# Ottawa IBM-PC Users Group

## 3 Thatcher St, Ottawa, Ontario  K2G 1S6

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| | | Home |
|---|---|---|
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| Secretary | Eric Clyde | 749-2387 |
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## Upcoming Events

### November 25, 1987 – General Meeting:

Our guest speaker will be from OMZIG (an Ottawa communications company). The topic will be 'Communication – where are we now and where we are going...'

Don't forget that November is election month! Gord Hopkins is accepting nominations.

### No Meeting in December

### January 27, 1988 – General Meeting

Speaker to be announced.

*Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month except July & December.*

*Memberships and library disks may be purchased starting at 7:30 PM. Meeting gets underway at 8:00 PM.*

## FLUSHING THE BUFFER

### October's topic: OS/2

by Jackson M. Hibler

Malcolm McTaggart, General Manager, Microsoft Canada, has a problem: if I understand his data... there are about a million non-8088 microcomputers out there, and they don't count; next there are the 8088's, eleven and a half million of 'em, and none of them count; and finally, there are some three and a half million AT's, but as he explains below, some of them don't count either! So how is he going to sell OS/2 in a world like that?

He didn't tell us how at the October meeting, but he sure tried to tell us why:

The world of desktop microcomputing is becoming one of integration: 'Networked computing platforms'. There's no room for the jumble of programmers' tricks so essential for 8088 applications software but so likely to crash a network. 'Protected Mode' is going to be more than a microprocessor function, it's becoming a creed.

The obscure and arcane command-line user interface of CP/M, UNIX and even MS-DOS just won't do for that vast population of non-users out there who just won't play. A visual, object-oriented interface (like the Mac...or Windows) will hide the complexity, protect programs from each other and save us from having to learn so much about the inner workings of our machines in order to get them to do any work at all.

Enter the new world of microcomputer as appliance! We are told the new computer users–the ones who haven't bought yet–just want to turn the machine on, sit down and get to work. They don't want to hear about prompts, read obscure error messages, convert files to ASCII or Wordperfect format, puzzle out telecommunications parameters...none of it! Well, Malcolm is probably right: non-users, they are legion, and they know why.

I suppose some of us will be just a bit sad to see it all go. After all, we are the ones that get called to do those ASCII conversions, and we worked hard to learn how. So I suppose we won't watch that intellectual investment go to waste without a bit of wistfulness, eh? But go it will, because, as Malcolm shows us, we don't count! We've already bought our machines, and we're welcome to 'em. But that market's pretty well finished now. The future is with those who haven't bought yet, and they want integrated, visual computing platforms, or they don't know what's good for them.

The new machine – excuse me, 'platform' – to go with the new OS/2 may not be the machine we have now...even if it is an 'AT'. If I heard him right, a set of special software drivers will be necessary to enable a given machine to run the 'device independent' OS/2. These drivers and their associated libraries will be sold only to 'licensed manufacturers', [see 'Clones, Copies, Facsimiles' by Terance P. Mahoney in this issue for a hint as to who those might be. ed.] who, if they wish, might then pass the keys to the kingdom of OS/2 down to those of us who have their old machines. Sorry folks, no generic, no retail. (Sounds like they're opening another opportunity for a gaggle of pirates, to me.) Mind you, Microsoft will sell us some retail hardware to run their wholesale software: The Mach 20 board – just $1400 CDN.

There seems to be a lot 'between the lines' here. OS/2 is supposed to be the future, right? But it is 'optimised' for the 80286! I suppose things started out as a challenge to do what no one else could do: implement Protected Mode on a chip that they now call 'Schizophrenia in Silicon'. But even 730 bright Microsoft people couldn't do it by lunch. It finally took 35 people three years to do it! And while it was being done, Intel came out with the 80386 that fixes the former chip's bugs and greatly expands its capacities. Malcolm may sniff at four terabytes of virtual memory, but I don't hear too many jeers at the 8086 Virtual Mode that lets the 386 run our present software in Protected Mode without modification! It looks to me like the 286 is already dethroned but for the mopping up! (The mop is called Windows 386.) So where does that leave OS/2?

Then there's this matter of the new IBM Microchannel bus. Comments Malcolm? He smiled and said: 'I could, but I won't.' That posture reminded me of the position taken before our group a few months ago by Intel's representative. He had the following comment when asked what Intel thinks about the 80386 and OS/2: 'At Intel we consider the 386 to be a great UNIX machine.' (Period, end of comment.) Maybe the future isn't so clear...yet.

Two things were made clear, however: an 80286 running OS/2 will be fat (a minimum of 1.5 Megs of extended, not expanded RAM) and fancy (many of our present applications will not be welcome guests). We must say 'good bye' at least to our expanded memory boards, if not the entire computer, and upgrade much of our software if we want to enter Microsoft's new world of OS/2 computing.

One more thing seems almost certain: One heck of a lot of us will take our sweet time making that switch.

## Newsletter Submissions

The Newsletter team welcomes contributions from members of the IBM P.C. User' Group. Articles should be submitted in hard copy as well as an ASCII file either on a diskette or downloaded through the Club's bulletin board.

The Newsletter team will like to hear from members who are interested in publishing regular columns on topics of interest to the user

## Computer Exchange Market

The flea market was an unqualified success! Anyone who was there can attest to the size of the crowd, particularly early in the afternoon. We can welcome 57 new members as a direct result of the flea market!

There were twelve tables full of merchandise brought to the market, and most vendors did very well...as did the buyers! Get any good deals?

## Disk of the Month Preview

by Chris Taylor

At deadline for the newsletter, the monthly disk is about half done. Some of the goodies you can expect on DISK – 46:

A print formatting program that will print any line between 80 and 132 columns in compressed print.

Some nice BASIC debugging tools; the equivalent to TRON and TROFF which send the output to the printer, single step through programs, trace the value of selected variables while a program runs and cross – reference variables.

Snipper, a memory resident program that allows selected portions of the screen to be dumped to the printer, a file, or into another program.

Some programs for re – defining the shape of your cursor.

Some interesting prompts to replace 'A>'.

And of course some games.

# From the Software Library

by Chris Taylor

## Demonstration Diskettes

When you get a demo disk, just what are you getting? Well, the author (or publisher) of the program is trying to entice you into laying out some bucks on his product.

So the disk should give you a good idea about how the program operates and what it's capabilities are. However, it must be crippled in some way so that if you like it, you will go and buy the real thing.

There are several ways of doing this. In a word processor, one of the nicest ways (from a demo user's standpoint) is to not allow you to save a document. If all other functions operate, you can get a true feel for the program. If you can import text, you can still see how the program will operate with large files. But, without being able to save a file, the program is effectively crippled and can't be used in an everyday sense.

A common method of crippling database programs is to limit the number of records that the program can handle. Although this allows you to see what features a program has, it has the disadvantage of not letting you see what performance you can expect when you get your 10,000 record database loaded.

Harvard Graphics puts a big logo across anything you design with the demo disks. As few people find this attractive in their graphics, the program has been effectively crippled while allowing you to see everything it can do.

The demo disk for the IBM Token Ring Network is not terribly useful. It is a straight text description of the product. But then again, I am not sure what else one could expect.

One of the niftiest demos I have seen is the one for Cruise Control, a utility for speeding up cursor movement. It is fully functional, but after about 15 minutes it becomes inactive. You must re-boot to get it to work again. Being a fairly inexpensive program, anyone trying to actually use the demo on an ongoing basis would become frustrated enough to buy it.

Are demo programs worthwhile? Generally yes. They will give you a good idea about what the program will do before you part with your money.

# What's Hot in the Specialty Library

by Chris Taylor

Here is a list of some of the big sellers lately in the specialty library:

FIRST THE BAD NEWS:

We regret that the popular 3D CHESS program has been **DELETED** from the club library, as it was found not to be Shareware or in the public domain. As there is no chess game out there capable of losing to me, I can't comment on how well it plays...but it sure was popular!

NOW THE GOOD NEWS:

A86/D86 V3.10 – The latest version of this shareware assembler. Now with the D86 debugger.

Great Utilities One – A roundup of 8 utilities that I consider to be among the finest around.

PC – Magazine Utilities Vol.1 – 36 of the utilities from PC – Magazine. A fine collection.

PC – File + – Always a popular program, the latest offering includes 175 help screens as well as FULL documentation (250 pages).

# Whole Bit TV Show

This program airs on the first Tuesday of each month on Cable Channel 12 at 10:00 PM. The topic for December is 'GAMES'; for January is 'EDUCATION'. For February, Sandy hopes that the topic will be 'OS/2'.

# Clones, Copies and Facsimiles

by Terance P. Mahoney

Do you enter brand name contests? You know, the kind that ask you to submit proof of purchase. Say three box tops. Or maybe you have to cut out the product identification code, those funny little lines the cash register reads: ~onion, 39 cents~ (I bet you didn't know Kelloggs made corn flakes from onions). Most of these contests allow you to use a 'reasonable facsimile thereof' instead of a true, genuine, actual proof of purchase.

Now a 'reasonable facsimile thereof' is a curious beast whose origin and presumptive purpose is buried in antiquity. Your contest rules often state that it must be a hand-drawn replica (do they know about computer drawing programs?). No photocopies. No photographs. No exact copies. This introduces an element of artistic licence to the facsimile. Compare the opulent curves of 'Tony the Tiger' drawn by Rubens with the harsh disjointed stripes of Picasso. Consider other unknown talents, after all its not a drawing contest.

Facsimiles being curious beasts may be improvements, may be worse, may be just as good. One thing is certain. The contents of the box are different. No photocopies. No photographs. No exact copies.

Why does this sound so familiar? Do you own a personal computer? A printer? An expanded memory board? Software? Who made it? Does it improve upon? Is it compatible? It's a real jungle out there. Ask 'Tony'. Gee I'd like to own that Ruben's. 'Help'!

Should you own a facsimile or a brand name? Well it depends on two factors: what kind of user are you? And what class of facsimile are you considering? Isn't compatibility a major issue? No. It's an important issue; but its secondary to the other factors. Let explain things the way I see them. Feel free to disagree.

Recently, both for our own business purposes and for club members interested in purchasing AT clones, we have been looking at 80286 micros. In a short period of time we have looked at the original AT, reached the heights of the improved AST Premium 286 machine and sunk to the depths of the no-name and deservedly so machine. We came up with five major classes:

1) The original AT by IBM. Brand name product.

2) Brand name facsimiles. Hewlett Packard, Olivetti, Compaq, Tandy.

3) Familiar name facsimiles. AST, Epson, Tatung, Packard Bell, Ogivar(?).

4) Somebody's name facsimiles. Mitac, Goldstar, Apco, Samsung.

5) No-name because they may have anybody's name on the system.

There can be a great deal of interchange between these classes. For example Packard Bell has sold Samsungs and Goldstars under their label. Apco's are Goldstars. Any of class 4 may appear as someone's class 5. While HPs and Compaqs tend to be unique, Olivetti has placed its label on other class 2 computers.

### (Class 5) - NO-NAME systems

It is possible to get excellent class 5 systems. Quality can be all over the map however, as many of these are assembled from parts from a variety of sources at the chip/board level. Documentation ranges from non-existent to pamphlet style. No operating system included. Not always bottom level prices because there is a certain element of what the market will bear.

We recently helped a friend install identical hard disks and controllers on ten XT systems fitting this category. Every computer was different although they had been purchased at the same time. There were four different ROM bios with at least two more variations due to version differences. Five systems were routine installations. Three systems went fairly well despite one of them trashing the systems disk I had been using for the installation. One system caused some problems initially but we were eventually able to get it operating. These four systems required expert knowledge to get them working. The tenth unit took two days and a trip home. The hard disk would only work after we removed the multi IO board. The hard disks controllers were not at fault.

Traditionally these systems have been recommended for the technically proficient with a tight budget. I do not know many technically proficient people that would be willing to put up with these systems. The poor documentation can handicap anyone. Due to their fluctuating components, service can be a problem. If servicing is available, these systems can be adequate for dedicated uses. While a novice user should avoid these systems, they are not just fodder for the technologist. If they run your application programs, and work with your peripherals, and if you can live with the system and software, as it is today, class 5 computers can be a practical tool. If you ever want to upgrade hardware or software, you may have to replace the system.

### (Class 4) - SOMEBODY'S NAME systems

Class 4 systems are probably as low as most

users should go. These systems are generally produced by a large manufacturer. Quality is usually consistent and adequate. Documentation is usually adequate although often written Janglish. While confusing in spots, the novice can make do with one friend (you are a member of the user group aren't you). Upgrading these systems is possible but may require above average mechanical (not electrical) skills. We have had to perform plastic surgery with a hot-knife to upgrade Olivetti computers so this requirement is not unique to this class. Overall support level is good. The infrequent defective unit is replaced with no hassle.

We have had a lot of experience with this class of machine. We recommend them to new users and for users who will be requiring expansion capabilities in the undetermined future. The largest direct dollar savings can probably be accomplished in this tier. These systems can cost a user in terms of time however. Additional time translating the documentation. Additional time when upgrading the systems. Additional time configuring hardware or software. For the business user, these may be suitable as secondary systems, turnkey systems or systems running dedicated applications. The technically proficient may be happy with one of these systems for their own use, but usually only where he has access to documentation on the brand name system. We would usually rather have something else.

### (Class 3) – FAMILIAR NAME systems

These names are familiar but not necessarily for computers. Documentation is normally good but may have peculiar lapses. If time is money, the time these systems can save you when changing hardware or software when combined with the dollar cost may make these the best overall value. If you expect to be expanding your system in the future, this is probably the best route as these are normally highly compatible and mechanically easy to expand. Probably the biggest problem with this class is a tendency for the manufacturer to think he really belongs in class 2. The result can be a closed system which is an "improvement" on the name brand product. This can lock you into high price, single source upgrades rather than the options available to everyone else. Technocrats can develop fierce brand loyalties over genuine innovations.

We recently upgraded a number of AST systems which were relatively new to us. Attention to detail probably impresses me more than anything else. Clips to hold the wiring, extra power harnesses and ground wires, a plug in the 80287 slot. I could continue. All of this on a fast switchable, computer. Innovation in the form of FastRam. [Really fast RAM access on ATs is in effect limited to the RAM on the motherboard, because all other RAM must be accessed through the system's bus which is also used by other things. AST connects up to 4MB of RAM through

its own special bus off of its proprietary boards. This means that for extended RAM over 1MB, the AST is much faster].

### (Class 2) – BRAND NAME systems

Generally these systems claim to be improvements on the original product in some way. These guys are big enough to compete fiercely with one another but usually tough enough on the user to lock him into some form of extra expense when it comes time to modify hardware or software. The types of improvement are often incompatible or unavailable when you are being compatible. Documentation is usually good but occasionally limited by corporate legal staff worried about revealing trade secrets. As a rule, hardware is of high quality. Companies are easily identified by a reluctance to admit mistakes. Unless you are creating a total corporate environment for a significant number of users, I have difficulty justifying these machines. Occasionally, these systems are available when the original isn't. I admire these systems, work on them sometimes, but I don't buy them as substitutes.

### (Class 1) – IBM

Look a these systems as large security blanket. They make some people feel comfortable. Documentation is generally good though often arcane, difficult to find and sometimes overwhelming for the new user. Many systems are compatible. Some are not. Large comfortable user base. More user support than any comparable system. Cost performance ratio, well, you can't have everything. These are the right systems for some people.

### CONCLUSION

My "reasonable facsimile thereof" will come from class 3 or class 4 hardware. With a few exceptions, I think most of yours should too. I like those AST systems. I think that if you consider the price (as compared to a class 4 system) some of you might like them too. I can even justify buying class 1 name brand. If your interest is in a facsimile, I do not believe you should buy class 2 brand. These systems have enough to recommend them as purchases on their own. Generally they make unsatisfactory substitutes. Class 5 purchasers beware. These systems are suitable for a narrow band of use today. They should not be used to plan for tomorrow.

Next month, barring opinionated lynch parties, I'll write about add on boards and software. If you are interested in purchasing anything through the club be prepared for an opinion, but remember there is no disputing taste.

# *Tidbits*

by Chris Taylor

## "New" Standards

Did you ever wonder why IBM abandoned the 5.25" floppy in favour of 3.5" disks? According to Chet Heath, chief designer for IBM's Micro Channel Architecture, IBM compiled a list of priorities to determine the features of the PS/2 computers. They were:

1. Safety
2. Data Integrity
3. System Integrity
4. Reliability
5. Compatibility
6. Functionality
7. Performance
8. Cost

Since the 3.5" disks are much more reliable, they satisfied item 2, which was considered more important than item 5 – compatibility, and item 8 – cost.

## Allocating Disk Space

DOS versions prior to DOS 3.0 allocate disk space on a "first fit" basis. That means that whenever you need to write a file to disk, DOS searches the File Allocation Table (FAT) from the beginning, looking for some available space. Starting with DOS 3.0, it was changed to a "next fit" basis where the search for free space begins at the point where it last left off searching in the FAT.

This results in less time searching for free disk space. There is also a consistently higher percentage of contiguous files (files which contain all their data in a single block, rather than fragmented across the disk). Contiguous files load faster and are easier to unerase (should the need arise).

The conclusion? If you want to speed up disk operations, consider upgrading to DOS 3.x.

## Lotus Speaks From on High

And finally, from the "Nobody asked me" department, the following quote from Lotus spokesman Greg Jarboe on Lotus's decision to remove copy protection from future releases of 1 – 2 – 3 (Rel. 3) and Symphony (Rel. 2), but not present releases –

"Copy protection [removal], by itself, is not worth the pain and suffering of going through an upgrade."

All at once now – **Booo!**

## Diskette Copy Service

One of our newest members is offering the club library a free copy service. Andre Le Francois will copy any of the library disks to 3 – 1/2" format. Ask Chris Taylor for details.

Never one to pass up an opportunity, Andre will copy other material as well but for a small fee! Call him at 236 – 8722.

## ERRATUM

The October 1987 issue was the first attempt of your new Newsletter Team to produce your newsletter. It was assembled from material from various sources (e.g. FRAMEWORK, PC – WRITE, WORDPERFECT...). The end result was transfered from WORDPERFECT to VENTURA DESKTOP PUBLISHING. In the process Murphy's law hit us twice at the expense of the articles by Paul Baudet which were rendered unreadable in its DOS section.

The transfer from PC – WRITE to WORDPERFECT followed by the transfer from WORDPERFECT to VENTURA PUBLISHING stripped the article of essential technical information.

The core of the DOS portion of the article was based on using the filter command: "the broken vertical bar on your keyboard". Both WORDPERFECT and VENTURA PUBLISHING translated this character (ASCII 124) to "a solid vertical bar" for printing purposes, thus indicating an ASCII redefinition of this value by the software.

Mr. Beaudet's article was warning the reader not to confuse these two characters!

As if this mistake was not enough, the "greater than sign" was also gobbled up in the transfer thus translating what should have been:

A '*greater than*' DIR B: '*vertical broken bar*' SORT / + 10 '*vertical broken bar*' MORE

[A > DIR B: ¦ SORT / + 10 ¦ MORE]

and

A '*greater than*' DIR B: '*vertical broken bar*' SORT '*greater than*' B:RID1.TXT

[A > DIR B: ¦ SORT > B:RID1.TXT]

became:

ADIR B: ¦ SORT / + 10 ¦ MORE

and

ADIR B: ¦ SORT B:RID1.TXT

The newsletter editor apologizes for the inconvenience that readers might have experienced as a result of these errors. In no way was Mr. Beaudet's article at fault.

## ERRATUM

Le Bulletin d'octobre 1987 est la premiere tentative de votre equipe du Bulletin d'assember un numero. Les articles reunis proviennent de diverses sources tel FRAMEWORK, PC – WRITE, WORDPERFECT... Le resultat final fut transfere de WORDPERFECT a VENTURA DESKTOP PUBLISHING. La loi de Murphy nous a frappe deux fois lors de ce processus le tout au depend des articles fournis par monsieur Paul Beaudet qui furent denatures dans leur section DOS.

Le transfert de PC – WRITE a WORDPERFECT suivi du transfert de WORDPERFECT a VENTURA DESKTOP PUBLISHING a enleve l'essentiel des details techniques de l'article.

Le theme de l'article s'articulait autour de la commande filtre de DOS – le trait vertical brise de votre clavier. WORDPERFECT et VENTURA DESKTOP PUBISHING traduisent ce caractere (ASCII 124) en – un trait vertical plein – pour fin d'impression; ceci indique que les logiciels redefinissent le tableau ASCII. D'ailleurs l'article de monsieur Beaudet mettait le lecteur en garde de ne pas confondre ces deux caracteres.

Comme si cette premiere erreur n'etait pas suffisante le signe 'plus grand que' disparaissait purement et simplement lors du transfert. Le texte qui devait se lire:

A'*plus grand que* DIR B: '*trait vertical brise* SORT /+10 '*trait vertical brise* MORE

[A > DIR B: ¦ SORT /+10 ¦ MORE]

et

A'*plus grand que* DIR B: '*trait vertical brise* SORT '*plus grand que* B:RID1.TXT

[A > DIR B: ¦ SORT > B:RID1.TXT]

est devenu:

ADIR B: ¦ SORT /+10 ¦ MORE

et

ADIR B: ¦ SORT B:RID1.TXT

L'editeur du Bulletin desire s'excuser des difficultes que cette ces erreurs ont causes aux lecteurs. L'article prepare par monsieur Beaudet n'est aucunement a la source du probleme.

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