

**F**leet Tactician Di-Ren has released issue 2 of its *Fleet Tactical ComClub* newsletter for aspiring Admirals. Version 2.01 is on its way, for PC owners as well as QL fans. Work on the PC version started in August, but QL version 2.01 is expected to surface first. This will include new manuals and a modem option, for players who live apart.

The PC version has generated great interest from *Shopper* readers, and Di-Ren says that PC development will become top priority once QL version 2.01 is complete. It should be possible to play QL against PC via RS232 or the modem option.

I have not yet played with the new version, but Di-Ren sends tantalising 'advance details'. Land-based gun batteries now defend your home port, unless supplies of stores or fuel are exhausted. The new tow option lets you tug disabled ships into dock for repair. With practice you can rescue ships that have conked out, which could add a whole new dimension to play. Ships can berth closer together, and take supplies from port while docked.

Once you're out at sea you have weather to contend with, as well as tides and currents. Weather ranges from 'light airs' to Force 10 gales, when even the bow can disappear under water as the ship wobbles. The worse the weather, the greater the fuel consumption, as in real life. The display is still made of 3D vector graphics, but has been embellished to show towropes (hurrah!) and rails at the bow and stern of each ship.

The crew are now part of the resource management simulation. Fires and floods reduce crew numbers, increasing the time it takes to carry out orders or make repairs. The good news is that the depleted crew eats less stores than a full complement; if they get lonely they can pick survivors out of the water, or take reinforcements from other ships or your home port.

Damage control is more sophisticated. Watertight doors are sealed when the ship is at ACTION STATIONS, so it is much harder to damage than a vessel that is in port or cruising. Of course, the crew still get stropy if you keep them at action stations for long.

New submarines boast twice as many torpedos as before, and a quaint 'deck gun', ideal for daft artillery duels. To balance this, supply ships are now defenceless, so they need an escort unless you can keep them well away from the enemy.

# Sinclair Scene

*Timothy Green sails the Sinclair seas and gets his disks in order*



*Fleet Tactical Command gains an upgrade to version 2.01*

*FTC 2.01* has extra short commands, like STOP, WEIGH and DROP for STOP ENGINES, WEIGH ANCHOR and DROP ANCHOR. If STOP is too verbose, Control-S will do. Sadly, ALT keys do not work.

A few concepts from *FTC1.02* (reviewed in *Shopper 31*) have been removed to make space. Nuclear missiles have gone, as they made it too easy to cut supply lines. They were not very realistic anyway, although the siren noise and annoying launch code worked well. Neutral ports are handled differently, and the facility to ARREST ships has been withdrawn as "It was found to be of no practical use".

Registered users of version 1.02 get the newsletter, and a free upgrade to version 2.01 when it is ready. Latest news is that *FTC2.01* will allow two players to use one expanded QL or PC, swapping by consent or at timed intervals.

With understandable optimism, Di-Ren plans ST and Amiga versions; thereafter a 'bolt-on' task is planned, letting the

computer take control of one fleet. Di-Ren says "Unfortunately we are unable to develop *FTC* as fast as we would like. QL version sales are not expected to come anywhere near covering actual development costs so far, let alone financing further development". So buy it, QDOS fans, if you can afford £50 and have time to play. The BBC Micro had *Elite*, and now the QL has *FTC*!

## Plus Three DMS

*DMS* stands for *Disk Management Software*. This Spectrum Plus Three package consists of an Index maker to keep track of disks, files and free space, configurable menu programs, and a utility to ease common file operations. *DMS* comes from Kobrahsoft via John Eyre, author of the acclaimed *Disk Editor Dice* (see *Shopper 8*).

The Index records details of up to 1,000 disks, identified by a three-digit number 000 to 999, followed by a letter A or B. Plus Three disks have a distinct file directory on each side. In use, the

Index occupies 64K of Ram disk; each name, size and disk number fits in 16 bytes, so it can hold details of 4,096 files at any one time.

The first step is to teach *DMS* about your library of disks. Just type U - for Update - followed by the disk number, such as '100A'. *DMS* reads the names and sizes of files on the disk in drive A, and puts them in the Index for disk 100A. A message appears as the Index is updated, but the delay is short, even if hundreds of files are already recorded. By the time you have marked the number on a disk, *DMS* is ready to read the next one.

You can add disks to the Index even if the program cannot read the directory, typing names and sizes manually for each file, but this option does not record the free space on a disk. If you supply the wrong disk or number you must type 'R' to Remove details of a particular disk, or use Update again with the correct disk. It only takes a few seconds to re-present a

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### CONTACTS

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Music Writer Utility  
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Dagenham, Essex RM9 5NY.

Sinclair and Sam cables  
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Dunstable, Beds LU5 4BG.  
(0582) 472067

Coupe Connection  
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Incremental Backups  
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disk and bring the Index up to date.

*DMS* reports 'file not found' if the disk is empty, 'missing ID' if it is unformatted, and 'Bad format' when given a 3" QL disk to chew on. *DMS* recognises all the 40-track Plus Three, CPC and PCW disk formats in my collection, but cannot access drive B. This is a shame, as 22 percent of those surveyed by the Plus Three User Group have second drives; four out of five of them use 80 track 3.5" drives.

Issue 13 of *Plus Three Contact* includes a program to format such drives to 706K, like the utility MGT once supplied with the Lifetime Drive. MGT's program was by Brian Gaff, but the PD version comes from Olav Reinert of the Danish club Sinclair Freakeren.

I have not tried the new Plus Three formats, which promise to squeeze 200K or more onto drive A. *DMS* only accesses the file directory, so it should accept the new 192K format, which uses 10 sectors per track, or HiFormat, which adds a 41st track, pushing capacity to 203K.

These popular formats should be treated with caution. The extra sector makes errors likely if the drive is running fast. A correctly set-up drive should work, but a marginal drive may give errors on 192K disks even if it handles 173K perfectly.

HiFormat uses part of the disk that was not intended to hold data; some Plus Three drives cannot reach track 41 without mechanical tweaks. The data density on the extra track is higher than standard, as inner tracks are shortest, increasing the risk of errors. That said, the new formats seem to work for many people, and I look forward to a chance to try them.

## Indexing

In less than an hour from scratch I built up an Index of over 500 files, from 44 disk sides. *DMS* saved a 9K file INDEX.IDX; any old index on the disk is renamed to INDEX.BAK, as a backup copy. Index files include the date, which must be entered as eight digits, eg 03/09/1990.

A good indexer must load and run quickly; I can load *DMS* and an Index of 526 files in less than half a minute from the Plus Three loader, using just five keypresses.

Once loaded, *DMS* can find files as fast as you type their names, or you can scroll at moderate pace through the names, in disk or alphabetical order, in



*DMS includes a file manager*

the main 16-line window. Find updates the window as you type, so any file is found as soon as you have typed enough to identify it uniquely. Most appear onscreen after one or two keystrokes. Find can also locate free space or any numbered disk.

Screen and Printer reports may show all files, in alphabetical order, files on a particular disk, or free space on each disk. If you have a parallel printer you can print the Index. *DMS* uses Epson control codes to print each line in double-width characters. I'd prefer to see three vertical columns on each page, in the standard 80-column width. Serial printers are ignored, even after FORMAT LPRINT "R".

Printed pages have a six-line heading, including the date saved, number of files and disks, followed by 50 lines of file details: disk number, file name, extension and size in K. *DMS* displays 'Insert Paper' and waits for a keypress before printing each page, so you can change sheets or wind past perforations.

## DMS-Dos

*DMS* includes a File Manager which runs as a separate application, or as part of the Indexer. The only difference is the free memory available for file buffering - up to 64K on the Indexer version, or 80K for the standalone Manager.

The menu-driven Manager lets you copy, erase or rename files individually or in groups. It can display the +3Dos file header - containing the file-type, start address and length in bytes - which is hidden in 64 normally inaccessible file bytes. It can format drive A three ways: Plus 3 (173K),

CPC System (169K) and CPC Data (178K free).

I found a bug in version 1.0, which got stuck redrawing the screen in a loop when I moved from the indexer to the File Manager and back again. I got out by pressing Shift-Space and Symbol-Space repeatedly, but the problem recurred when I loaded the same file later. Kobrahsoft is looking into this, as well as support for serial printers, columnar output, and Drive B. I expect that Kobrahsoft will make improvements.

## Make a menu

The last two programs build menus, rather like the ones that appear when you turn on the Plus Three, or press Edit in Basic. These are designed for picking Basic programs off any disk, and can add a front-end menu to your own disks.

Each *DMS* menu lists up to 20 things, selected with the vertical arrows and Enter keys. Items are identified automatically from the disk directory, if the 'archive' attribute is used to mark relevant files. The File Manager makes this easy. Alternatively, you can put the names in a REM on line 2.

*DMS* has a 10-page A4 manual, with daisywheel text which is very clear. Laser-printed figures on the last page show the screen layout and menus. The ink, paper and border colours are configurable for each screen window.

*DMS* is as good as *Dice* fans might expect. It's worth £12.95 if you have more than a handful of disks, especially if you have a parallel printer. I'd love something similar for the QL and Sam. Next month I'll test *Plus Three Diary and Database*, from the same

author.

## Singalong Sinclair

*Music Utility* is the first upgrade or XTN for users of *Spectrum 128 Music Writer*. It allows transposition and new block options, and costs £5. Further XTNs adding Midi and printer features are promised. XTNs are overlay files, loaded one at a time by *Music Writer*. This first XTN lets you set the tempo, voice and volume for any block of notes, and the 'auto beat' emphasis used at the start of each bar. The volume control leaves accents unchanged.

Transposing from one key to another raises or lowers the average pitch of a tune. You might transpose music to alter its mood, or to suit particular voices or instruments. *Music Utility* keeps the same semitone intervals between notes over a range of two octaves; outside that range you get the right note, but the wrong pitch, an octave higher or lower than expected.

The program arrives on cassette, with a utility to transfer it to Ram or Plus Three disk, but with no option to back up the tape. It comes with two pages of laser-printed documentation, punched to fit the *Music Writer* binder.

## Spectrum clip art

The Spectrum has proven itself a useful, if fiddly, desktop publishing machine, thanks to PCG's *Word Master* suite. Now Danish enthusiasts have compiled a set of clip art images in Spectrum format. The entire library of 1,200 pictures on three C60 cassettes is in the Public Domain.

The pictures were converted for the Spectrum by the Danish user group Sinclair Freakeren. Subscribers to *Outlet* and the Plus Three User Group can obtain them from their clubs, on disk or cassette. Check the *Dataline* page in this issue for addresses.

## BetastillDos

Betasoft has upgraded the manual for BetaDos, its Plus D system file, so that Open type files are fully explained. They get only cursory mention in the original MGT manual; this comes as little surprise when I see the list of bugs fixed in BetaDos.

MGT's G+Dos gets into trouble if the disk has stopped, and the program needs to write a sector on a new track. The old software could start writing before the disk was turning at full speed, provoking sector errors. BetaDos fixes this bug when you use its



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