the contents of a button use “Erase” in the lower section of the window.

Tip: There is actually a much quicker way of adding Workbench programs to a button bar, just add some extra buttons then drag the icons of the programs you want to run directly from their drawers onto the button bar. The name or icon of the program will be used for the button label or image and the function will be set correctly.

If you want to run lots of programs from the same button bar you may find the Active pop-ups feature useful, this allows a menu of functions to pop-up when you click a button. To use this first make sure the “Active pop-ups” option is activated for your button bar in the “Button Bank Editor”. Then edit the button editor which you would like to add a menu. In the “Button Editor” window instead of selecting a mouse position in the list click on “Add”, this adds a new item to the function list, now give the function a menu name and set it to run the command or program you want. You can add as many functions as you like in this way and they will be displayed in a menu when you left click this button. To reorder the functions in the menu use “Move Up” or “Move Down”.

When you’re happy with your button bar click save in the editor window and enter a file name. Setting up complex user menus is easy, you can drag and drop items between levels too.

TIP: If you want to make a separator bar between sections of your menu add a new item and name it “---” (three dashes), when you preview RunOpus will show this as a separator line.

To edit an existing item or to assign a function to a new selected item use the “Edit” button, open the sub-item and click on the associated “Edit” button, the sub-item list will be displayed. An example of a hopefully familiar Function Editor window. As we’ve covered adding Workbench and Opus commands lets try an AmigaDOS command that interacts with the files selected in the current list. As an example I’ll show you how to make a menu on the top that copies the currently selected file in Multiview (which like many Amiga Programs can be copied from both Workbench and the shell).

In the Function editor add a sub-menu to your bank called “AmigaDOS”, click the folder button and select Multiview from your Workbench Utilities drawer using the file requester. Now we need to tell Multiview to file the selected item in the list, this is done by inserting an Amiga variable which will be replaced by the name of the file. To select one click on the [”] button and a whole list appears, want to use “$file” that will insert the first selected entry in the list with path, so click to select “$file” from the drop down list. That’s all we need to do here so click Save and then New, now replace your command text gadget by making sure the new item has appeared.

To test out the new menu item find a file on your hard disk that contains a *.txt,*.wri or a text file that can be viewed with Multiview, select it in the list and add the new sub-item you have menu command. You should find that the file is displayed in a Multiview window or on its own screen.

About Menus.

Another good way of launching programs and Opus commands is from user menus that can be added to the end of the main Opus menu bar. By default Opus comes with one extra menu (called User Menu) defined, you can add and remove menus from this as well as adding as many extra menus as screen width allows. The User Menus are edited using the “Settings/User Menus” menu item, which opens the window below. In this window are three lists, showing the menus, items and sub-items you have defined. Selecting a menu on the left shows all the items in that menu in the middle list and selecting an item shows any sub-items that have been defined. To add a new item at any level click on the Add button below the appropriate list, type a name in the string gadget and press return.

TIP: If you want to make a separator bar between sections of your menu add a new item and name it “---” (three dashes), when you preview RunOpus will show this as a separator line.

To create a new function or to assign a function to a new selected item use the “Edit” button, open the sub-item and click on the associated “Edit” button, the sub-item list will be displayed. For example Opus has a hotkey editor that allows you to launch a function using a key press even if Opus is not active! So let’s try copying a function from the menu editor to the Hotkeys list.

First select “User Menus” from the “Settings” menu and locate the menu item or sub-item you want to create a hot key for. Now click on the screen background so you can see all the main Opus menus and select “Hotkeys” from the “Settings” menu. Arrange the windows so you can see both of them at once then click on the user menu item you want to copy and drag it across to the Hotkeys window. When you preview the menu bar you should find a new menu item appears in the hot key list.

Note that the key press is defined in the Function Editor but the System-Global option is in the Hotkeys Editor. Set the new menu item is selected in the Hotkeys list then click on edit, the standard Function Editor window appears and it should contain a copy of the function you just selected. To assign a hotkey to this function click on the ‘Key’ text gadget at the bottom of the window and then press the key combination you would like to assign, for example Shift, Alt and W. When you’re happy click “Use”, by default this hotkey will only be active when you have an Opus window selected, if you want to it applied when you are using other programs select it in the list and click the “System-global Hotkey” check box in the Hotkeys window.

Mailing Lists.

If your Total Amiga has an email Internet mailing list to keep connected readers (or anyone with an EMAIL address) better informed about the magazine. The mailing list is hosted by YahooGroups.

We post a minimum of one update to the list per month plus any important magazine announcements. Your mail box will not be flooded because this list can only be posted to by the editor.

How To Join.

Subscribing to the list is free, just send a blank EMAIL to: totalamiga-announce@yahoogroups.com (all one line)

Or go to the list page on the Yahoo website: http://totalamiga-announce.yahoogroups.com

Well now that we’ve seen what a button can do we should explain how we set up this button in the first place. We post a minimum of one update to the list per month plus any important magazine announcements. Your mailbox will not be flooded because this list can only be posted to by the editor.

To try out the new menu item find a file on your hard disk that contains a *.txt,*.wri or a text file that can be viewed with Multiview, select it in the list and add the new sub-item you have menu command. You should find that the file is displayed in a Multiview window or on its own screen.

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We post a minimum of one update to the list per month plus any important magazine announcements. Your mailbox will not be flooded because this list can only be posted to by the editor.

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Descent: Freespace

Here’s a taste of what you’ve got to look forward to in the forthcoming port of the second in the Quake series. See the news pages for more details.

The first three shots below are from the standard game:

These two are from some of the mods which have already been ported:

Yee Ha Pardner!

Is he choking his chicken?

Perfect Paint

Perfect Paint in action with the funky Glass effect.

http://www.totalamiga.org