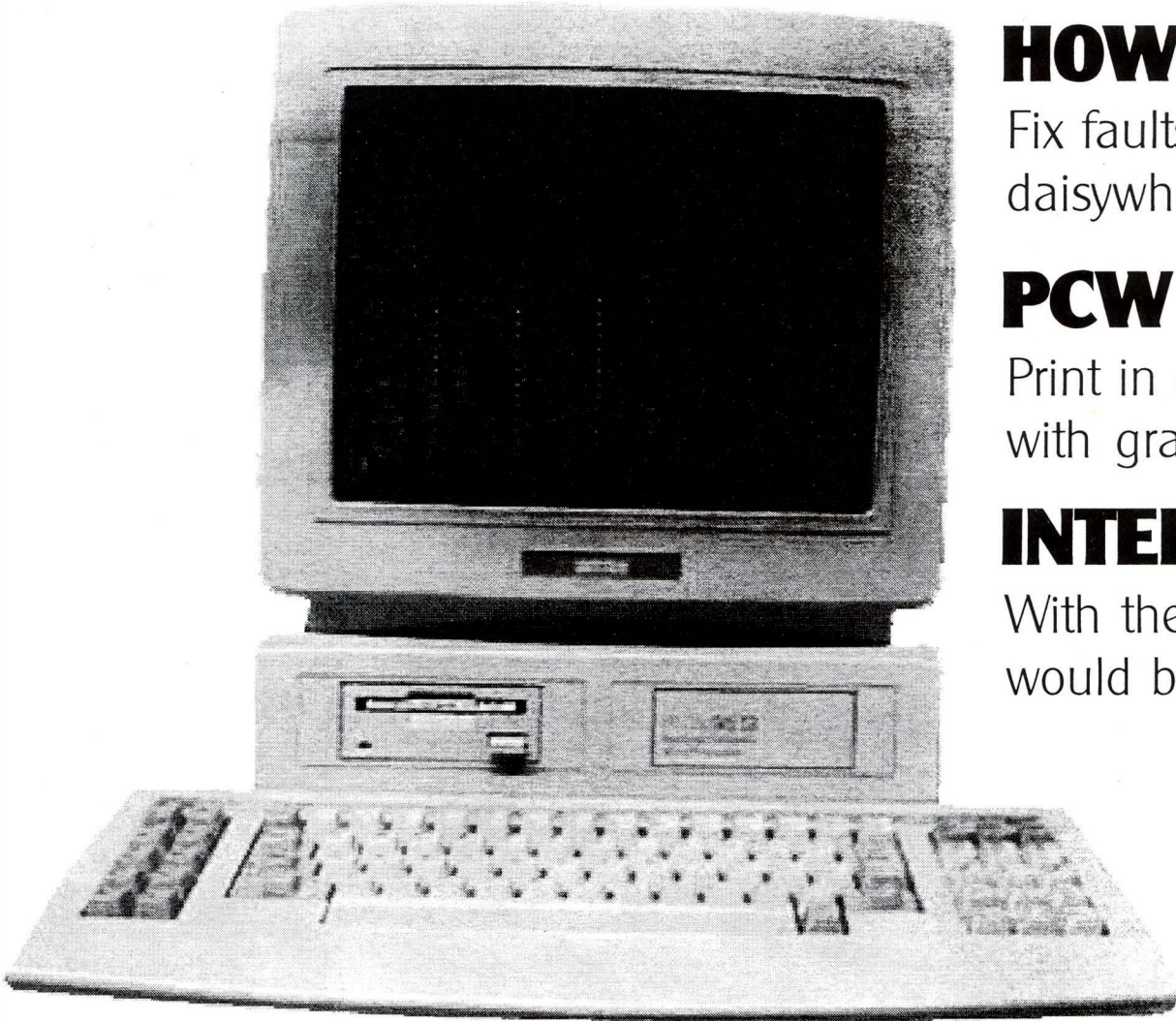


PCW Today

ISSN 1368-4485

Feb 2002 > Issue 16

The future of Amstrad computing



HOW TO:

Fix faults on your daisywheel printer

PCW 16:

Print in colour and with graphics

INTERVIEW:

With the man who would be PCW king

Under the hammer...

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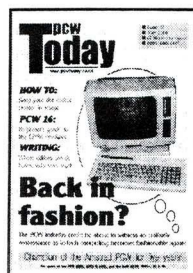
ISSUE 13

- Exclusive: Loco boss interview
- Complete guide to getting online
- Fix your PCW
- Logo tutorial
- Loco book review



ISSUE 14

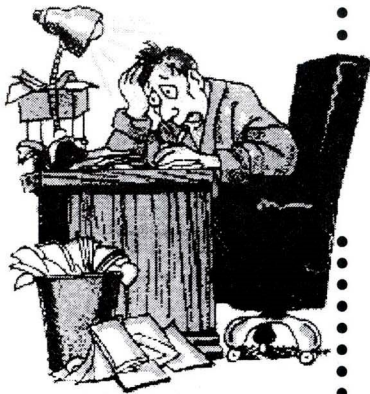
- Review of new e-mailer
- How to mend a dodgy drive
- New Loco spreadsheet
- Internet review



ISSUE 15

- The low-tech revival
- How to fix your printer
- CP/M emulator
- Interview with Dave Green

To order a back issue, simply send a cheque or postal order for the correct amount (payable to PCW Today) to the usual address. Back issues cost £2.50 each, or £7 for all three.



contents

what's in the latest issue?

first look

ISSUE SIXTEEN

Another year, another new look. Well we've changed the masthead again at least. Just about everything else has stayed the same.

Oh, of course, we've also replaced my ugly mutt, which normally heads this column, with an artist's impression of me in the PCW Today office!

Once again I must apologise for the lateness of this edition.

I can also dismiss the annual rumours: No, PCW Today is not about to shut down. The magazine is still very much live and kicking. In fact the PCW market has remained remarkably buoyant over the last year or so.

Sadly one victim of the times have been our popular Super Disks. We have been forced to discontinue the offer for a number of reasons. Current disk subscribers should read the notice on page 23.

Another casualty has been the anniversary charity edition which failed to spark the public imagination. A lack of interest meant it was not viable to produce this edition as planned.

However it is not all bad news. We are aiming to return regular PCW Today service back to somewhere approaching normality. The aim is to publish three issues of the magazine this year - one more than we have managed in the last two years.

In the meantime, enjoy this jamed packed edition!

Adrian Braddy,
Editor.

4

News

A version of basic and an art package for PcW 16 back on the cards.

6

Interview

We talk to Steve Denson, king of the PCW world.

8

Beginners' Guide

Ron King explains the basics of PCW software.

10

Mr Fix-It

Learn how to repair your daisywheel printer with this easy to follow guide.

12

Cover Feature

Discover how we picked up a 9512 for just 99p on the Internet.

14

PcW 16

Mike Saunders takes a look at a graphics package for the 16.

15

Comment

Don Moody lives up to his name with his analysis of Amstrad products.

16

Jim Joyce

Our eccentric columnist has spotted the PCW in some unusual places.

17

LocoScript

How a return of an old favourite could be a welcome boost to 256k users.

18

David Landers

How LocoFile and LocoMail can work together in perfect harmony.

20

Writing

Our guide should help you get over that dreder writer's block.

22

PcW 16

We investigate why PCWs could be about to come back into fashion.

24

Directory

A comprehensive list of all the PCW companies.

27

The Classifieds

Pick up a bargain in the biggest PCW small-ad section you'll find anywhere.

28

PCW World

LocoScript boss Steve Denson is not looking forward to the summer.

30

Langford

Our David on the trials and tribulations of running a small PCW company.

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Headlines

Basic for PcW 16 back on the cards

Programmer Rob Buckley 'set to release new software soon'

THE moribund PcW 16 market could be set to receive a major boost in the shape of two major new software launches.

PCW Today revealed several years ago that top programmer Rob Buckley was working on a version of the programming language Basic for use with the PcW 16.

He was also developing an exciting new graphics package for the computer, which runs on the unique Rosanne operating system, for which there is very little software available.

Rob started the ambitious project way back in 1996 but he was held up after a hard drive disaster wiped many hours of work from his system.

But Rob told PCW Today: "I recently found a backup of the thing and have resurrected it so it actually compiles programs.

"It's not yet finished and lacks many commands and functions that you might expect from Basic like FOR NEXT, which I am planning to add before a proper release.

"However it does allow you to use the GUI (Graphic User Interface) of the 16, and I've already been able to write



WELCOME BOOST: ThePcW 16.

working useful programs such as a text editor with it.

"I'm also only 30 per cent through writing a manual for it because the extra stuff for controlling the 16 GUI needs some explaining."

The new version will work on a PC,

but it will allow programmers to create new software specifically for the 16, without them having to use the CP/M emulator.

If there is demand, Rob will work on a version of Basic that runs directly from the PcW 16.

He explained: "I would be interested to hear if PCW Today readers want a 16 language based on the 16 itself. Obviously requiring a PC to code the 16 isn't the ideal way, but I'm only willing to port it if there is a genuine need."

Rob added: "At the same time as I am writing Basic, I am writing a graphics program for the 16. The idea being that I add commands to Basic as I need them in the graphics program."

Once completed the software will be available free of charge.

"This won't be a commercial project and will be free for anyone to use," he told PCW Today.

"The PC version will be available on the web from the WACCI site and perhaps my own site too. If a proper Editor/Compiler on the 16 version happens it will be available from SD MicroSystems, as will the graphics program."

Sugar takes helm at Amstrad

SIR Alan Sugar has taken over as Chief Executive of Amstrad after abruptly parting company with Bob Watkins, who had worked for firm for 25 years.

In a brief statement in October, Amstrad said Mr Watkins, who had been Chief Executive since 1997, had resigned from the board and that Sir Alan would take over as Chief Executive, in addition to his role as Chairman.

The company did not say why Mr

Watkins had left, but newspapers suggested that it was connected to Amstrad's disappointing financial results released in the Autumn.

Profits are down due to a slowdown in digital television set-top box sales and increasing losses at its Amserve business, which sells the e-mailer system. Pre-tax profits were just £1m for the year compared with £13m in the previous 12 months.

Pinboard on the move

LEADING PCW repairs firm Pinboard Computers has moved from its former Baldock home.

The spares and repairs company can now be found at 7D Diamond Industrial Centre, Works Road, Letchworth, Herts SG6 1LW. Tel: (01426) 683663, Fax: (01426) 480042.

MicroDesign 3 put into public domain

SOFTWARE firm Creative Technology has released its entire software range, including MicroDesign 3, into the public domain.

This means the software is no longer covered by normal copyright laws and it can be freely copied and distributed, as long as no profit is made.

Creative chief Nik Holmes told PCW Today the move followed a slump in sales of the software.

He said: "The days of working with the PCW are long gone for us, and we now feel that the time has come to put

CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

our PCW programs and products into the public domain.

"MicroDesign and its relatives have always been copyrighted software, and we have always controlled the duplication and distribution of the software closely.

"But since PCW users no longer buy it, there's little point in trying to sell it,

so we're now giving it away."

He added: "By revoking the licence restrictions on the MicroDesign program, we make it legal for you to make copies of the software, and to give them to your friends or fellow club-members.

"For material such as our Fonts discs, which can be copied easily, this is simple and straightforward.

"For the programs like MicroDesign2 and 3, Tweak, the Network, and the Font & Shade Designer, copying is a little more difficult, since both master discs and working copies are

copy-protected. "We do not intend to make it any easier by producing non-copy-protected versions of these programs. But the change in the licence means that from now on, it will be legal to make working copies from your master discs, and to distribute them freely.

"And for the techies out there, it also becomes legal to reverse-engineer the copy-protection to produce your own

unprotected version, or to distribute a "snapshot" of a running MD3 environment - CP/M licence permitting.

Nik concluded: "If you have not been able to use our software before, because of costs or licence restrictions, we hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to use it in the future."

But what of the future for Creative, once the second largest PCW software firm?

Nik said: "Although we have not sold any PCW software or peripherals for several years, we are still here, and working happily in other areas.

"These include software and hardware design, internet and worldwide web design and development, and educational software - for more information, have a look at our website at www.cict.co.uk.

"For old time's sake, we're also providing the PCW Club with its own website which will be launched soon at www.thepcwclub.org.uk."

New e-mailer 'best product since 8256'

AMSTRAD has launched a stunning new version of its popular e-mailer machine.

The latest generation of the revolutionary plug and play gadget allows users to surf the internet from their telephone.

The stylishly designed e-mailer plus, like its predecessor, allows you to send and receive and send e-mail worldwide, send SMS text messages to mobile phones, and send electronic greeting cards to PCs.

So far there are 100,000 users of the old type e-mailer - well below Amstrad's target of a million, but the firm's boss Alan Sugar believes the new model could kick-start a revolution.

His company has ploughed £12 million into the new scheme and it desperately needs to be a success to

revive Amstrad's fortunes.

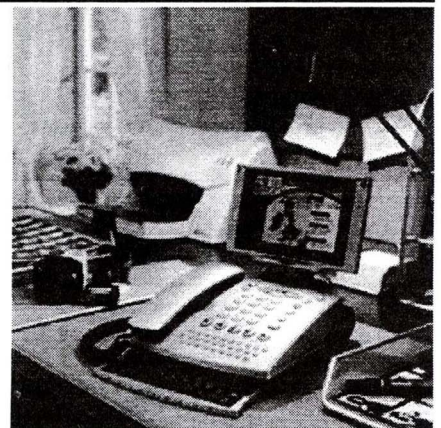
Sir Alan certainly thinks he has a winner on his hands. He said the e-mailer plus is "a product which I consider to be the best device I have bought to market since the famous PCW8256 Word Processor".

The new silver-effect e-mailer plus incorporates a bigger screen than its predecessor and it comes with Microsoft Mobile Explorer pre-installed, which has until now been used only in mobile phones and handheld personal organisers.

Using the new 'Amsurf' system, users can access text-based websites like BBCi, Teletext, Lastminute.com, Sports.com and Ebay.co.uk.

Priced at a heavily-subsidised £100, the new machine offers users one of the cheapest ways of getting online.

Meanwhile in a move that shows



STUNNING: The e-mailer plus Amstrad are looking back to the heady days of the eighties in their search for future success, users of the e-mailer plus can download and play old Sinclair ZX Spectrum games for a fixed fee.

The scheme will play directly into the new craze called 'retro-gaming', which has generated a huge revival in video games long given up as dead. Amstrad has spent recent months chasing-up the rights to a number of Speccy games.

king stephen

Adrian Braddy chats to **Stephen Denson**, the man who has almost single-handedly kept the Amstrad computing market alive in the 21st Century

When LocoScript Software finally hit the buffers back in 1999 many diehard PCW users decided the end was nigh.

But talk of the PCW's death turned out to be premature because standing in the wings was an unlikely saviour.

Stephen Denson, or Steve as he is widely known, had been a well-known name in the Amstrad software business for several years.

His small Norfolk business, SD MicroSystems, quietly built up a reputation for finance and accounts packages and, of course, the best-selling Drive Reviver Kit, which has saved thousands of PCWs from the skip.

As other companies dropped away, SD MicroSystems grew in strength, buying the rights to the DGC Software range and moving into hardware.

By the time LocoScript ran into trouble, Steve's company was the obvious choice for LocoScript supreme Howard Fisher, who was looking for a firm that would continue to support PCW users well into the next decade.

So after several months of talks, the LocoScript name and business was handed over lock, stock and barrel, to SD MicroSystems.

The move was a major one for Steve and his company. They had a fearsome reputation to carry on, and a lot of cynical PCW users to appease.

It also meant SD MicroSystems became virtually Britain's last remaining Amstrad-specialist software and hardware trader.

Quite a responsibility.

Now, almost three years on, PCW Today spoke to Steve about life at the top of the PCW tree.

After two and a half years at the helm of LocoScript, how do you assess the current Amstrad PCW situation?

Very strong, I would say. The market is holding up remarkably well considering the age of the machinery thanks largely to the immense loyalty of PCW users and their love of LocoScript especially. And I use the word "market" with consideration; the PCW is still a user's computer and not a hobbyist or retro machine as with all the other 8-bit micros.

we'd all like a new pcw of course and there remains a gap for such a low-tech machine

We'd all like a new PCW, of course, and there remains a gap for such a low-tech machine but it's unlikely to happen as boring old Microsoft has won the system wars. But who knows what Amstrad have up their sleeves - apart from gold cufflinks, that is!

Aside from the PC products, what has been your most successful line?

That great unsung hero, the 3" Drive Reviver remains our best seller. We



have supplied many thousands over the years although the so-called experts told us we shouldn't let owners loose on their PCWs with a DIY repair kit.

I would say the PCW would be much less strong today without the Reviver keeping these old workhorses going.

On the software side, LocoScript 4 continues to sell well as do the add-on packages although there has been a steep decline in the sales of 3rd party programs including our own SDM and DGC titles.

This is a shame as there are some great programs for the PCW in almost every category.

Have you any plans to update any of your software or bring out new titles?

Updates and add-ons, yes, new titles, doubtful. For example, we are working on a way of incorporating the Euro symbol in LocoScript 4, something we have already done for LSPro on the PC.

We are interested in extending the

functionality of our existing titles and especially the LocoScript family but there is no point in re-inventing the wheel and so all-new releases are unlikely.

Has anything surprised you about the business since you took over?

I suppose the continuing demand has surprised me most of all. Purely in technical terms, LocoScript is obsolete even in its MSDOS versions on PCs and yet people still love using the program.

We get lots of 'I've been a loyal LocoScript user since the Crimean war' type emails and letters but the idea that someone uses a program just out of loyalty is daft. People continue to use LocoScript because it is a brilliant word processor and data filing system, still unsurpassed in many aspects. Full stop.

What has been the response of the great British public to your two and a half years at the top?

Many of the people we deal with are hardly aware that LocoScript has changed hands twice since the demise of the old Locomotive company.

They dial the Dorling number, get redirected to us and that's it.

Amongst the PCW aficionados I feel there was a bit of sniffiness to start with that the LocoScript HQ had moved from suburban Surrey to rural Norfolk.

I recall one of the ex-LoCo staff commenting that she had been to the Norfolk coast once - in February - that it was cold and she couldn't understand why anyone would ever want to go there!

the continuing demand has surprised me. In technical terms, locoscript is obsolete, yet people still love using the program

I thought that was quite funny but also indicative of a certain attitude.

Overall, I think people are generally delighted that we have kept LocoScript going and that we know what we are doing.

What has been the highlight and the lowlight?

The highlight has been making a success of a famous brand which many

thought was past its sell-by date.

There have been quite a few lowlights; BT messing up our phone lines early on, the LocoScript master disc duplicator packing up after two days use - going up in smoke actually whilst Howard Fisher and I were out to lunch - and, worst of all perhaps, ex-LoComotive customers who had last bought something in the year dot and yet expect us to provide them with free lifetime support.

But we have survived.

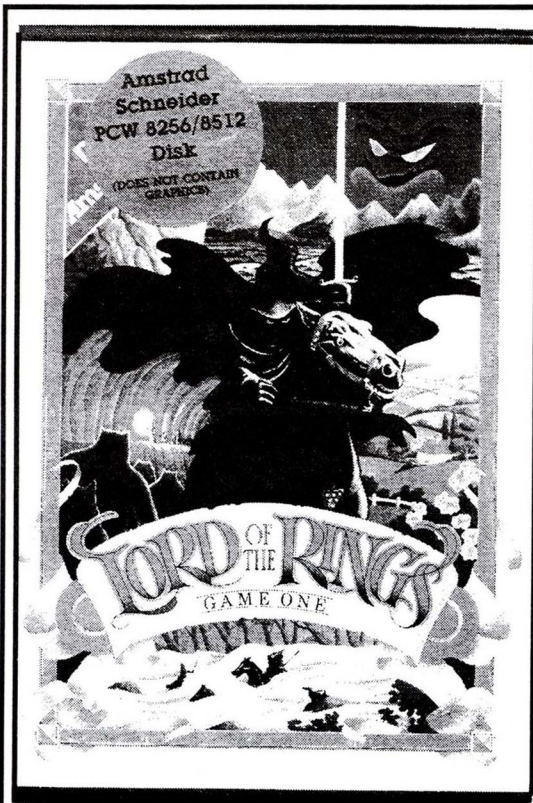
What are your hopes for the future?

More of the same and for as long as possible. Sounds like a Woody Allen quote perhaps - 'I want to be remembered for being alive' - but it encapsulates our desire to support the PCW and LocoScript until time finally runs out for the machine and the program.

That's some while off yet though, fortunately.

Finally, I would like to say a big public thank you to Howard Fisher who has been fantastically supportive throughout.

He will always be Mr LocoScript to everyone who is associated with the program and rightly so.



Enter our fantastic reader competition

With the world going Tolkein crazy at the moment, we thought we'd get in on the act with this wonderful game giveaway.

One lucky reader will walk away with a copy of Lord of the Rings Game One. This excellent text adventure is very hard to come by nowadays. It is great fun and your knowledge of the film or the book will come in handy.

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learn the basics

Ron King guides beginners through the software jungle

I shall take this from the beginning because there are, I know, people around who have been given or otherwise obtained a PCW without any software. They contact me to ask how to make the darned thing work!

When the PCW was bought new it would have been provided with two discs to load either LocoScript or CP/M.

CP/M is the operating system which runs all programs except LocoScript; LocoScript has an integral operating system based closely on CP/M.

Machines with 3" drives

3" discs come formatted in two ways; CF2 format which is nominally 180K each side (These discs can be turned over in the drive to access each side separately), and CF2DD format which is formatted 720K nominal and can only be used one way in the drive.

When the first 720K 3" drives appeared, special CF2DD discs were sold at about double the price of the ordinary discs, but the standard discs proved to be of such a high standard that they formatted to 720K and the disks sold as CF2DD disappeared. Was it an attempted con?

Unfortunately some new discs being made today are of inferior quality and will only format to 180K.

You can only tell by trying them as in a 10-pack, some will and some won't.

The two formats came about because the first machine, the PCW8256, has one single-sided drive only, following the style of earlier Amstrad machines such as the CPC6128 and the Spectrum+3.

However these machines format discs differently although the CPC6128 and PCW formats are partially compatible.

The B: drive of the PCW8512 is 720K which can be confusing at first.

Whereas 180K discs can be read on either side, 720K discs must always be put in the same way so should be clearly marked one side. Failure to observe this will result in a complaint from your machine but won't do any harm.

Machines can only be booted from the

A: drive, so boot discs for the PCW8256 and PCW8512 are 180K and for other machines 720K. Although the PCW9512 has a 720K A: drive, software on 3" disc, apart from boot discs, is usually supplied on single-sided 180K format discs.

The 720K drive can read 180K format discs, and the PCW9512 is supplied with a utility program, 8000COPY.COM, which can copy 180K format discs to 720K format discs.

Two boot discs were provided for the PCW8256 and PCW8512. The first disc has LocoScript version 1 on one side and CP/M on the other.

The other disc contains utilities for CP/M, two programming languages, Mallard Basic and DR LOGO, plus some help files.

Later machines with 720K 3" or 3.5" drives, were also supplied with two discs, LocoScript on one and CP/M with utilities on the other.

Machines with 3.5" drives

Later PcWs (note the small "c"), the PcW9512+, PcW9256 and PcW10 all have single 3.5" drives, although second drives can be fitted as drive B:. They use only 720K discs for all purposes, but many of the earlier machines, PCW8256, PCW8512 and PCW9512 have been fitted with 3.5" drives, sometimes in place of, sometimes in addition to, the original 3" drives.

A favourite upgrade was to use a 3.5" drive as a B: drive for a PCW8256 or PCW8512 but these machines could also use a 3.5" drive as the A: drive. The disc can be formatted to 180K each side without turning it over by using a switch. These machines can be booted from a 720K 3.5" disc using special boot discs, but a special file has to be included with a .FIB extent, presumably fooling the machine into booting by telling a FIB. Another popular arrangement was to use a 3.5" 720K drive as the A: drive and transfer the single-sided 180K 3" drive as the B: drive. In this case .FIB files would be needed for both drives, both different of course. They would have names such as A35.FIB or B35.FIB.

LocoScript boot discs

The PCW8256/8512 was supplied with LocoScript version 1 but later machines were supplied with LocoScript 2 except for the PcW9256 which reverted back to LocoScript 1.

LocoScript 2 is an improvement on LocoScript 1 in several ways; it is faster, supports external printers and includes the facility to copy, format and verify discs.

LocoScript 3 introduces scaleable fonts to enable different sizes of characters and LocoScript 4 enables graphic images to be imported and limited colour printing.

Within the various versions there are many sub-versions, and there is often a problem with compatibility between machines.

Some versions run on one machine, a different version may be needed for another machine. It's not good enough to say "I want LocoScript 2 on a 3.5" disc"; the model must be quoted also.

A typical name for a LocoScript boot file is J228LOCO.EMS where the 228 stands for version 2.28 which is one version among many for the PCW8256/8512.

The file extent .EMT is also used on occasion.

CP/M boot discs

Similar problems occur with compatibility between versions of CP/M for the different models.

A typical name for a CP/M boot file is J14CPM3.EMS which is CP/M 3 version 1.4, used with the PCW8256/8512. CP/M 3 is more often known as CP/M PLUS. The file extent .EMT is also used for some other versions.

To make a boot disc, the file J14CPM3.EMS can be copied to any other disc and this is the only file needed to boot CP/M, but in other cases this won't work and the boot file has to occupy a special place on the disc, as in MSDos.

The most sure way to do this is to make a copy of the entire boot disc then delete all files except the J??CPM3.EM? file.

AMSTRAD PCW SPARES

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I offer fully tested/serviced second-hand PCW machines, hardware, software, spares, books and parts, most of which come and go on a daily basis. Should you be unable to visit my website then just send a S.A.E. for a copy of my latest sales list, which will be up to date on day of posting to you.

*** Offered also is a return of post professional disc conversion service. Your PCW Locoscript data converted to PC Rich Text Format from £3-50 per disc or less, this includes supply of 3.5" PC discs, CD or Zip files, the return of your 3" or 3.5" discs and the return postage. Please contact me for a quote. ***

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*** All prices include postage and packing. ***

Disc drive belts for the PCW/PcW range of machines. £1-25 each.

Hammer Armatures for the 9512/9512+ printers. £4-25 each.

3.5" 1.44mb blank floppy discs. Boxes of 10. Sony. £2-50 per box.

9512/9512+ Boxed set of three dust covers. £2-50 a set.

Canon BC-01 ink cartridges. £5-50 each

3.5" disc drive cleaning kit in computer mounting plastic holder. £1 each.

3" blank discs, Amsoft or Maxell, second-hand. Formatted to 720K (re-format for use with 180K), verified and relabelled. £8-50 for 10.

Help and advice with PCW Problems

Those of you with PCW problems and with access to the Internet, can visit the Help pages (they cover most of the common PCW faults) available on my Website, but be warned it is by far the largest PCW site on the web and can take sometime to navigate (use your cheap rate time!). There is also free PCW software to download. Alternatively I am happy to offer free advice either via the Telephone or Electronic mail – what more can I say but enjoy your PCW!

YOU HAVE TRIED THE REST NOW TRY THE BEST!



wheely good

PCW repairs specialist Ron King looks at the upkeep of your daisywheel printer in this helpful guide

The daisywheel printer supplied with the PCW 9512 and 9512+ needs regular care, so here is our guide to keeping that printer in tip-top shape.

The printer was originally supplied with two covers, front and rear, a tractor unit, ribbon and one printwheel. The front cover, down in its working position operates a limit switch at the left-hand side.

If the switch is not operated the printer will not work.

To fit a daisywheel, the lever at the top left of the printhead is pulled back, the daisywheel is dropped into its guide cage, making sure that the type face is towards the paper and the lever is pushed forward fully, when the daisywheel clips over its central shaft.

When the printer is first used the shaft will spin and the daisywheel will be picked up on a locating pin to ensure correct orientation.

Power and data cables terminate in a single 7-pin round plug which plugs into the rear of the monitor.

Never plug this in with the machine switched on or you will probably damage the CPU board of the machine!!

The printer is quite robust, but some faults occur which can be rectified by the owner. When undertaking repairs always allow plenty of time, take notes or do sketches to remind yourself of how to reassemble; don't rely on memory alone.

Work on a soft cloth to prevent small screws and other parts from flying away. Never use force; if parts won't separate or fit back together easily find out why before proceeding.

Fractured Armature

This is the most common fault and is characterised by the printed characters becoming progressively fainter although the printer seems to be working okay and the ribbon is good.(see later)

To check it remove the printer covers and ribbon. Push the carriage to the left-hand side.

If you look into the right-hand side of

the carriage you will see an electrical winding, actually an electro-magnet or solenoid, and between this and the rod on which the carriage slides is the armature, sometimes called the hammer.

Each time a character is printed the armature is pulled forcibly towards the magnet, striking the type operating lever, which in turn hits the type character against the ribbon and paper.

After a long period of time this abuse might cause a fracture to occur in the armature so that it doesn't push the type operating lever to strike the type character forcibly enough.

The fracture is often, but not always, easily seen using a magnifying glass. The only real solution is to replace the armature, not a very daunting job.

The armature is located on a shaft at its lower end and secured by a small C-type circlip.

This circlip must be pushed out of its groove without losing it.

One way is to fold a piece of soft cloth many times to form a pad which can be located securely under the circlip to catch it.

Another tip is to put a little adhesive such as Prittstick or even a dab of grease on the circlip so that it will stick to surfaces rather than bounce away.

Having removed the circlip the armature can be drawn off its shaft. When the armature has been removed a spring can be seen which presses on the back of the armature and directs it towards the solenoid.

When the replacement armature is being fitted this spring must be drawn back to allow the armature to go to its correct position after which the spring can be released to press the armature towards the solenoid..

A simple tool can be made from a piece of wire such as a straightened paperclip. Just bend the end of the wire for about 3mm at right angles and use it to hook the spring and pull it back.

The spring position can be checked by pushing the type operating lever towards the daisywheel, when the armature can be seen to move towards

the solenoid by pressure from the spring.

After this the circlip must be replaced, again taking precautions to prevent it flying away. Sometimes the spring becomes brittle and can break, but don't despair; the printer works okay without it.

I find it fairly easy to change the armature as detailed above, but if you wish better access can be obtained by removing the top cover and lifting the printer mechanism out as detailed below.

What if the replaced armature doesn't completely cure the problem?

Sometimes, even after replacing the fractured armature, the printer persists in printing too lightly or dropping out characters even though the remaining text looks strong. First check the daisywheel disk to ensure that it is in good order, then check the software setting.

Bring up the impression strength menu and see whether a stronger impression will cure the problem. If not, there are several ways in which the strike can be improved

The strength of the impression is affected by the rebound lever which cushions the return of the striker lever after each character is typed.

At rest the striker arm rests against a small rubber buffer on the rebound arm which sets the start position of the striker.

Positioning the striker arm a little nearer to the daisywheel often improves the strike and thus the impression, but this can be overdone.

There is an optimum position and to overdo it only worsens the impression again. We are only talking about a millimetre or less and this can be done by sliding a packer of wood or plastic in behind the buffer.

A paring from a matchstick will do the job. If it works it should then be glued in place.

This should be tried first as it involves no dismantling.

An adjustment on the printer's PC board also affects the strike. To do this remove the top half of the casing as described below, and the printer's printed circuit board will be seen at the rear.

About the middle of the board you will see a large rotary variable resistor which has a slot for adjustment by screwdriver. By adjusting the resistor, more or less voltage can be applied to the coil driving the armature, thus increasing or decreasing the typing force.

Make a short file containing a single line, using those characters which seem most vulnerable. The = is often one such.

Tie back the limit switch which is normally operated by the front cover (or the printer won't run) and type the line. Now adjust the resistor and reprint the line.

If it is worse you're probably turning the resistor the wrong way. If possible use an insulated screwdriver to do this, but in any case be very careful not to let any metal part cause a short circuit. Turn the resistor a little at a time, checking as you go. When the impression is okay leave it! Don't be tempted to give it "just a little more".

I have also been told that the solenoid that operates the armature can be adjusted positionally but I have never tried this myself.

Ribbons

The ribbon being used may also cause problems. The inked nylon type is reliable but doesn't give the best impression. That is achieved by the carbon faced ribbon often called multistrike.

But some of these carbon ribbons break up on contact, causing a very bad impression even on a good machine. When examined, the carbon appears to be almost completely removed from the ribbon, leaving the transparent plastic base, whereas a good ribbon retains a lot of the carbon.

If your printer displays these symptoms suspect the ribbon first. These duff ribbons are sold by the most reputable companies so are probably okay for a different type of printer.

When buying a ribbon for your PCW9512 or PcW9512+ ensure that the model number is on the box or ask for confirmation that the ribbon is suitable.

Printer appears to work correctly but prints nonsense

This is caused by the printwheel not clipping on to its shaft properly, so that

the wheel is not indexed but turns at random.

When refitting a print wheel make sure that you push the lever quite hard as far as it will go. If you examine the hole at the centre of the wheel you see a spring clip which should engage in a slot in the shaft.

If this clip is too tight or the mechanism is slightly worn, the wheel will not go right home.

A gap will be seen between wheel and support plate which shouldn't be there. There are several remedies according to circumstances.

Maybe the clip at the centre can be eased off a little or a tiny spot of grease or vaseline applied.

If you don't intend changing the wheel often a thin blade may be introduced to help press the wheel on to its shaft.

A more permanent repair can be effected by removing the whole carriage from the printer and adjusting the plate which pushes the wheel on to its shaft.

Remove the top half of the casing. Remove five screws which hold the casing. Look inside the front edge of the casing at the joint and three locking lugs will be seen, one in the centre, the others at the extreme ends.

Using a thin screwdriver or something similar carefully release the lugs one at a time until the two halves of the casing can be separated without breaking the lugs off.

Look at the way the cables at each side of the mechanism are run in their clips and memorise for replacement purposes later.

Lift the printer mechanism up a little by the rail at the front until it clears the locating sockets at the front and draw it out of the two restraining sockets at the rear, releasing the cable at the right hand side from its clip.

Release the two clips at the rear of the carriage which hold the retaining plate to the rail and remove the plate. Remove the C circlip at the extreme end of the slide rod. The carriage assembly and slide rod can now be lifted clear.

If you find it easier the slide rod can be slid out from the carriage assembly. By removing the circlip and top plate from the right-hand belt pulley, the belt can be released giving greater movement for the carriage assembly, but don't release the belt from the carriage assembly; it's not necessary.

Examine the mechanism by loading in the daisywheel a couple of times and you will see that the wheel is pushed on to its shaft by a plate or bar.

Bend this plate a little at the centre between both thumbs and forefingers until it engages the wheel and shaft convincingly, but don't overdo it.

Reassemble the printer, making sure that the cables go back into their clips and are not trapped under the printer mechanism and retest.

When loading single sheets the paper does not stop but continues feeding with a judder

This is probably not a fault in the printer but is caused by the software. The machine is sending signals to a sheet feeder when one is not fitted. To check this in Locoscript, at the management screen press [PTR] then Options, [F8].

You will probably find that the sheet feeder option is ticked. Cancel it and all will be well. In CP/M, with the boot disc still in the drive type DAISY SS then press [RETURN]. This will set up the printer for (S)ingle (S)heet and the new parameters will come up on screen.

Printer carriage moves erratically so that margins are affected or printhead may hit stops

This is often caused by dirt or dryness of the bright rod which guides the print head and imposes an extra load on the drive belt which leads to the belt jumping over teeth.

Clean the rod with meths and lubricate sparingly along its length with a light oil, such as sewing machine oil. This should form part of a regular maintenance routine, along with cleaning.

Cleaning

Whilst the printer is stripped down, brush or blow out any dust and clean as necessary with a cotton cloth and methylated spirit.

The covers and upper case can be washed in warm water and detergent. Make sure that they are dry before refitting.

Clean the roller with a cloth or cotton wool soaked in methylated spirit. Rub the roller vigorously whilst turning until very little more ink comes off.

Finally

These notes are given in good faith and I hope that you will find them of use, but I can accept no responsibility for damage that you may do to your printer in using them. I have done all these repairs myself several times with different printers and consider that they should not present difficulties.

it's going once...

Auction addict **Adrian Braddy** discovers you can pick up amazing PCW bargains on a new type of website

Inevitably your PCW will soon be starting to show signs of wear and tear. It is a fact of life that no matter how well constructed they are, like all pieces of electrical equipment your computer will not last forever.

One day you will switch on your trusty Amstrad and there will be not an ounce of life left in it.

When that dreaded day comes, many people take it as a sign to give up on the PCW for good and move to a PC.

After all you can't walk into Dixons and buy a replacement Amstrad off the shelf any longer.

Of course you are perfectly entitled to take the PC or Mac route, but there may be a far cheaper alternative that means you don't have to learn a completely new system.

Second-hand PCWs are very easy to come by – just look at the small-ad columns in this magazine for example.

What makes this option even more attractive is the fact that the prices of second-hand equipment are plummeting.

Just a couple of years ago you would expect to fork out about £100 for a decent used PCW. Now you can easily find a good one for less than half that.

There are numerous places where you can find dirt-cheap systems. Local newspapers often have them in their classifieds sections, as do computer ad-based publications like Micro Mart.

Car boot sales are another great hunting ground, and you can pick up an astonishing selection of kit on a Sunday morning at your local sale for a few pounds.

Some people even go skip-dipping to find their replacement PCW. Because of their low re-sale value, a lot of people simply throw away their old Amstrad. And scouring those skips is becoming a hobby in itself – and not just among tramps!

However if you prefer to keep your hands clean, there is a new and high-tech way of picking up some great old

PCW gear.

On-line auctions are rapidly becoming the new Internet craze – and you would be amazed at how much Amstrad software and hardware is on sale at rock-bottom prices on the Net.

Through auction sites like E-bay.co.uk and Amazon.co.uk, thousands of everyday and collectable items are being sold for cash.

What are on-line auctions? I hear you cry.

Well they are not like other websites or shops, or even an auction house, in the traditional sense. There is no auctioneer, no mysterious hand signals and no shouting at ridiculously high speeds.

It's like a massive electronic flea market or church fete.

Millions of people gather at on-line auctions, and millions of items are for sale. In number of users and in diversity of content, it is comparable to the entire Internet back in 1993, just before the Web took off. You might easily be overwhelmed, get lost, not know how to begin to sell here.

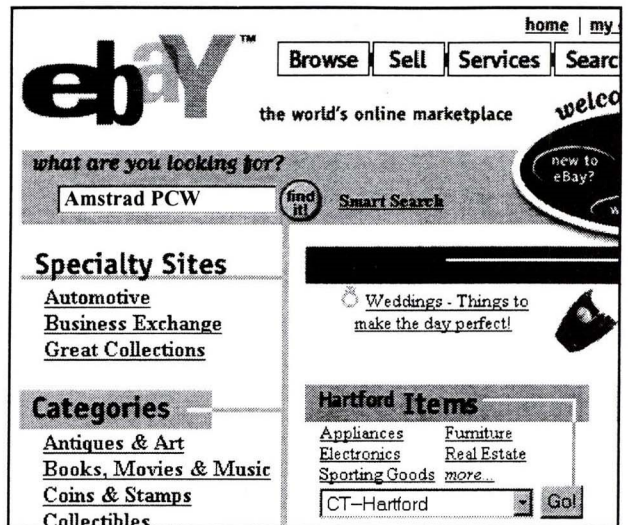
There is usually a picture of the product and brief details, along with a starting bid.

You bid the maximum you're willing to pay, the system keeps your bid in confidence, then bids for you only as much needed to keep your top position.

Each time you bid, the auction site's computers record it and send you a confirmation e-mail message.

During the auction, eBay will send you a message if you are outbid; if you win, it will send you an End of Auction notice.

You then normally deal directly with a seller by e-mail to work out details of payment, shipping and insurance.



It sounds tricky but it is in fact very easy and remarkably addictive.

Of course there are downsides. You can't actually touch and try out the goods you are buying, and the whole system is open to fraud.

However if you keep your bids low, you won't lose much and in preparing for this article, we found that most auctioneers are very friendly and helpful. Many are regulars and it is to their advantage to offer a good service, so you will buy from them again.

The whole operation is helped because each selling (and indeed every buyer) is given a rating.

In Ebay.co.uk this is called Feedback, and it is a clever little device that is very helpful to buyers.

Feedback represents how many positive, negative or neutral comments users make about each other after transactions.

So a seller with a high rating, say in the hundreds, has participated in hundreds of transactions that were judged positive by buyers. Feedback is critical because it's the main way buyers and sellers in cyberspace can judge each other's reliability.

All the major auction sites sell

Amstrad products, but by far the best is also the biggest – Ebay.co.uk.

When you enter this site, you can submit a search. We typed in 'Amstrad' and about 50 or so items appeared on screen.

These included whole computer systems, from the 8256 to the 16, and a variety of hardware and software.

But the best bit is the price these items are regularly going for.

We managed to buy a 9512 on Ebay.co.uk for an astonishing 99p. This was because the seller had chosen a very low starting price – and he received no other interest.

Legally the seller had entered into a legal contract and so he had to sell.

Bad news for him, but good news for us.

The computer was sold without printer and software, and the seller wasn't sure it was working.

We took the risk and spent about £10 on the postage.

When it arrived, just a few days later, it seemed in good nick. It powered up as normal, showing the familiar blank white screen, however when we tried to load CP/M, the drive made a few half-hearted whirrs, and then gave up.

It seemed like the great experiment had failed.

However SD MicroSystems came to the rescue and provided us with one of their miracle Drive Reviver kits.

After half an hour with the screw-driver, changing the disc drive belt, the PCW sprang into life – good as new.

And it has worked ever since. A bargain at 99p.

Of course, in order to access on-line auctions you need to have access to the internet and you need an e-mail account.

These days you don't need to own a PC to go on-line. Your local library or college will almost certainly provide free access, or you could always ask a friend.

The new Amstrad e-mailer plus system can also access a special version of Ebay.co.uk.

Once you are on-line, auctions can be quite frightening for the newcomer. Although it may seem overwhelming, a buyer needs to know only a few things to start out on the right foot.

Registration

Registration is necessary for all online auctions. This process is usually very simple, and very secure. However, auctioneers must be at least 18 to participate in most auctions.

To complete the registration process, you'll have to agree to the service's terms of service or terms of participation. (Amazon.co.uk calls it a participation agreement.)

This information will outline the service's dos- and-don'ts — mostly the don't.

Use this agreement as a guide for any activity that comes into question.

Know Bidding and Selling Rules

Auctions are rigorously structured, and rightly so. Therefore, it is important to know what your given role in an auction involves. It is important to know what kind of responsibilities both the buyer and seller have in the auction relationship. These may involve bid honouring, payment or shipping. Not only is it important to know these rules but it is also important to know what could happen if you break them.

Auctioning Tips

Like any form of online communication, Internet Auctions have their own etiquette. If an auctioneer fails to use this etiquette, he/she could find themselves losing a sale or at the short end of a bad deal.

In general, basic online rules apply. It is important, however, to remember that auctioneers are not always trustworthy and that the buyer (and seller) must beware.

Start Low:

It would almost seem like common

sense but it's always a good idea to start bids low. Starting high usually backfires and ends up costing the buyer more than it is worth.

Pay Up: When it is time to pay, pay immediately and with the most efficient way. Nothing makes a seller more angry than late payment.

Ask Questions: If you have a question about an item, don't be afraid to ask. Asking can lead to valuable information and develop better relationships.

Remember, your bid is a contract, so you need to take some commonsense steps to protect themselves.

For instance: If you're bidding on a RamPak for your 8512 and the seller's description doesn't say whether it actually works, send the seller an e-mail asking before you bid.

Once you bid, you're legally bound to pay if you end up the winner.

Don't Go Too Far: Take it easy on sellers. They don't deserve being attacked with negative emails or other annoyances.

Auction Formats

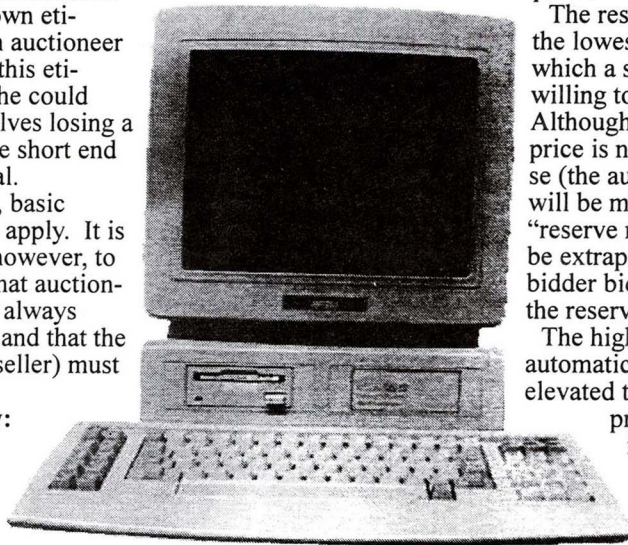
There are three main types of auctions online. It is important to know how they differ and how auctioneers function within them.

Dutch Auction: This is an auction in which the seller lists multiple quantities of an identical item. With multiple items up for sale, multiple bidders can win. Also, one bidder can try to buy more than one quantity. All winning bidders pay only the lowest successful winning bid amount.

Reserve Auction: This is an auction in which the item for sale has a reserve price.

The reserve price is the lowest price at which a seller is willing to sell an item. Although the reserve price is not listed per se (the auction posting will be marked as "reserve met"), it can be extrapolated when a bidder bids at or above the reserve price.

The high bid will automatically be elevated to the reserve price, providing the current high bidder with what the



seller would agree to sell at.

Straight Auction: Also referred to as an absolute auction, this is an auction in which there is only one item up for sale, and there is no reserve price. The seller sets the opening bid and must respect the final price at the end of the auction.

Despite all the rules and etiquette, be sure to enjoy yourself. On-line auctioning can and should be fun. And it is a new place to pick up goodies for your PCW. But beware, if you get carried away, your loft could soon be filled with stuff you don't really need!

designer label

PcW 16 pro **Mike Saunders** reviews a useful little piece of software that can produce labels and letterheads

Super Labeller is a software package that runs on the CP/M emulator for the 16. As its name suggests, it's a utility to print colourful labels with different fonts and graphics.

But despite its name, it can also be used for a variety of other purposes, including letterheads, club membership cards, and more.

Super Labeller requires an Epson-compatible printer, and is supplied on a single floppy disk.

The disk contains the program itself, a plethora of pictures, and some example labels.

The graphics supplied are a generic selection, encompassing computers, animals, and many others. SD Micro also sell extra picture disks, with specific categories such as business,

a label is the picture.

The program gives a list of all the pictures stored on the disk, from which you choose your preferred image.

This picture will sit on the left of your creation, and you can now edit the text that goes with it.

Creating the text is very simple thanks to the editing-box which shows how your label will look.

You can move the cursor around using the arrow keys, and insert text at any place you fancy. Super Labeller gives you ten lines to work with, so there's a decent amount of space if you need it (e.g. if you're making a membership card). Although it doesn't show colours or bold/italics, the editing box gives a good representation of your label's final appearance.

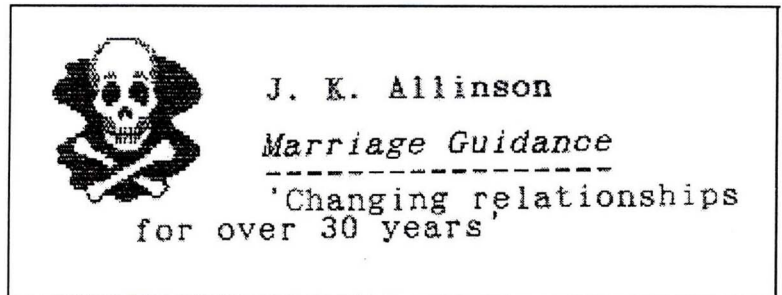
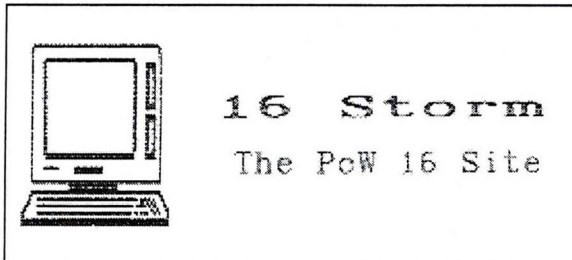
pictures supplied with the program. My printer is a Citizen ABC with colour-kit. Super Labeller lets you position the label across the page, allowing easy creation of letterheads.

You could print out a sheet with the label at the top, then type some text in the PcW's word-processor and print it onto that same sheet.

This is a really powerful feature and extends the scope of the 16 by far, as graphics and colours can now be used to make standard documents look more professional and lively.

Conclusion

Not only is this a fantastic program, it's also a fantastic package. The instruction book is comprehensive and



sports and leisure, and others.

Each extra graphics disk costs £5.00.

Also included in the package is an excellent and helpful 20-page manual. This guides you through setting up your printer to editing the label's text.

It also contains a couple of pages that show the supplied pictures.

This is a good reference source, as the pictures can't be viewed directly in the program.

Creating a label

The program uses simple graphical screens to help you design your label. A main-menu presents the general options - like choosing a picture, editing the text, and printing.

The first thing to choose when creating

Changing

the style of text is done using control-codes.

These are letters and numbers that describe how the line of text will look. For example, each colour has a number, so entering '5' will make the text red, and entering '1' will change it to magenta.

Of course, this will only have an effect if you've got a colour printer.

The same system is used to change the typeface - by typing 'B' you can make the text bold, and with 'I' you can change it into italics.

There's actually a surprising range of effects that can be achieved, ranging from double-width to outline.

The illustrations above are of a couple of labels that I've made, using the

helpful and the supplied images are crisp and well-drawn. The program itself is a doddle to use (those labels above took me about 3 minutes each), yet it's powerful enough to produce loads of styles and purposes.

This is a major step-forward for the 16, as graphics and colour can be manipulated and the results can be used to improve word-processor documents.

At £14.95 Super Labeller is good value, and I heartily recommend it to anyone wanting to increase the scope of their 16.

The software is also available for all other PCWs and can be bought from SD MicroSystems, PO Box 99, Thetford, IP24 1NA. Tel: 08700 736427.

a mug's eyeful

Don Moody has bought six items made by Amstrad in the last 25 years and he hasn't been impressed

I really must take Jim Joyce to task for taking Zoë Williams to task in last issue of PCW Today regarding some article she had written in The Guardian criticising Amstrad products.

Now I don't read the Guardian - and I wouldn't know Zoë Williams from Adam (or should that be Eve) - but I have, in my time, purchased six items with the Amstrad name on them.

The first, about 25 years ago, was a stereo system for my son which was so bad that I successfully convinced the retailer to refund my money on the grounds that, in consumer terms, it was not fit for purpose.

The second item, about seven years ago, was an 8512, bought second-hand for 50 quid. It was basic and fairly reliable (and the ink ribbon lasted a darned sight longer than these modern ink cartridges) and I was able to sell it for £75 when I bought a PcW16 about three years ago.

Now that *was* rubbish, crashing about once a week. The first (*free*) replacement by the retailer was even worse - it was, in a term used injudiciously by another well-known entrepreneur (and to appear later) absolute crap, crashing about once a day.

It was during this period that I have to agree with Ms. Williams about "getting a headache in the four minutes between starting up and breaking down". It was here also that I learned to type with crossed fingers and PCW came to be interpreted as P(lease) C(ontinue) W(orking).

However, the second (and last) free replacement was, I must admit, not bad at all, standing up to all I threw at it in developing my DTP ideas and crashing only about once a month. Surprisingly, I was able to sell it about six months ago for £50 - although I had to throw in a Printer, copies of my (three) DTP disks and the nine months remaining on a maintenance contract!

The fourth item, purchased about two years ago, was a portable TV, which

performed very well for about 15 months, before it suddenly exploded into an enormous cloud of acrid smoke. Luckily, I was watching it at the time and was able to unplug it from the mains before it did too much damage. Unfortunately, the repair organisation had to give up on it after about four months on the grounds that they were unable to obtain a replacement mains transformer. Fortunately, it was insured and I received a free (non-Amstrad) replacement.

So, was I unlucky? Well, I thought I was until I came across my fifth 'Amstrad' product, a copy of a book entitled "Alan Sugar - The Amstrad Story" by David Thomas and published by Century Press in 1990, found at a second-hand book sale for 75p. It makes some very interesting reading indeed.

Here are some classic extracts to whet the appetite

Page 51 - *The truck driver and his wife — the market which he (Sugar) coveted for himself*

Page 54 - *Looking back, Sugar has no illusions about what he was selling at first: "It (the Amstrad 8000 stereo amplifier) was the biggest load of rubbish I've ever seen in my life. Absolute garbage, it was. I didn't know any better."*

Page 55 - *As many (Amstrad 8000 Mark IIs) as we used to sell, we used to send back — so many went wrong.*

Page 70 - *True, Amstrad was not beyond the odd trick: on the meter designed to measure the quality of the sound on the EX range of tuners which was disconnected when the "test" button was pressed and returned to the centre-zero "OK" position, and —*

Page 71 - *One of three cones in the speaker boxes was not connected; it just seemed to be there for show.*

Page 77 - *Sugar was careful not to stint on the appearance of the front panel (of the Tower System). Make a cheap product look expensive: this cardinal principle of the Amstrad philosophy had already served him*

well. The silver-coated front of the Tower System was festooned with flashing lights, knobs and buttons. it passed the Amstrad test: it was, Sugar declared, 'a mug's eyeful'.

Page 123 - *The size of the computer was also central to Sugar's marketing plans, "It looked like a mug's eyeful for the old man when he walked into Dixons. He looks at this thing, with its whacking great big keyboard and a monitor — and he thinks, 'That's a real computer*

Page 125 - *Chris Hall (of Locomotive) — had heard of Amstrad. His brother had once bought an Amstrad cassette recorder and they had decided between them never to buy anything with the Amstrad name on it again.*

Page 168 - *Customers who had bought the 664 - and dealers stuck with 664 stocks - were naturally aggrieved at having been sold a turkey.*

Page 169 - *"I was careful to make the new machine (the 6128) look a mug's eyeful" —. But the 664 episode cast a long shadow over the 6128, winning Amstrad few friends.*

Page 247 - *The Amstrad approach to marketing is simple. "We work on the philosophy - pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap."*

Page 249 - *If some outside observers saw the risks that we take in engineering a new product, they would have kittens*

Had enough? - well, we're only up to 1987 and the PCW95 12 and we've already had several references to "Truck Drivers" and "Mugs", so I should think so.

Oh! and I nearly forgot - the sixth item. Well, it was a block of 400 Amstrad shares I bought at 30p each and sold at £4.43 - a nice little profit of over £1,600 which more than covered all I'd spent previously. So, whilst it hasn't been all gloom and doom in "The Amstrad Story" for this mug of a non-Truck Driver, I'm afraid I have a lot of sympathy for Zoë's point of view



jim joyce

The classic computer columnist who doesn't pull any punches!

Worldwide Web

You find PCWs in the most unusual places. One was apparently spotted on Neighbours recently and there are even Amstrad user groups Down Under.

But judging by the hits on PCW Today's website, the usage of Amstrad PCWs really has reached every corner of the world.

In the last couple of years the site has received hits from Zimbabwe, Croatia, Paraguay, Japan, Iceland, Thailand, Ukraine, Romania, Israel, Mexico, Russia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Poland, Finland, Greece, Canada, Brazil, Namibia, Singapore, and the list just goes on.

This magazine itself has had subscribers in virtually every continent at one time or another.

It just goes to show how truly global the PCW phenomenon has become.

Sweet Tooth

In the last edition I reported how The Sunday Times and The Guardian had been a tad critical of the good-old PCW.

So it is a pleasure to report that another broadsheet newspaper, this time The Daily Telegraph, has been rather more decent about our favourite computer.

Feature writer Catherine Moye admitted recently: "I should declare a sweet tooth for all things Sugar, being an Essex girl myself, a lifelong Tottenham Hotspur supporter and owner of the original Amstrad 8256 PCW, the single most influential purchase of my life so far."

That's what we like to hear.

To Cap it All

I was surprised to discover a company selling these natty baseball caps



especially for PCW fans. Sadly, on closer investigation, I discovered that in this case PCW stands for Professional Championship Wrestling.

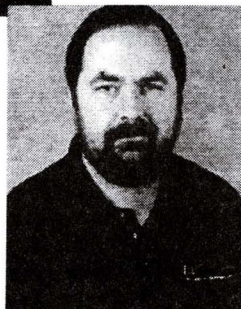
Still you can buy the PCW hat for \$15 from www.thegym.org and pretend. They also do a rather fetching t-shirt for \$18.

You might have to pay a bit in shipping from the US though!

Fat Chance



I would like to know if anyone has ever seen former LocoScript chief Howard Fisher and strongman Geoff Capes in the same room



together. Are they in fact one and the same?

Perhaps Howard led a secret double life during the eighties.

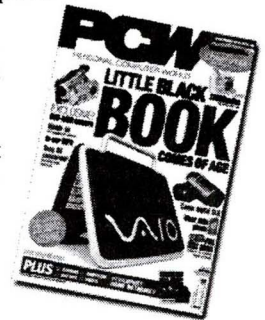
When he was not overseeing operations at Loco Towers in Dorking, he could have been nipping out to compete in World's Strongest Man.

Well... it's a theory!

PCW Prank

It was a shock to see a new magazine in WH Smiths the other day, going under the deceptive title of PCW.

Amstrad fans may have been duped for a second, but it was in fact just redesign of the long-running Personal Computer World.



Surely Not

In a similar vein, I was rather taken aback when I read the label on a packet of disks I bought from a leading computer retailer.

I did a double take when I saw the price tag said "10 PCW Disks".

It took me some time to figure out that PCW actually stands for PC World! Doh!

Retro Fever

With Amstrad going all retro and re-launching Sinclair Spectrum games, we can only hope they will continue the trend.

How great would it be to see the 8256 re-launched in the 21st Century with a brand new look and an internal modem?

It would certainly provide a breath of fresh air in a world dominated by gigantic and noisy PCs and Macs.

Last Word

Spotted anything funny or unusual from the Amstrad world? Send it to jimjoyce@pcwtoday.co.uk or write to the usual address.

the loco rodeo

Gunslinger John Edgar takes a look at the re-launch of an old classic which will benefit users of 256k PCWs

If we think in Wild West terms then LocoScript 3 was the old gunslinger who got run out of town by it's younger, more powerful rival, LocoScript 4.

LS4 is fast on the draw (well, it can handle boxes and pictures anyway) and adds more value to the LocoScript experience, to come right up to date with advertising speak.

LS3 is now making a surprising comeback. LocoScript Software more or less sacrificed LS3 to the cause of selling LS4.

This is totally understandable since, when a company spend a great deal of money developing a new product, they want as many of their customers to upgrade as possible.

And as we have mentioned there were good reasons in terms of features for them to do so such as columns and colour printing support. However, SD Microsystems Ltd, the new owners of LocoScript, are taking a more inclusive approach and have made the decision to re-release LS3 to address what they obviously see as a gap in the market.

Many PCW owners are still using LS1 and 2 and for them LS3 really represents a step up the ladder without going the whole hog (are we back in the Wild West? - Ed).

LocoScript 3 was a ground-breaking product when launched in 1994. For the first time ever, a PCW word processing program had truly scalable fonts which were known as LX (short for ine eXpandable).

What this meant in practical terms is that you could scale up the size of typefaces whilst maintaining the resolution using automatic line and proportional spacing.

This gives superb quality text printing without the awful "blocky" effect which non-scalable systems use when they simply increase typeface sizing.

If you want to see what this is like, put a magnifying glass over some standard PCW matrix text.

You'll find that those solid lines are an

optical illusion and that, when blown up, they are all jagged edges.

LX technology avoids this and the Locomotive designers deserve a medal for what they achieved with very limited PCW hardware.

LocoScript Software soon added some optional extra LX packs to the Roman and Sans Serif fonts supplied with LS3 (and LS4) known as Business, Decorative and Display which can be bought separately.

There are other, more specialised LX Font packs, too, such as Symbols, Style and Size which all have their uses.

However, back to LocoScript 3. In its original form, LS3 required 512K minimum to operate.

What SD have done is to produce a "minimalist" start-of-day disc which will actually run on an unexpanded PCW 8256 or 9256, allowing the use of one standard and one LX font (at a time).

This may sound limited but it greatly enhances the print quality on a standard PCW matrix printer and gives the user the option of including large poster-style letterheads for the first time with 1" high lettering.

In fact you can vary the size of an LX font from 8 to 72 point.

As well as giving a boost to the many people still using standard 8256s

and 9256s, the relaunched LS3 also offers a cheap

upgrade to PcW 10 or PcW 9512+

users with Canon inkjets and

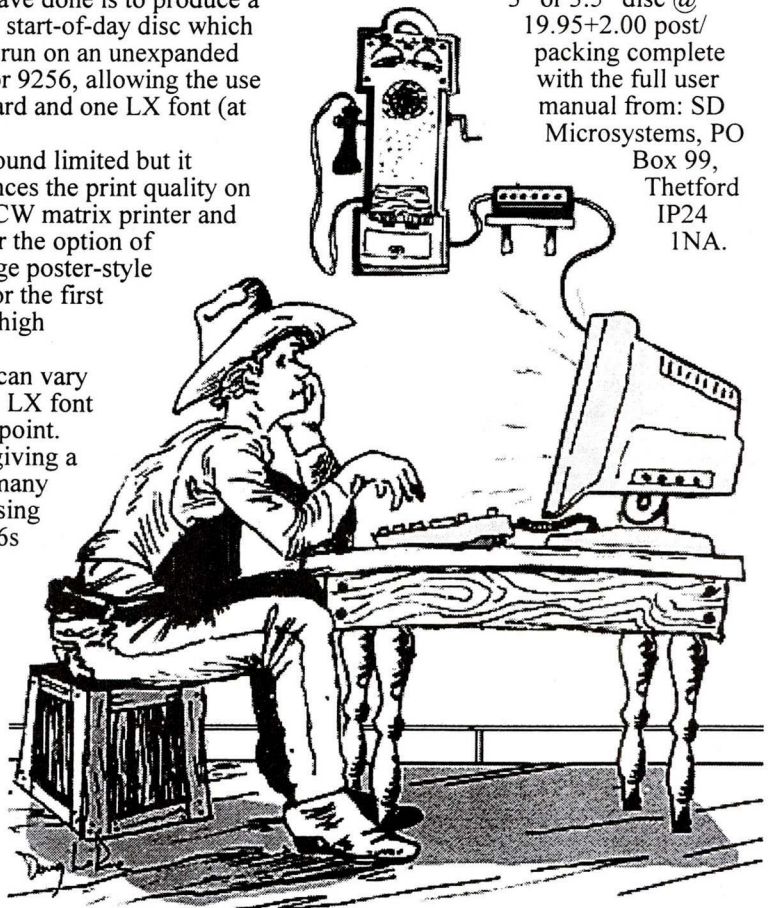
who don't require all the extra features of LS4.

If you have a 9512 (or +) with daisy wheel I really see no good reason to upgrade to LS3 - unless you need the wordcount.

There is one catch to all this: no support seems to be available for "external" printers e.g. those other than the dedicated printer which came as part of your PCW system.

For that, you must still upgrade to LS4. Nonetheless, LocoScript 3 offers a thrifty and rewarding step up from LocoScript 1 or 2 and using standard systems and it can be recommended for this purpose.

LocoScript 3 is available on 3" or 3.5" disc @ 19.95+2.00 post/packing complete with the full user manual from: SD Microsystems, PO Box 99, Thetford IP24 1NA.



good relations

Matchmaker David Landers shows how LocoMail can help LocoFile forge new links

If you use LocoFile, you'll know that its Record Cards are modelled on those of a traditional card-index system.

The advantage of the computerised version, of course, is that the cards can instantly be shuffled into a different order. But it's still a 'flat file' system - whereas more sophisticated programs can link together two or more such files to create a 'relational' database, collecting data automatically from different sources.

Excess baggage

To illustrate the idea, let's imagine a computerised stock control system that might be used by a retailer.

Stocks of a thousand different products are held, say, and the firm deals with fifty suppliers to obtain them.

A database of that size is actually well within LocoFile's capacity. 'STOCK.DAT' would have a record card for each product: containing data about the product itself (part-number, description, price etc.); stock levels (current stock, minimum stock before re-ordering); and, finally, where the product comes from (supplier's name, address, phone-number).

However, each supplier is supplying, on average, twenty different products - so the same supplier details will have to be entered over and over again.

This duplication wastes time and invites errors at data entry stage; while updating the file becomes tedious whenever suppliers are changed.

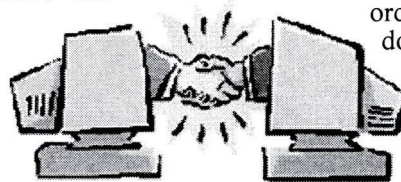
All of which suggests that data relating to suppliers ought to be held in a separate file: 'SUPPLIER.DAT'.

In this twin-file system, each supplier is given a unique reference

code. These codes will be the only supplier data held in the new version of STOCK.DAT, and they'll act as the link to SUPPLIER.DAT.

For example, if a firm with the code '123' is supplying products 'abc' and 'xyz', the relevant record cards in STOCK.DAT would have '123' entered into a 'supplier_ref' Item Box.

To make the link, the SUPPLIER.DAT record card for this particular supplier carries that same '123' link code alongside the name/address/phone-number items.



LocoMatic

LocoFile readily handles this type of system at a manual level. When the time comes to re-order, the PCW operator 'Runs' STOCK.DAT, extracts the necessary product info, then uses [f1],[S] to 'Select' SUPPLIER.DAT and determine the supplier's details via a suitable index. But how about automating the process?

What's needed is a LocoMail routine which can interrogate two LocoFile datafiles and combine information from both sources in a single result document.

We'll call this hypothetical routine 'MAJOR.MER'.

MAJOR.MER has to 'Merge' with the first datafile, pull out specified items, hold them, then re-write itself in such a way that it can merge successfully with the second datafile to collect the associated items. In effect, MAJOR.MER has to become MINOR.MER. Last, but not least, the two sets of data must be properly presented.

It would be no good having a long

list of part numbers followed by a long list of suppliers - they must be correctly associated.

The main difficulty is in keeping LocoMail active for the second merge - all the 'mail' codes in MAJOR.MER will be used up during the first merge, leaving an ordinary LocoScript document rather than a new merge file. One way round the problem might be to hold mail codes as LocoMail 'item-

names', to be released during the first merge, ready for the second. And this turns out to be possible - just.

A single "(+Mail)" or "(-Mail)" code can't be held in this way, but matched pairs can.

So we could set the item-name 'mailon' to "(-Mail)(+Mail)" and 'mailoff' to "(+Mail)(-Mail)" - the second code of the pair being the one that does the business. (These paired codes work by exploiting LocoMail's ability to shift up or down an 'activity level'.)

Anyway... regardless of the precise explanation, the desired LocoMail 'on' and 'off' codes can be entered in this manner, surreptitiously, as item-names. Which means that the first merge is able to set up the second merge.

Looking now at the logic of the intended routine, the first merge has to collect specified items from some (or all) of the cards in the first datafile.

So a loop will be involved. These data must be retained in such a way that associated data can be added, item by item, during the second merge.

The only way that the correct items in the second datafile can be found is via the common link: ie. the reference

item that's shared by the two datafiles.

Therefore this item must also be picked up by the first merge and used as an indexed 'goto' pointer by the second.

Inside story

Theory is best demonstrated by practice. If you have LocoFile and LocoMail on your system, try the example in the box-out, 'Naming Names'.

It's a very basic example, and the routine can certainly be refined - but it does confirm that the combination of LocoMail and LocoFile allows the creation of something quite similar to a true relational database.

How's it done? Well, the routine in Naming Names starts off by setting an index, and defining various item-names - including the 'mailon' and 'mailoff' codes. (It's vital, incidentally, to define 'mailon' first - otherwise LocoMail becomes inactive thereafter.) Two program units are also defined: the first of which ("embed", on lines 4 and 5) is nested: ie. it is performed from within the other prog-unit ("loop", which is on line 6).

When the routine is merged with the first datafile, the desired index is set by the '\$=' command in line 1.

After the definitions, the next action (in line 7) is to set up another '\$=' command in readiness for the second

merge.

Then (last line) the "loop" program unit is performed.

This inserts a carriage return, picks up the 'surname' item from the first card in the datafile, and adds a comma and a space.

Next it performs the inner program unit, "embed".

This contributes a (-Mail)(+Mail) pairing ('mailon') and prints two dollar symbols.

Then it picks up the 'link' item from the same record card, putting this between double-quote marks.

"Embed" finally adds a carriage return and the name of the item needed from the second datafile, rounding off with a (+Mail)(-Mail) pairing ('mailoff'). Control reverts to "loop", where a '\$+' command moves to the next record card. "Loop" is repeated 'at surname'.

Once all the cards in the first datafile have been exhausted, the merge ends, producing a result document consisting of text plus mail codes. Those codes, of course, have been suitably placed to turn some of that text into LocoMail commands.

The new routine starts with the '\$=' command, choosing the 'link' index in the second datafile.

This is followed by sequences of text/commands: one sequence for every item collected via the first merge. Each sequence contains the relevant 'link' item (a user-specified number in this case) inside a LocoFile

\$\$"value" command, which selects the correct card for the associated item in the second datafile.

The Naming Names routine can be adapted to suit your own needs. Just remember that the two datafiles need a common item as a link, and that this particular item must be indexed in whichever datafile is used for the second of the two merges. (Any index, including default 'record card order', can be used for the first merge.)

Biblio-Tech

Twin-merges can be useful in a number of areas. For instance, a research project will often involve trawling through scores of books. Any of these may provide notes or references for the finished piece, and all the books consulted should be listed in the bibliography even if they're not referred to directly in the text. The tidiest way of keeping on top of this is to create a 'BOOKS' datafile: listing author, title, date, place of publication, etc., plus your own book-code. Then create a 'REFS' datafile: holding a synopsis of the reference, the page on which it occurs in the original, the place it will appear in your own piece, and the same unique book-code. Bring the two together via a twin-merge.

That particular example will be found, with others, on the next Super Disc.

naming names...

1) Create a LocoFile datafile, called FSTNAME.DAT, with two items per card: 'firstname' and 'link'. Set up a numeric index (also called 'link') with the link item as its key. Fill out five or six record cards, each with a different first-name chosen at random.

Enter a unique number into the link item of each card. (Numbers can be any size, in any order, but keep a note of the ones used.)

2) Create another datafile, SURNAME.DAT, with the items 'surname' and 'link'. Index 'surname' alphabetically. Fill out a dozen or so cards, each with a different surname.

Give each link item the number that corresponds to the first-name which you want associated with that surname.

3) Create a LocoScript document called SURNAME.MER and type in the routine below. (Nb. use [f8] to 'Show state of codes'; 'Mail' codes are typed with [+][M] and [-][M]; finish each line with a carriage return at [RTN]).

```
(+Mail)$="surname":space=" ":comma=",";cr="[RTN]
```

```
"(-Mail)[RTN]
```

```
(+Mail)mailon="(-Mail)(+Mail)":mailoff="(+Mail)(-Mail)"(-
```

```
Mail)[RTN]  
(+Mail)embed="(-Mail)(+Mail)mailon(-Mail)$$"(+Mail)link(-  
Mail)"[RTN]  
firstname(+Mail)mailoff(-Mail)(+Mail)"[RTN]  
loop="(+Mail)cr:surname:comma:space:%embed:$+(-Mail)"(-  
Mail)[RTN]  
(+Mail)mailon(-Mail)$="link"(+Mail)mailoff(-Mail)[RTN]  
(+Mail)%loop@surname(-Mail)
```

4) When you've typed the routine, switch off 'Show... codes' before exiting via 'Finish edit' to save the file.

5) Merge this file with SURNAME.DAT by positioning the Disc Manager's cursor bar over SURNAME.MER, pressing [M] and picking SURNAME.DAT as the datafile. Press [ENTER] for a 'manual' merge.

When the merge finishes, choose to 'Save result' as the file FSTNAME.MER.

6) Merge FSTNAME.MER with FSTNAME.DAT in the same way.

The result of this second merge will be a list of surnames, on-screen, in alphabetical order, each followed by its associated first-name. (Check back through your datafiles and you'll find that they are, indeed, all correctly paired off.) 'Abandon LocoMail' at the exit menu when you've finished.

writer's block

Freelance writer **Barbara Black** knows how hard it can sometimes be to get the creative juices flowing

When you first set out to write, it's not always easy to get pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard. Here are some tips to keep the creative juices flowing - or to get them started.

First of all, are you clear what your purpose is?

Before you start writing be sure you know what your goal is.

If you get stuck facing a blank screen, try talking your ideas aloud, discussing them with someone, or mapping them on a sheet of paper.

Brainstorming maps work well for randomly generating ideas or use the cluster method of linking related ideas in spokes off a central idea.

Nothing is too weird if helps you work: the philosopher Immanuel Kant could only write with a shrivelled apple in his desk drawer (he liked the smell).

Some people swear by Baroque music (Handel, Bach, Vivaldi) - for you it might be a bowl of peanuts.

Set up an environment that caters to your writerly needs.

If you are at the office, this might involve some compromises.

Much of writing is thinking, and much of thinking is listening (erroneously referred to as "staring into space").

If you are in an environment where you are distracted by noises (or there aren't enough noises) find the right place.

This might mean writing a first draft somewhere else and revising at your desk.

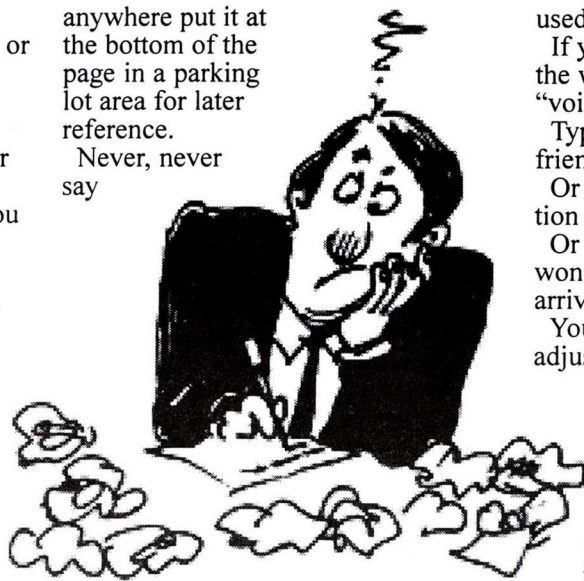
If outlines work for you (take heart, they don't for everybody), start your work with a rough outline of the areas you want to cover.

You don't have to go through this outline in a linear way.

Start where you have your ideas. If you get a random idea that doesn't fit

anywhere put it at the bottom of the page in a parking lot area for later reference.

Never, never say



"I'll remember that" because it just ain't true.

Don't try to sound perfect on your first go through.

Just get it down in point form or crummy sentences first.

Allow yourself the luxury of messiness. Type ideas as they come out.

You may start to see a pattern emerge and be able to loosely group ideas together.

Much of what we call "organization" goes on in our head while we are in the act of writing.

If you get stuck in the middle of a sentence looking for the right word, type XXX or ???.

You can come back later and fix it, but now is not the time to staunch the flow of ideas.

If you're really stuck, have someone read what you've written and ask you about the unclear parts.

You'd be amazed how many times when a writer is asked "what did you mean by..." the writer answers in a perfectly clear sentence which can be

used in the written work.

If you're stuck on how to approach the writing, try writing in a different "voice."

Type as if you are speaking to a friend.

Or fill out details by using a question and answer format.

Or start by saying what the reader won't find in this piece of writing (to arrive at what they will find).

You can revise and refine later to adjust the style and format.

It's often a good idea to print a hard copy of your first draft and revise it away from the screen.

Changing medium like this is a good way to get a fresh look at your writing.

Don't be too hard on yourself.

Sometimes what we call writer's block is actually the "processing" stage of the writing process.

This is where we wander around doing anything but actually writing - making coffee, Hoovering - but all along there is a subconscious thought process going on which is roughly ordering ideas.

Of course, it's up to you to determine where "processing" crosses the line and becomes outright work avoidance.

Try a dried apple!

Barbara Black is a freelance writer and editor with over 10 years' experience.

Her articles, reviews and columns have appeared in several newspapers, as well as travel and aviation publications. Barbara writes regular columns for the ezine Reputations.News.

You can read this publication at <http://www.prmadeeasy.com/freeforall/freeINK.asp>

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what if...?

Day dreamer **Stuart Dunbar** considers what would have happened if the PcW 16 had been LocoScript-based

I think it is time to reassess the PcW 16. In practical terms this may be a pointless exercise yet it may spark an interesting debate.

Let me preface the subject by stating that I hope most of the 16 users who read this are very satisfied with their machine.

After all, it does the job it was designed for which is word processing and basic computing and if 16 owners are happy with that then fine.

I suspect those who are happy are first-time PCW (and probably computer) users who may have little to compare the 16 with.

On the other hand, those 16 users who also own a classic Amstrad were, like me, generally disappointed with the latest PCW.

We retain an affection for the machine and cherish the fact that it is the last in a long line but we feel that as a word processor for everyday use it just doesn't cut the mustard. Here's why.

The 16 is just too slow to run its built-in WordPro program efficiently.

The dialogue boxes draw sluggishly and the method of selecting text styles and sizes is cumbersome.

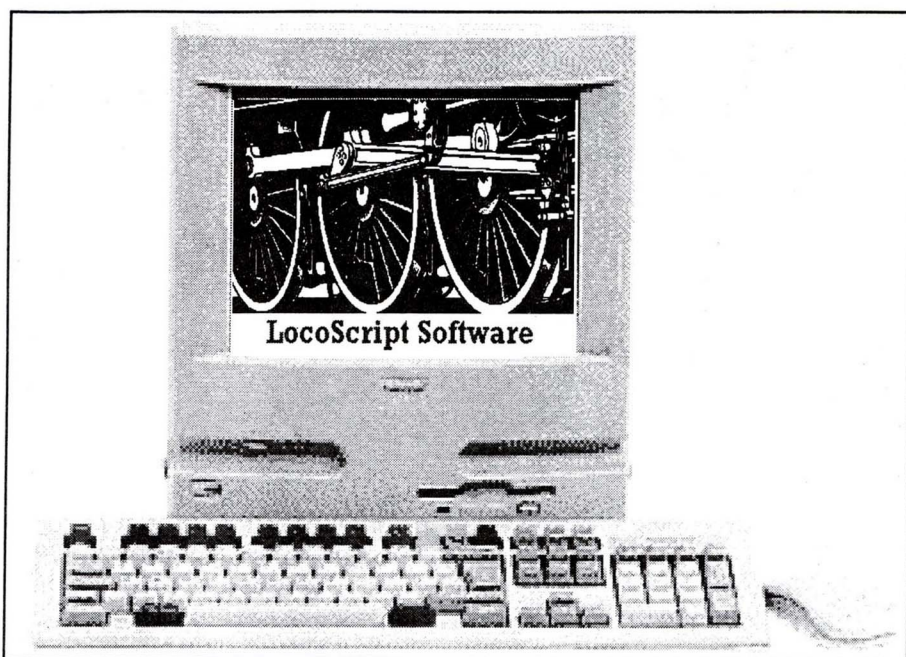
There are too many pauses and too many bugs in the software.

This is all the more frustrating since the machine was delayed by a year and boasted a souped-up 16mhz Z80 processor which we all expected to make the 16 fly. Instead, it crash-landed on launch and has struggled to take-off ever since.

Understandably, Amstrad wanted to modernise the PCW concept, which is why they went for the graphical and mouse approach.

The problem is that the 16 doesn't have the power to compete with the Windows PC it was trying to ape. Dixons even advertised it as a "Mini PC" for goodness sake!

The 16's Desktop looks great but when you start to use the programs you soon realise that the software is none too snappy.



Yet it could all have been so different. LocoScript Software refused the PcW 16 project because Amstrad's timetable was too tight.

The fact that it slipped by a year makes a nonsense of that. Had LocoScript been on-board I think they might have produced a LocoScript 3 type program with a couple of bolt-on extras such as mouse control and a page preview.

Others have suggested that Protex would have been a good alternative but by the mid-1990s it was showing its age as a CP/M program.

LocoScript had a choice of scalable fonts and could produce output as good as that of a modern PC and users take to its friendly, pull-down menus easily.

You notice I don't suggest LocoScript 4. That's because it wasn't around during the 16's development and, in any case, LocoScript have always been commercially shrewd in holding something back from the software bundled with Amstrad PCWs.

PcW 16 owners could then have upgraded to LocoScript 4 with its

columns, graphics and colour printing support and.

How much better the 16 would have been with a built-in version of LocoScript shouldn't be underestimated. Then we would have seen the difference in the x4 speed of the new Z80 chip.

There may be some who would claim that LocoScript in any form is now too old-fashioned to make an impact on a new computer.

Well, I can tell you that there are thousands of people using LocoScript Professional on the latest PCs who wouldn't swap it for any other word processor however "advanced".

When Amstrad opted to design a new PcW from scratch for the 16 project they forgot the part that LocoScript had played in the success story.

Whether the 16 would have sold any better with LocoScript built-in is another matter but the reliability would have been greatly enhanced, something the PCW has always been renowned for.

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- PD Blake**.....01482 864230
99 Normandy Avenue, Beverley, E. Yorks HU17 8PR.
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- Rascal Software**.....
29 Fell Croft, Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria LA15 8DD.
Producers of Chordmaster, the guitar package for your PCW.
- SD MicroSystems/LocoScript Software**.....08700 736427
PO Box 99, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1NA.
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- Three Inch Software**.....01651 862359
Rowan Cottage, Wester Craigie, Whitecairns, Aberdeen AB23 8XE.
Suppliers of the best selling 3 Inch Thesaurus on either 3" or 3.5", plus the Ryming Dictionary, Copy, and PCW9512 Rescue Kit.
- Trading Post**.....01952 462135
Victoria Road, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8AF.
Small selection of PCW software.
- Unit One Word Processing**.....
5 St Giles Close, Farnborough, Kent BR6 7DT.
Supplier of the excellent LocoScript 4 guide by Dorothy Featherstone.

Please let us know if there is a company you think should appear on these pages. Also keep us informed about any changes you think should be made to this section. We aim to keep the directory as up to date as possible. Send your information to Company Locator, PCW Today, 150 Oxford Road, Middlesbrough, Teesside, TS5 5EL. Or e-mail it to: directory@pcwtoday.co.uk

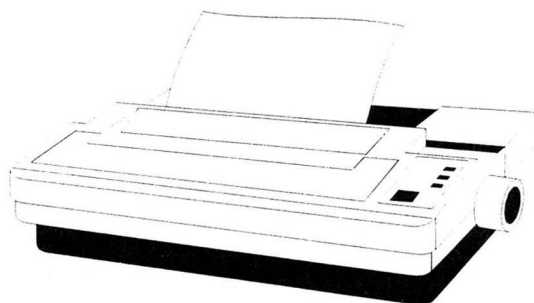
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FAX: 01258 480659

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DMP4000	Fabric ribbons	£3.95
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PCW SOFTWARE

LocoScript (Start of Day)

PCW8256/8512

PCW9512

PcW9256

PCW9512+

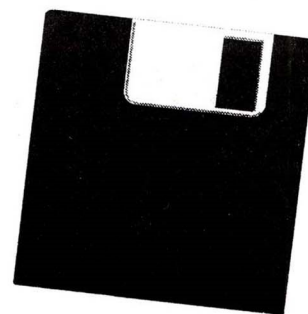
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ALL PRICES INCLUDE VAT AND P&P

the classifieds

I HAVE many discs, books and software for the PCW 8512. If any of your readers are interested I will await their phone call or letter. Send an SAE for a list of PCW items I have for sale. BR Mitchell, 79 Pawlett Road, Bristol, BS13 0DS. Tel: 0117 9879979.

WANTED: LocoFont BJ additional fonts disc for LS2 Canon BJ10 inkjet printer. 01424 713927 (3.00pm-7.00pm)

TECHNIQUE keyboard wanted (for 8512). Baxter: 01773 833267.

PCW 9512 with two 3.5" drives [MACHINE HAS A FAULT] LocoScript 4 Master discs with printer file disc. Mini Office. Lots of 3.5" DD discs. Lots of 3" discs, some in plastic cases. Mini Office 9512 manuals. Tractor feed. Daisy Wheel printer. 520k Rampak. Any reasonable offer for all or individual items. Tony Seager, Bath 01225 706533.

WANTED: Ribbon re-inking machine and ink, or source for such, for voluntary organisation. 01424 713927 (3.00pm-7.00pm)

MANY thanks to Edward Green and Bill Lawrenson who responded so helpfully to my ad in issue 15.

FOR SALE: Masses of programs, add-ons and systems. Large SAE to 44 Paynton Road, St Leonards, East Sussex, TN37 7DY.

SOFTWARE for MASTRAD 8512 (originals, working copies and all handbooks) for LocoScript I, III, LocoMail, LocoFile, LX fonts, LocoScript IV with LocoSpell and Canon BJC 4300 installation disc. MiniOffice Professional. MicroDesign 2 with cuts, etc. Maxell and Amsoft 3" discs (unused) 29 in total. Offers to Jim on 01283 790934 (Burton on Trent area).

WANTED: Gem hard disc drive. Will collect. Tel Peter on 01527 893619.

GOOD condition PCW9512, CP/M, LocoScript, etc, without printer £20. Lots of software: Z80 low level programming software with extensive book on subject; games include Chess 88, and other software such as Mini Office Professional, and more... £30. Might even include magazines with useful programs and tips. Telephone 01895 833584 / 07803 840533.

FOR SALE Amstrad PCW 9512 – recently serviced and working well. Includes a Canon bubblejet and Amstrad daisy wheel printers, LocoScript 3, plus extra fonts, various manuals and many discs - £40. Telephone 01243 513073.

REMAINING stocks from Dave's Disk Doctor Service: Japanese high quality 3" disks – unused (per 10) £25. Japanese high quality disks – used/reformatted (per 10) £10. 3.5" DSDD 720k disks – used/reformatted (per 10) £5. 3.5" DSHD 1.44Mb disks – used/reformatted (per 10) £3. Dust Covers for 8000 machines (3 piece) £6. Dust Covers for 9000 machines (2 piece) £5. DIY replacement drive band for 3" drive (incl instructions) (only 2 left) £5. DIY replacement armature for 9512 printer (incl instructions) £5. Fabric printer ribbons for 8000 printer £5.

Please call for availability and leave a message if we aren't in. (01892) 835974. All items are post free in the UK and there are substantial discounts for bulk orders.

AMSTRAD 8512 (A drive needs attention) with matrix printer, keyboard, Centrix interface for Canon BJC 4300, MicroDesign, KeyMouse and interface. All free, recipient to collect. Contact Jim on 01283 790934 (Burton on Trent area).

30 CF2 and 24 CF2D brand new 3" discs for sale for £50. PCW8512 with working A drive, accessories, master discs and manuals, going free. Buyer collects from East Molesey, Surrey, or will deliver locally. Ring 020 8979 5354.

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The Classifieds, PCW Today, 150 Oxford Road, Middlesbrough, Teesside TS5 5EL.

summer blues

LocoScript supremo **Stephen Denson** isn't looking forward to the summer holidays like the rest of us

It's hard to believe with the current weather, but before long it will be summertime again.

Summertime and the living is easy, goes the old song.

Well, not for farmers or for most people involved in the computer industry, I suspect.

The sun may be shining, the sales phones are silent and it is tempting to sit around the office in shirtsleeves, sipping tea and listening to the cricket on the radio.

Yet staff still have to be paid, overheads covered and the VAT bill met.

The summer months are a very thin time for software and hardware resellers and far more computer companies go bust during this period than any other season.

Indeed, SD Microsystems will this summer celebrate the third anniversary of our LocoScript Software takeover which followed the very summer of 1999 when they were unable to continue due to cash flow problems.

They are by no means alone amongst casualties.

Many firms in the IT industry have gone leaving big debts including some large distributors and the trade press is full of such stories.

Size is certainly no and indeed a suite of plush offices and huge warehouse space is not a sign of financial well-being.

Most medium to businesses operate from rented properties which can be in a matter of weeks, days even. A lot of the office machinery including

computers and photocopiers and even the furniture may well be leased and a company which at one time made a big impression on the market can suddenly become a with just sales brochures and perhaps, in this internet age, an abandoned web site to show that it ever existed.

Possibly one day there will be virtual ghost-towns on the net links to firms that are no longer trading.

In fact, there is already a web site for "lost companies" with their original mission" statements and final farewells posted up and set to float around in cyber space forever.

Even those firms who ultimately survive a summer downturn in often have to make economies including personnel cuts.

Some of the biggest names in computing are "downsizing" at the and a lot of the dot.coms who managed to survive last winter are now hanging on, still hoping to show their long-shareholders a profit.

Some will hang on until the lastminute (No, LocoSpell hasn't screwed up. That was a pun. Sorry, but I can never resist a dig at companies who get by on and hot air.)

Future Struggle

Many of us thought that Future Publishing ditched PCW Plus when it was still reasonably viable and at just the point the PcW 16 was at last coming on stream.

Some of us were aware months ahead

that the publisher was simply waiting for circulation to dip low enough to justify closure.

As I've alluded to before, Dr. Beeching used such tactics to decimate the railway system; cut the number of trains running on some minor line and then watch as the passenger numbers inevitably decline because there are no trains to catch! Figures don't lie, do they?

Similarly, Future pulled the plug on subscriptions only allowing readers to sign-up for 6 months and openly telling advertisers that PCW Plus wouldn't go on longer and refusing to publicise the magazine elsewhere.

Indeed, this "get in while you can" approach was even used as a sales tactic.

I have been involved with small publishers who operate just one or two titles and they will fight like tigers to keep them going.

They may only just break-even but they provide their staff with a living and a purpose.

The Future portfolio was ever-expanding in the 1990s and titles such as PCW Plus were dumped because their profit potential was insufficient to impress the board of directors.

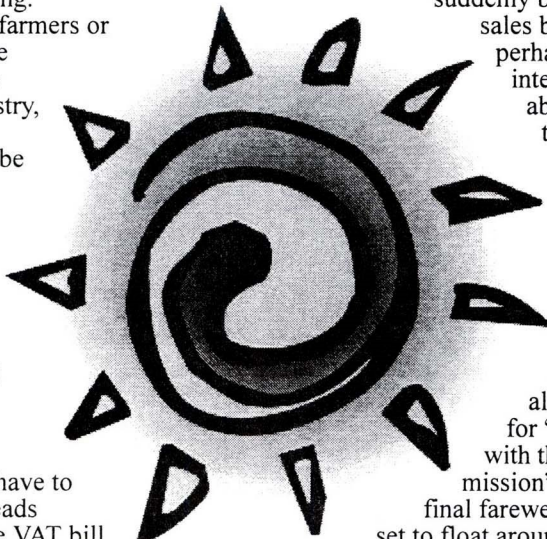
They had fatter fish to fry with all their PC and console magazines which sold in the tens of thousands.

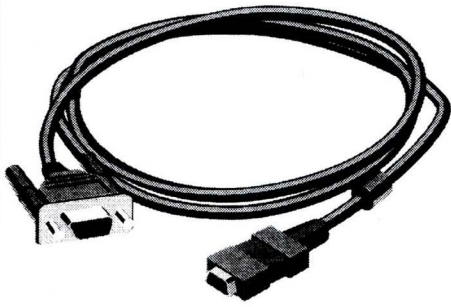
And we shouldn't really complain as PCW Plus lasted 10 years and 124 issues.

But I couldn't suppress a smile when I read that "The Future Network", as Future Publishing is now known, is currently experiencing severe financial problems which has hit their share value and prospects.

Perhaps those new boots were too big after all?

Steve Denson is the boss of SD MicroSystems Ltd and LocoScript Software, the biggest supplier of PCW software and hardware.





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david langford

Another episode in the decline and fall of Ansible Info'

I keep wondering when I'll draw a final line under the extremely small software outfit Ansible Information, and retire to my other life of overwork as a writer. Certainly Ansible is beginning to flag, but - like the residue of a lingering head cold - it refuses to go entirely away.

2001 saw further decline when the immemorial Amstrad PCW 8512 lost the use of its B drive (no, changing the belt didn't help). A few months later, the A drive went too (ditto). This happened exactly as I was trying to move stuff from a pile of old CF2 disks along a cable to the PC.

The result was a solemn pact between Ansible and SD Microsystems, whereby the great Steve Denson copied that particular batch of disks and in return will receive all future Ansible disk-transfer enquiries. Another fragment of the business empire successfully dismantled!

Further dismantling of a cruel and unusual nature was later carried out on the failed PCW plus a couple of dead ones that had accumulated in our cellar over the years. From the fragments, I managed to assemble a patchwork system with an evil, gaping hole where the B drive used to be.

It's like owning Victor Frankenstein's home computer, born of unhallowed parts stolen from graveyards, and apt to turn at any moment on its hubristic creator.

There's the terrible suspicion that Igor may have messed things up and brought me an abnormal processor chip.... Still, the un-dead PCW does actually work. For now.

Meanwhile, Microsoft continued its policy of causing as much irritation as possible to mere customers.

Practically the only Ansible product that still sells is Ailink, the package that reads your 3.5" PCW disks in a PC disk drive and then - this is the cunning part - converts the LocoScript documents to Rich Text Format files suitable for Word and other modern Windows word processors.

I have a suspicion that Bill Gates disapproves of this. At any rate, each

version of the accursed Windows makes it harder for our software to read PCW CP/M disks on the PC. Back in the days of Windows 3.0 to 3.11 there was no problem. Windows 95 brought some difficulties: the CP/M copier needs to access disks in a special and non-standard way which was now discouraged. I programmed around this snag, but it got even worse in Windows 98.

Revelation! If you restart Windows 95 or Windows 98 in MS-DOS mode (an option on the Shut Down menu), all these difficulties with the CP/M Copier go away. Naturally Bill Gates got to hear of his, and came up with his cunning counterstroke. The new Windows ME can't be restarted in DOS mode.

It's like owning Victor Frankenstein's home computer, born of unhallowed parts stolen from graveyards, and apt to turn at any moment on its hubristic creator

Thanks to customer feedback, input from that nice Mr Denson, and a little lateral thinking, I came up with an all-new Ailink workaround that was far less drastic than restarting the computer, and seems to do the trick on Windows 95, 98 and ME.

It was at this point that the evil Gates, laughing satanically at the futile struggles of mere mortals, released Windows XP. Maybe it would be a cunning plan to go out of business right now.

Meanwhile, although I'd vowed to have nothing to do with the non-PCW-compatible Amstrad PcW16, the inevitable finally happened in 2001. Someone with one of those little machines bought Ailink without heeding our subtly worded disclaimer ("If by any chance you need to convert PcW16 documents, PLEASE GO

AWAY"). I was faced with the grim choice of bodging the PcW16 file format into Windows-readable shape, or offering a refund. Naturally I chose the more complicated and time-consuming option. Just as Ansible's fabled software for the Amstrad PCW was written in Borland Turbo Pascal 3.0 for CP/M, its distant descendant Borland Delphi handles our current Windows 95+ programming. It was time to wield the mighty sledgehammer of Delphi upon the small and wizened nut of PcW16 document format....

Skipping over many tedious hours, I can report that PcW16 documents have a less utterly cryptic internal structure than LocoScript ones, although there are oddities that I haven't fathomed. The main obstacle to decoding them is what seems to be a bizarre attempt to save space by leaving out all the spaces (with mysterious exceptions).

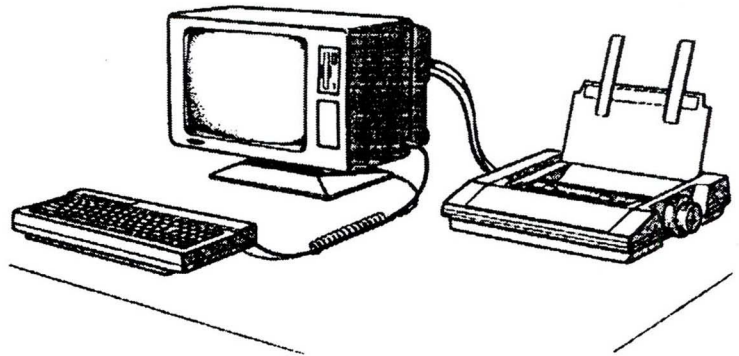
Instead, the ASCII coding of the first letter in each word (with the same mysterious exceptions) is increased by 127 as an indication that a space should be inserted just before. Very odd.

After various tweaks, the ad-hoc conversion to Windows Rich Text Format was producing recognizable prose and eliminating most of the formatting boilerplate.

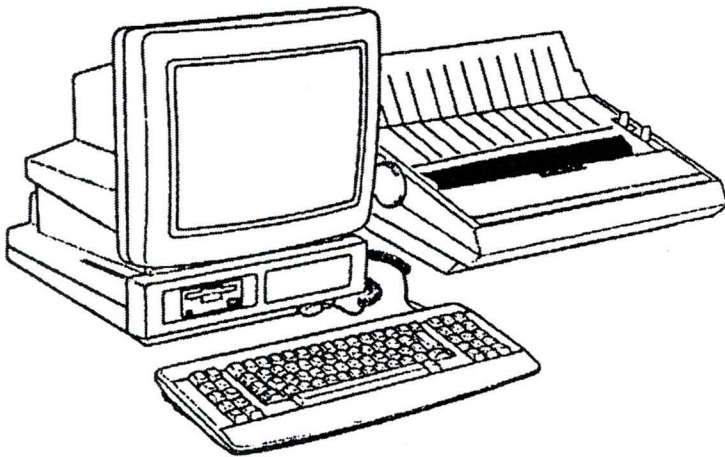
The bumf at the head of each PcW16 document varies in length: it was easier to delete by hand to the obvious start of the text than to automate this bit. A few inexplicable random letters still sprinkled the text, always at the beginnings of words, but these were obvious enough to the editorial eye.

So, another refund saved! It's not a saleable conversion program, though, because the results are scrappy and need hand-editing. All I need now is to discover that the full PcW16 document structure is publicly available on some website, and that other hands have already written a freeware conversion utility producing RTF results of unsurpassable perfection. This would provide suitable dramatic irony to conclude another episode in the decline and fall of Ansible Information.

Do you own a PCW?



Do you still use it?



Then join **The PCW Club now!**

The annual subscription of just £12 entitles you to the *Disc Drive*, the quarterly magazine devoted entirely to the Amstrad PCW, plus regular issues of the *Newsletter* throughout the year.

In addition PCW Workshops are held every month at the Basildon Centre, Basildon, Essex, usually at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month. All visitors are welcome and the first meeting is free.

**Full details of membership from the Chairman, Mike Elliston,
96 Sparrows Herne, Basildon, Essex SS16 5EX.
Telephone: 01268 522484 *Strictly office hours only***

You can also e-mail mike@thepcwclub.org.uk or simply turn up on the night.

LocoScript Software

Product/Price List

SD MICROSYSTEMS Ltd, (Dept PCW),
PO BOX 99, THETFORD, IP24 1NA.

Phone 08700 736427 Email sdmicro@aol.com

LocoScript PCW Software is available on 3" or 3½" disc.

LocoScript 4 (512K)....£29.95

The ultimate software upgrade for your PCW with scalable LX fonts, columns, pictures, colour support. £19.95 for Loco 3 users.

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Sophisticated spellcheck/word counter.

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Versatile pop-up database for Locoscript.

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Programming language and mailmerge system.

* £10.00 if purchased with Locoscript 4.

LX Font Pack Deals

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Graphics Libraries for

LocoScript 4 or MicroDesign 3

ClipArt Set 1 £19.95 ClipArt Set 2 £19.95.

Or buy both @ £29.95 for 100s of pictures.

LocoScript 3.....£19.95

Re-release. Works in minimal 256K RAM and with standard printer on PCW 8256/9256.

Printer Support Pack...£19.95

Required if you need to add an "external" printer to Locoscript 4 (not Windows-only). Or if you are buying LS4 then let us install a driver for just £10.00 extra.

PCW Software (runs under CP/M)

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Very powerful calculation program for doing budgets, costings, accounts etc.

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Read, writes and formats 720K MSDOS discs on the PCW. Ideal for transfers to PC.

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preview and includes as standard LocoFile, Mail and Spell

LocoLink For Windows.....£39.95

Converts LocoScript document or data files into MS-Word etc.

Mallard Basic PC.....£39.95

PC version of the PCW programming language with full intro and reference manual. Disc-only version @ £19.95.

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