

**PRINTER.EXE**

Q: In the UPG BATCH (p17) you mention a utility PRINTER.EXE once provided by Apricot for switching printer output between parallel & serial ports. Apricot routinely deny all knowledge of this. How can the utility be obtained? [UPH 175]

A: PRINTER.EXE did really exist. As far as we know there has only ever been a version 1.0 which has the following DiRectory info:

PRINTER.EXE 1025 11/07/84 12:14pm

It was genuinely provided by Apricot on all PC/Xi Master Disks up to BIOS 2.7 of 21st March when it was on Disk 4. To this day we still use PRINTER even on our networked XEN-HD when we are swapping between local parallel & serial. We do not know if it works on the F series but it should, based on our XEN.

As you know any Apricot will default at sending its printer output through either the parallel (LPT1:) or serial (COM1:) port depending on the way your operating system has been configured either with SETUP or Activity UTILITY System Configurator. PRINTER.EXE, which was used as either PRINTER PARALLEL [RET] or PRINTER SERIAL [RET], swapped live between these. (The speed and other settings of the port were not affected by PRINTER.)

There was one bug with the very original MS-BASIC which if loaded after PRINTER.EXE had been run was not fond of working.

**APRICOT CONTROL CODES**

Q: Throughout the UPGs there are various mentions of the use of codes to control various settings on the Apricot however I have been unable to track down a comprehensive list of such codes and how I might use them either live from the keyboard, or in batch files. Examples which spring to mind are altering the level and frequency of the beep, the speed of screen scrolling. [UPH 175]

A: A heart felt cry which we shall take to heart and include such a list in the next UPH.

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This UserPrompt Help! is the second issue of monthly aid for Apricot Apricot users (Apricot IBM compatible XEN-i use is not covered). It is available only by mail order direct from the publishers:

UserPrompt Guides  
54 Stanhope Road, Swadlincote, Burton-On-Trent, DE11 9BQ

Questions of general relevance from subscribers to UserPrompt Help! are answered to the best of our considerable experience but as you will appreciate no microcomputing knowledge is ever 100% comprehensive or up to date and all advice contained in UserPrompt Help! is offered with this caveat.

The latest details of 21+ booklets on the use of Apricot microcomputers (and a few on IBM & clones) can also be obtained by writing to this address.

Apricot Help! 2

UserPrompt Guides

**USERPROMPT HELP! FOR APRICOT USERS****Issue 2 - Index**

From the authors of the UserPrompt Guides to the Apricot range  
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UserPrompt Help! Issue 2

Well let's begin with an apology to all those readers who have been eagerly waiting for this since "late September". Our mailing shot, which as you will realise went out too late in September, generated a great deal of interest and somewhat snowed us under - anyway apologies for not living up to your expectations. Details are enclosed with this issue on how to subscribe to the next few Helps!

All questions are followed by the reference number of the user asking for Help! Your reference number appears on the address label on the envelope this Help! arrived in - you can use this ref. no. to save writing your full name/address on your UPH renewal.

APRICOT DEVELOPMENTS

Nothing new to report for you existing PC/X1/XEN/Fn/Portable users except that Apricot have reduced the prices of their XEN-FD/CD/HD and brought out some new "cheap" IBM compatible XEN-i models (starting at under £2,000 including hard-disk and monitor). Some dealers do still have X1-HD and F2's for sale, and at very cheap prices at that.

USERGROUPS

GATEWAY USERS appears to continue to flourish, and their latest newsletter is better than ever with 10 A4 pages of news for F series & Portable users. If you have one of these micros you really should join Gateway Users - see UPH Issue 1 page 15 for details.

IN PRINT

It occurred to us that as we read about 30 micro mags a month - far more than most readers can afford or get access to - you would appreciate details of anything relevant to Apricot users which we come across - although its not much this month:

Personal Computer World Nov 86 p232 has a listing of an "Apricot F-Series Directory Tree" by Alan Potton. This is a GW-BASIC program with accompanying batch files to print out the directory tree structure for a disk. We have tested it and found that: TREECMM.TRE needs changing to TREECMM.BAT everywhere it appears; you need SORT.EXE available; that it will need extensive editing to work on anything except the logged drive; that it does not like directory names which exceed the 8 characters (ie which have a suffix); and that it gives some screen corruption while running a PC/X1 BIOS 3.1 GSX and GW-BASIC - otherwise it's OK!

POINT 32

We have been told by one dealer that existing Point 32 users who don't fancy splashing out on the upgraded XEN-MainFrame based Apricot network need not miss out on the latest MS-NET 2 software because of this. The bad news is that they want something like £750 to install the new software.

MS-DOS & EXIT COMMAND

Q: What is the command EXIT for in MS-DOS and can you give a simple example of how it is used ? [UPH 3]

A: EXIT is a command understood by COMMAND.COM. It works just like a QUIT command in any other program. That said when you boot up your Apricot under MS-DOS part of that booting process is to automatically run COMMAND.COM as MS-DOS's own command processor. It would therefore make no sense for you to be able to EXIT (ie QUIT) from that COMMAND.COM as there is nowhere for you to quit to - ie you can not quit from MS-DOS.

You can however run COMMAND.COM a second time from DOS's A> prompt. That second COMMAND.COM has its own "environment", hence you can prove to yourself that it is a different COMMAND.COM by doing things such as changing the PROMPT or using SET. Then issue an EXIT command (ie type EXIT [RET] ) to quit to DOS's own original COMMAND which will still have its original environment.

As you will have gathered by now there isn't a great deal of value to EXIT when used in this way. The most typical usage is within an application program : eg Word Perfect allows you to temporarily suspend WP and run DOS (ie a second copy of COMMAND.COM). To quit from that COMMAND.COM and return to the Word Perfect program you have to use COMMAND's quit command - ie EXIT [RET].

This approach was also used by Apricot with their Activity front-end. Whenever you enter a DOS command to Activity such as DIR B: [RET], Activity composes an instruction and then runs COMMAND and automatically EXITS afterwards:

eg COMMAND /C DIR B:

This is why Activity is so appalling slow at processing several DOS commands.

RAMDISK

Q: The RamDisk is too limited - 15 files is not enough and one needs more than 64Kb. Which is the best RamDisk utility for the F1? [UPH 16]

A: Good news - you can save your money - see UPH Issue 1 page 11 for the answer to both these problems. We have always used Apricot's RamDisk own free driver and never had any problems - but see page 6 below.

DOS HIDDEN SYSTEM FILES

Q: When COPYING A:\*. \* to B: I noticed that there were 6 hidden files (5 with BIOS 3.1) which do not get copied. I presume these files are essential and should be copied onto backup disks - are they and why are they hidden? [UPH 142]

A: The hidden files are the Apricot MS-DOS system files which are essential to be able to boot from a disk, but not essential on your backup disks provided you have them somewhere else to be able to boot your micro! The way to also copy the hidden files is to use whatever Apricot utility program you have (eg DISK/Activity Utilities/DISKCOPY/DCOPY) which copies entire disks, not just visible files listed in the directory which is what the internal COPY command does. [Alternatively use FORMAT, DISK or Activity to format a disk with an op system on it.]

UPGRADE TO DOS 3 & WINDOWS ?

Q: Any likely problems using later version MS-DOS and Windows on my F10 - I currently have ROM 3.1.1 and RAM BIOS R1.6 with GEM/MS-DOS 2.11? [UPH 43]

A: To answer first the question of MS-DOS. Before saying whether you can use DOS 3, let's just address why you should chase after a later DOS. There have been three versions of DOS 3's (four if you include Apricot's premature 3.06 for the first release of their Point 32 network). These are 3.0, never available for Apricots, then MS-DOS 3.1 & 3.2. The major impetus behind these new versions have been developments in IBM hardware (and hence PC DOS) with the PC-AT, PC-network and the IBM Convertible. DOS 3 is attractive, particularly to hard-disk users such as yourself, because it includes many features and utilities which make using sub-directories a hell of a lot more convenient particularly with old software which does not understand paths:

- DOS 3.0+ enables programs to be run direct from non-current directories directly, even without a PATH command;
- Apricot DOS 3.1+ includes an ATTRIB utility to enable you to change the attribute of files to read-only to prevent accidental deletion (although ATTRIB is provided with other's DOS 2, and can be achieved with the F10 GEM Desktop's FILE Show info...);
- DOS 3 may include an APPEND utility (similar in effect to a PATH) which enables overlay files to be found in other directories;
- DOS 3.1+ has a SUBST utility which can substitute a drive letter (eg D:) for a path, enabling old software (eg WordStar, SuperCalc3 v1.0) to access multiple sub-directories on a hard-disk.

MS-DOS 3 on the Apricot's doesn't seem to cause any problems with most software: we have been using all our Apricots with DOS 3.1 for what seems like years now and have never needed to revert to DOS 2 for anything. That said the only Apricot users who can get anything later than DOS 2.11 are XEN-FD/CD/HD users with DOS 3.10, Point 32 network users with DOS 3.10, and XEN MainFrame network users with DOS 3.2. Hence the only way you will be able to get DOS 3 for the F2 is to get hold of a network F-series startup disk. That startup disk only contains appropriate system tracks and a few network utilities - all the useful DOS 3 utility programs are on the network's file-server's disks so you would need those as well. Apricot currently charge up to hundreds of pounds per annum to provide updates of such disks to network users so don't bank on your dealer being overly keen to pirate a copy for you!

Then your questions about Microsoft Windows - let's begin yet again with "Why?" should you want Windows? (a) To provide the ability to switch between applications - this should work on the F10 but only very slowly and only just with 512Kb RAM; (b) For the free Windows Paint/Write software - you already have something very similar in GEM Paint/Write; (c) As a friendly front-end to DOS - GEM achieves this already. As Windows can take up to one megabyte of disk space, and given that it is painfully slow on a PC/Xi it could be excruciatingly slow on a F10 (and you would have to use the mouse instead of an ALT key)! Assuming that you do want Windows - is there one to have? As far as we know the only versions of Windows available for any Apricots are those for the Apricot XEN and the IBM compatible XEN-i models. You haven't a chance of getting IBM Windows to run on the F10! The colour version of Windows for the XEN with a colour monitor (640x200) might work with the F2/F10 but probably not, and you might need later versions of the ROMs than 3.1.1 to be reliable.

Summary: DOS 3.2 well worth trying to get, Windows on the F10 probably not.

DOS 2 TO 3 ?

Q: Should I upgrade from MS-DOS 2 to MS-DOS 3 ? [UPH 114]

A: See previous page.

DOS/BIOS CONFUSION/COMPATIBILITY

Q: How far can I go in mixing various BIOS versions and the associated Apricot software? Is it safe to use Manager BIOS 2.7 on my Activity BIOS 3.1 system? Can I make any serious errors - eg mixing up COMMAND.COMs? Same questions with BIOS 2.7 disks in the floppy disk of my 3.1 hard-disk machine. Finally will MS-DOS 3.1 work on my machine? [UPH 23]

A: As a general rule you shouldn't have a problem mixing BIOS versions. As far as we can remember nearly all newer Apricot software has been better than previous versions, hence you wouldn't want the earlier BIOS versions! Although F1 owners have been known to moan very loudly about the update to BIOS 3 being accompanied by a deterioration in their system's screen resolution and performance.

What has fundamentally varied between versions of the BIOS have been:

- a. Apricot PC/Xi used to have a LOGO as part of their operating system. With BIOS 3 this needless luxury was recognised as a waste of memory.
- b. Apricot PC/Xi originally came with a Apricot "Manager" front-end to DOS, which was later replaced with Apricot "Activity" which is what F1/File and Portable users always got. As a general principle that early Manager software is even more diabolical than Activity hence why want to use it?
- c. The "ladder" based utilities of Manager days are not fond of the BIOS 3 800400EG graphics and will corrupt the screen - although you can avoid this by simply not running 800400EG.

Having formatted your hard-disk with BIOS 3 and installed that BIOS's Activity master software onto it you will still be able to boot up and run your entire Xi-HD from a Manager BIOS 2.7 floppy, or even earlier. In these circumstances you should be particularly wary of:

- a. The format routines in Manager's DISK and some Activity Utilities don't do quite the job they should! With some hard-disks using them can prevent later, correct, formatting utilities from being able to work and/or can fail to freeze out duff sectors of the hard-disk leaving little time-bombs in your system which will, one day, cause you to lose data.
- b. Until after BIOS 2.4 double-sided disks were not correctly coped with making software such as Async and Cardbox-Plus screw up files on double-sided disks. No doubt a lot of other software also has problems. Remember that you shouldn't need to boot under an old BIOS to use old software, particularly third party such as the Super... programs.
- c. As we said in UPH Issue 1 page 12 don't place much confidence in older Apricot hard-disk archiving software.

You will have a difficulty mixing MS-DOS utility programs (ie standard Microsoft utilities rather than Apricot's own) between DOS's because these are clever enough to check that they are being run on a micro booted under their own DOS version. This is why Apricot's DOS 3.10's CHKDSK utility won't run under Apricot DOS 2.11 (although surprisingly 3.10 ATTRIB will!).

You should be unable to unwittingly mix COMMAND.COMs and hence cause yourself problems as DOS has sophisticated routines for checking COMMAND.COM. What this does mean in practice is that you will with Apricot DOS 3.1 have to watch out as it can report Invalid COMMAND.COM, System halted and require you to RESET if you do accidentally attempt to mix up COMMAND.COMs.

MS-DOS 3.1 should work on all Apricot's : we have run it on PC/Xi-FD, Xi/Xi-HD, F2 (hence presumably F10), F1 (hence presumably F1e), Portable, XEN-FD, XEN-CD, XEN-HD, Point 32-10, Point 32-20. As mentioned in an earlier answer above it is getting hold of it that is the problem. Meanwhile, back (ahead?) in IBM land, DOS 3.2 is the latest and best DOS with DOS 3.1 bugs removed, and with two new utilities REPLACE and XCOPY which are particularly useful for hard-disk and sub-directory updating/copying.

#### SUB-DIRECTORY COPYING

Q: How do you copy entire contents of sub-directories to two or more floppies (from an Xi-HD)? When disk full is indicated I may have another 20 or so files to go but I don't know how to continue the copying. I'm sure the solution must be simple - but there is nothing in the UPG to explain? [UPH 152]

A: We're afraid the answer is only simple if you have MS-DOS 3.2 as mentioned above. This includes a new external utility XCOPY which can do just what you want - an extended COPY routine.

Until (if?) MS-DOS 3.2 appears for the Apricot PC/Xi we're afraid that you will have to make do with using BACKUP to make the copy and then RESTORE to get them back [see UPH Issue 1 p9+]. For example say you wished to backup the sub-directory A:\LOTUS\123FILES

```
A>BACKUP A:\LOTUS\123FILES B: [RET]
```

Remember that this command actually also copies files from any sub-directories of 123FILES - you would have to add a /R switch before the [RET] to stop this.

#### RAMDISK

Q: I use a 320Kb RamDisk (Apricot RAMDISK.SYS) for applications. The root directory will only accept about 30 entries. The work around is to create and use sub-directories, but why? When running CHKDSK on RamDisk it reports 20 lost clusters. The work around is to invoke option /F to create 20 FILEnnnn.CHK files and then delete them all, but why? [UPH 137]

A: Before any MS-DOS "disk" is used it is "formatted" into three clearly defined areas - for the space to file(s) allocation table (FAT), the file directory, and the actual data space. With DOS there are two copies of the FAT with each FAT entry 12 bits long (ie 1.5 bytes) with DOS 2 [16 bits, 2 bytes with DOS 3 large hard-disks], and each directory entry takes 32 bytes. Thus

the space initially defined for the FAT and directory will limit the number of files which can be created in the root directory of that disk. These were, albeit arbitrarily, set by Apricot in RAMDISK.SYS as described in UPH Issue 1 p11. As to CHKDSK not liking RamDisk this appear to be a problem with a 320Kb RamDisk and applies even with DOS 3. We have never known any actual space allocation problems using 256Kb or smaller RamDisks - does the 320Kb RamDisk lost cluster problem actually cause problems for you?

#### PORTABLE & PRINTERS

Q: I have a Dixon's Portable and Star SG-10 Printer which locks up unpredictably. The Star is used in IBM mode. [UPH 5]

Q: Epson RX100 stops in the middle of print, it does not matter which package, although the ON line pumps it to the end. [UPH 144]

Q: When I try to print a document prepared with SuperWriter on my Canon PW1196A dot-matrix printer the printer stops at seemingly random intervals during the print. It can only be persuaded to continue by being repeatedly switched ON/OFF line. Apricot, Canon and Dixons have been unable to help. [UPH 15]

A: We seem to have uncovered a common problem here. On the basis that there is nothing wrong with any of the printers - and why should there be - there is obviously something wrong either with the Portable's parallel output or with your cables.

One possibility is that you have overlooked our advice on page 8 of the UserPrompt Guide PORT-DOS. We have always said NO to both the paper-out and printer fault questions and have thus avoided any problems. Another possibility is that your printer cable either connects too many or too few of the 36 Centronics parallel lines. Most of our parallel cables connect just the following pins: 1 to 9, 11, 16 and 17 only.

However some printers, such as the Epson LQ1500, need more lines - we use a full 36 ribbon cable (with Pin 14 cut to avoid any double line-feed problems). The Gateway User Group's newsletter No 5 also mentions the "Portable hanging up while printing" problem and suggests that it may be cured by the upgrade to BIOS 3.1 ROM chips, which they are offering to members for just f10 (see UPH Issue 1 page 15 for details of Gateway Users).

#### PRINT BUFFER

Q: We have tried 3 different print buffers with a PC to speed printing but there appears to be no time saving as the Apricot seems to control the download rate to that of the Epson FX100 printer. All the suppliers seem baffled & one has ceased selling buffers for Apricots they say! [UPH 73]

A: Thanks for the info which we pass on with the comment that we too have had various bad experiences trying buffers on the PC/Xi. There is something "wrong" somewhere with Apricot's parallel interfaces (for instance we are unable to get various laser printers to work correctly with the PC/Xi, only slightly better with a XEN, although fine with an IBM and several compatibles). As to what the solution is - sorry but too technical for us.

MASTER DISKS

Q: One UserPrompt user wrote in to ask if we knew where he could get hold of a pair of F1 Master Disks as he had wiped both of them clean while trying to make copies. [UPH 4]

A: The very first thing you should do with any original disks (ie Apricot Master Disks, original applications programs etc) is:

- a. Make them write protected by moving the slider so you can see through the disk and thus prevent any accidental deletion or overwriting.
- b. Make a copy of the disks - which becomes your day to day work disks, while you safely store the original in case of future need - eg to recopy a new work disk, or to return the originals for an upgrade to a later version.

SUPERPLANNER

Q: I want to use the address book as a mailing list linked to invoicing, publicity and subscription records etc. Am I wasting my time on pure foolishness ? [UPH 61]

A: Simply and frankly - we think you are. SuperPlanner is really a non-runner. There are two costs to using any software - its cost and your cost. Your cost is made up of the time to use the actual software, including the future benefit you obtain from acquired skill/knowledge. SuperPlanner is a dead product, and the reason is its uselessness.

MANUAL & ESCAPE CODES

Q: Screen handling - the Manual says "A list of escape sequences is supplied with your computer" - Where? [UPH 84]

A: For a short period the Apricot Microsoft Pack used to include a section of ESCAPE sequences - section 17.2 of the Appendix - however this was later dropped as being too useful to risk would be users having.

The most useful escape sequences are listed in the UserPrompt BATCH Guide (and earlier .BAT Guide) on page 21. Incidentally a few BATCH Guides contain a mistyping on that page - the code to get the PC/Xi's icon (pre BIOS 3 only) on the screen begins with ESC i not ESC I.

CONCURRENT CP/M

Q: I would appreciate info on using CCP/M with an Xi10 and availability of any utility to partition the hard-disk between operating systems [UPH 113]

A: Sorry to say that you are the only person we have ever heard of as actually using Concurrent CP/M on the Apricot and can't offer any help.

APRICOT SKETCH PRINTING

Q: [SHIFT] [F4 PRINT] outputs the screen to the printer but not graphics - can the graphics from Sketch be printed ? [UPH 126]

A: You've spotted the problem, and what a problem. We know of no solution but have seen some mention that there may be one somewhere in GSX graphics. Digital Research's GSX includes the ability, somehow, to specify not just a screen driver but also printer drivers. Certainly Apricot do a "Black Hole" disk [ie one of their unsupported disks - a bit like a Master Disk, but they charge separately for Black Hole disks] said to contain GSX printer drivers. It is possible that if there is a suitable GSX driver for your dot-matrix printer, and there is some way to call that driver from within Sketch (Printing is not a menu option) then you may be able to get printout.

BIOS UPDATE & MANUALS

Q: How do I get BIOS 2.7 - I have BIOS 3.1 (slow) and 2.4 [UPH 141].

A: Like all the other Apricot disks - from Apricot via your dealer. However as PC/Xi BIOS 2.7 has not been distributed by Apricot for a long time you'll probably have to rely on the dealer already having a copy - which he should. Even if BIOS 3.1 is slower, which we are unconvinced of, it contains fixes to several bugs, including unreliable keyboard driving.

Q: Having bought our Xi second hand we are missing the original manuals on Manager (which seems adequate to our needs). Do you know of any source for these or the later Activity manuals? [UPH 170]

A: Afraid not. Apricot may have some left and might be prepared to sell them but we have never seen them offered, even to dealers. Although most UPG's are written to be read in conjunction with the original Apricot manual(s), the UPGs in isolation are certainly better than nothing.

PRINT SPOOLING & BUFFERING

Q: PRINT /T does not clear the print buffer. I am not using SPOOL - any ideas ? [UPH 5]

A: A PRINT /T [RET] command only terminates the printing of any files which you have put into PRINT's own print queue using PRINT filespec [RET] commands. By terminate we mean that PRINT stops working as a background activity copying the contents of the disk file specified out of the Apricot's printer port. The terminate command does not directly control the printer. We presume that your Star SG-10 includes a RAM buffer, hence any "printing" which it has already received into that buffer (which might be as much as several pages!) will continue to print out until you get the message "Print canceled (sic) by operator". This is mentioned on page 21 of the PORT-ACTIV and PORT-DIX UPGs. Those unfamiliar with "SPOOL" shouldn't worry much - it was Apricot's original attempt on the PC/Xi Master Disks to do a Manager ladder style front-end to the MS-DOS PRINT utility - see p25 of the DISKS UPG.

**XEN PRINTER INTERFACING**

Q: I suffered from poor interface between XEN and Brother HR-1 printer. Most problems have now been rectified except that if the computer is switched off first I get garbage printed, and this is retained and printed later even if printer is immediately also turned off. [UPH 56]

A: This was also a problem with our Portable. We would sometimes turn it and the printer off to terminate some unwanted printing, and that printing would continue when the micro was turned on again. A partial solution was to press [RESET] on the micro before turning off.

**EPSON USERPROMPT HELP**

Q: We have an Epson RX100 but need a clearer guide to the syntax of each command. [UPH 84]

A: We were surprised at just how many UserPrompt users had Epson printers, and problems with understanding them - we used to find the original Epson manuals OK, and their recent ones rather good. Anyway we now considering a UserPrompt Guide to Epsoms. Further details when/if it's in print.

**EPSON LX80 PROBLEM**

Q: Epson LX80 problem : how to get more than 132 characters per line in condensed print. Datamaster with FX80 gives 137 but LX80 breaks line at 132. [UPH 92]

A: Sorry, but no ideas whatsoever as we have never used a LX80. Normally narrow width Epsoms - ie 80 models - print 80 character at 10 pitch (ie 8"), hence 96 at 12 pitch, and 137 in condensed pitch which is actually 17.16 cpi. You don't mention which program is driving the LX80 when it wraps at 132, and that may be the problem.

**SUPERWRITER & NON-EPSON**

Q: SuperWriter 1.03 makes our Silver Reed printer do all sorts of silly things. SuperWriter drives an Epson fine. Cardbox-Plus and SuperCalc3 drive the Silver Reed fine. [68]

A: In ordinary text printing mode both Cardbox-Plus and SuperCalc3 just send standard ASCII characters to the printer, so both should be able to print correctly with any printer, once parallel/serial interface problems have been sorted out. SuperWriter, like most word-processing programs, seeks to do clever things with a printer, hence why it includes a printer installation routine.

The printout you provided looks suspiciously as if you are driving the Silver Reed as if it were something else - eg an Epson as the first and last lines of the sample printout you provided include extra "@A" which is probably SuperWriter sending a reset printer sequence! So we suggest you try to find out what the Silver Reed "emulates" (eg Diablo 630) and try to install a copy of SuperWriter for that particular printer driver.

**KEYBOARD ESCAPE CODES**

Q: I have MS-COBOL v2.1 and wish to run the INSTALL program to configure the runtime executor for the F10's screen-handling. To do this I need the escape sequences generated by the keyboard keys. How can I find these out without having to pay Apricot's extortionate price for a technical manual? [UPH 6]

A: On any PC/Xi or old F1 you would be OK as Apricot used to provide a KEYEDIT utility which displayed and altered keyboard codes. With Activity this utility became the Activity UTILITIES Keyboard Table Editor. Poor old F2/F10 and XEN users were assumed not to be interested in getting their keyboards tailored. Anyway read on for the Apricot ACT0001.KB keyboard settings which are the standard ones incorporated into Apricot's Master Disk operating systems (you may find this keyboard table file on your master disks along with KEYS.EXE) ...

- Most alphabetic and numeric keys just send the characters moulded into their key caps - ie A sends a, A or ^A in its unshifted, shifted and control modes.
- The function keys are set as follows (three digit numbers correspond to the decimal value of a character allocated to that key):

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
	Help	Undo	Repeat	Calc	Voice
Normal	177	178	179	180	185
Shift	177	178	027 U	<calc>	<voice>
CTRL	027 7 L	027 7 C	027 7 F	027 7 B	<voice>

  

	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
	Print	Intr	Menu	Finish	Time/Date
Normal	181	182	183	184	[Hard wired on F's]
Shift	027 &	182	183	186	
CTRL	<MS echo> 182		183	186	

- For PC/Xi/XEN users who are interested - the microscreen settings:

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Normal	185	186	187	188	189	190
Shift	all as for Normal					
CTRL	all as for Shift					

- Cursor control keys:

	Home	Clear	Insert	Delete	Up	Scroll
Normal	027 H	027 E	027 @	127	027 A	010
Shift	027 H	027 E	027 @	127	027 y D	000
CTRL	027 H	027 z	027 @	127	027 y E	000

  

	Left	Down	Right
Normal	027 D	027 B	027 C
Shift	027 D	027 x D	027 C
CTRL	027 x F	027 x E	027 y F

MISCSCREEN

Q: Our AUTOEXEC.BAT sets the microscreen function keys using MISCSCREEN commands. When we select SuperWriter its function keys do not operate correctly. Can you supply the MISCSCREEN commands we need in a batch file to run SuperWriter ? [UPH 26]

A: SuperWriter was set up by Apricot assuming that the microscreen keypads still had their standard Apricot default settings, as listed on the previous page. The quickest way to get these original Apricot settings in force is not to use MISCSCREEN but to use the standard Apricot keyboard table file so that it resets all the keys on the keyboard to their default value using the command:

KEYS ACT0001 [RET]

However as we wrote in the Apricot User July/August 86 Clinic on page 6 you should check whether you have KEYS version 1.0 dated 12/10/00 or version 2.0 dated 2/11/84. Only the latter is worth using. To get the microscreen back to how you like it after SuperWriter you could set up a batch file to call SuperWriter so that it runs KEYS, then runs SuperWriter and then ends with your MISCSCREEN commands (as in your AUTOEXEC).

To widen the issues slightly : you really should not be using MISCSCREEN as it is laboriously slow and limited in what it can achieve. It is better to use KEYEDIT or Activity UTILITIES Keyboard Table Editor to generate a .KB keyboard file with your preferred keyboard (not just MicroScreen keypad settings) in it. You would then either put a command in your AUTOEXEC.BAT to run KEYS to bring that .KB file into force upon booting or else use SETUP or Activity UTILITIES System Configurator to build that .KB file into your bootup operating system so that the Apricot boots up with that keyboard.

We presume that you also want some narrative displayed on the MicroScreen, and various of its red LED lights turned on so you should use ESCape codes as described at the back of the UserPrompt .BAT and BATCH Guides to do this.

KEYBOARD EDITORS & FUNCTION KEY SETTING

Q: What commands to set the Function keys F1 to F10 on the XEN? [UPH 26]

Q: What is the best utility to edit the keyboard table - there is nothing in GEM on the F2/F10? [UPH 43]

Q: How do I control the XEN keyboard configuration and microscreen? Which UPGs will help in this? [UPH 121]

A: There are 3 ways to adjust what is produced by a key on an Apricot:

- i. All Apricots let you assign a single keystroke to a key using an ESCape sequence as described on page 21 of UserPrompt .BAT and BATCH Guides. The key numbers for functions keys F1 - F10 are also given there.
- ii. Original Apricots have MISCSCREEN for the microscreen pads (see above).
- iii. A "table" (.KB file) of what all the keys produce can be set up. All PC/Xi "Manager" users got KEYEDIT to create/edit such tables. All "Activity" users get UTILITIES Keyboard Table Editor. Unfortunately F2/F10/XEN users get nothing as standard. However we have seen a beta test version of Apricot's new "generic" Keyboard table editor (which uses the new BIOS 3.1 graphics) your dealer may be able to get this for you.

ASSIGN CHARACTERS TO KEYS

Q: Is it possible to assign a string of characters (eg SW [ret] ) to one of the function keys using escape codes. I can successfully assign single characters but not strings [67]

A: See the answer above : the limit for an ESCape code is a single character as you have got to work. Up to 12 characters per key mode (ie 12 normal, 12 SHIFT, 12 CONTROL) can be assigned in a .KB keyboard table subject to the limitation of the way a .KB file is designed - see our Apricot User June 86 Clinic page 6 answer for further details.

MISCSCREEN DESCRIPTIONS

Q: How do I set up the LCD descriptions for the Microscreen keypads on my Xi-HD? [UPH 133]

A: The original way to achieve this was using an Apricot utility called MISCSCREEN.EXE (see above). It was used as follows:  
MISCSCREEN MESS, This is the text to appear on the MicroScreen [RET]

However MISCSCREEN was fairly slow, its primary purpose was to assign keystrokes to the microscreen keys, and it has not been distributed since the original Manager style PC/Xi disks. The easiest and quickest way for all PC/Xi/XEN users is to incorporate the microscreen changes into the appropriate batch file as described in the UserPrompt BATCH Guide on page 21, and as illustrated on page 24.

SUPERCALC3 & MISCSCREEN

Q: When using SuperCalc3 the program takes over the first three keys of the Microscreen for Cancel/Plot/View. For our program we need all 6 keypads but not the graphics. Is there any way to regain the use of the 3 keys in question? [UPH 9]

A: We don't know the answer to your problem, but just to explore the issues a little. Somewhere in the SuperCalc3 program it has commands to reset the Microscreen LCD display to show CANCEL PLOT VIEW. It should be reasonably easy to find these in one of the SuperCalc files - either the program or overlay files (we tried MS-DOS's FIND filter without success). You could then overwrite the CANCEL... to leave the description you wanted. However this only affects the display.

Somewhere else SuperCalc3 will overwrite the keyboard table to assign the three control characters ^Z ^Y ^T to the first three microscreen keypads. It might be possible to find these and edit the commands (probably ESCape sequences) but you would only be able to substitute a single character.

All in all a not very attractive proposition.

If you actually want six pads set up to use during SuperCalc have you thought of setting up pads 4, 5 & 6 for use in both Normal and SHIFT modes - hence six different usages ?

SUPERCALC PRINTER CONTROL CODES

Q: Getting my LQ1500 to vary its style of print from SuperCalc - ie how do I put printer codes into SuperCalc? [UPH 57]

A: Sorry - this is covered in the UserPrompt SCALC Guide on page 10 with examples of the codes required for f signs, different character pitches etc.

Q: How do I get NLQ from SC3 on an Epson LQ1500 without using the DIP switches all the time? SC3 seems to reset everything? [UPH 141]

A: SuperCalc3 only resets everything when it has finished plotting. Normal printing is simple ASCII character codes, with no special resetting. You should be able to rationalise that this is so by thinking what questions SuperCalc asks about printers - it just wants to know what make/model you have for the graphics printer/plotter. So to get NLQ you will just need to use a printer set-up string. Of course you could automate sending such a string with an .XQT file as described in the SCALC UPG.

SUPERCALC PORTABLE COLOUR MONITOR

Q: When running SUPERCALC with a 10" Apricot colour monitor off my Portable the worksheet cursor is not displayed. Using the LCD display all is well. Is this a bug in PORTCOL2.GSX? [UPH 11]

A: Presumably as we had a similar problem with a colour monitor on an F1. However we were able to fix this by trying a different GSX driver. The latest PORTCOL2.GSX (ie the four colour driver) which we have seen is dated 8/08/85 but we could never afford our own 10" colour so have not been able to test whether this PORTCOL2 does work - the Portable was bad enough at £2,400!

SUPERCALC F10 MONITOR

Q: SuperCalc behaves stupidly on my F10 with the screen slightly offset to the right - ie say columns A to H would fit onto a normal screen. I get column H at the top left of the screen, then some way across the screen the column of row numbers and then columns A to G. [UPH 42]

A: Once again this is a bug with the GSX driver which we have also come across. We presume you have "cadged" some F1 GSX drivers and may have ended up with a 250 line version as opposed to the later 200 line version dated 14/6/85 or later.

GW-BASIC & ESCAPE CODES

Q: BASIC Escape codes do not work - CHR\$(27) gives a symbol on the screen, LPRINT escape codes to the printer works out - solution? [UPH 10]

A: Sorry to say you are correct - see UPH Issue 1 p8.

SUPERCALC MEMORY

Q: Only get 32Kb RAM memory available with SuperCalc3 even though I have an F10 with 512Kb. [UPH 43]

A: Somewhere you have allocated too much memory to something else. Things to consider are:

RamDisk gobbling up 64Kb's  
GEM Desktop running - don't bother with it!  
SuperCalc /G settings set up for fastest settings hence loading too much of the program into memory : try /GGI to adjust to Disk rather than Memory then press [CTRL]Z and then type SY to save the update to disk.

SUPERCALC3 & EPSON HI-80

Q: Following a report in Apricot User we purchased an Epson HI-80 to find there is no suitable driver in SuperCalc3. Despite several appeals to our supplier we still have an inoperable printer. Can SuperCalc3 version 1.0 drive the HI-80? [UPH 169]

A: Indeed it can, but only as if it were a Hewlett-Packard HP7470A. To convert your HI-80 to emulate a HP7470A requires two Epson extras as described in UPH Issue 1 page 13.

1-2-3 COLOUR PLOTTER/PRINTER

Q: I want to find a cheaper plotter/printer to print 1-2-3 line graphs in several colours. [UPH 63]

A: The only cheap colour plotter we have any experience of is the Epson HI-80 which can take A4 paper and has 4 pens. As mentioned in UPH Issue 1 page 13 the HI-80 can be made to emulate a Hewlett-Packard HP7470A plotter for a cost of c£500. That said Lotus do now support the HI-80 itself in 1-2-3 release 2 for the IBM (ie as an Epson HI-80 rather than as a HP7470A) and it may be worth ringing the Lotus help line to see if a HI-80 plotter driver for Apricot 1-2-3 release 1a is available.

There are a few very cheap colour printers advertised - the underlying rule is that your Lotus 1-2-3 has to include an appropriate driver to be able to plot/print in colour or even at all.

SUPERCALC .XQT FILES

Q: I can't find a way of running SuperCalc .XQT files direct from batch files - is it possible? [UPH 130]

A: Yes, and very easy - simply include the name of the eXecute file immediately after the program name. Using parameters with a batch file you could have SCALC3.BAT containing:

Echo off  
GRAPHICS  
SC3 \1.XQT

Hence to run DEMO.XQT you would type SCALC3 DEMO [RET]



BASIC & "TOO MANY FILES"

Q: Attempts to OPEN a sixth data file from a BASIC program gives "Too many files" - solution? Attempts to SAVE the program by external command gives "Too many files". The program is saved if the command is a line in the program! There are only six files in this sub-directory - solution? [UPH 10]

A: First the error message is nothing to do with the number of files on disk, it is to do with the number of files which are "open" : ie which either MS-DOS or BASIC have open, and hence have to keep track of where they are in the file, etc. etc.

When MS-DOS is having trouble with the number of file it was being asked to deal with it gives the message "insufficient handles". DOS normally allows just 8 files to be open - ie has 8 "handles", several of which are used by DOS itself! You can extend this by a FILES=nn statement in your CONFIG.SYS - eg FILES=10 or FILES=20.

Then within that overall MS-DOS limitation there is a limit set by BASIC itself. The "Too many files" is the BASIC error message reporting that this limit has been reached. You can increase the number of files that BASIC can handle by including a switch when you run BASIC or GWBASIC. Rather than just typing BASIC [RET] include a /F:nn switch where nn is the number of files you want to be able to open simultaneously (although we have not tested this):

eg BASIC /F:6 [RET] if you have FILES=10 in CONFIG.SYS  
BASIC /F:16 [RET] FILES=20

Q: How to load MS-BASIC and run automatically a program with if possible legally having more than six files open. [UPH 33]

A: Assuming you have read the answer above and want to run a basic program called DEMO.BAS you would use the command (assuming FILES=20 in CONFIG.SYS):  
BASIC DEMO /F:16

You will find this information right at the front of the BASIC section of Apricot Microsoft Pack and it may even work (ie not tested by us).

HARD-DISK SPACE

Q: Running out of space on hard-disk mainly due to need to have copy of each WordStar file in each sub-directory. On a 20Mb drive how much space does one need free for "working space"? [UPH 34]

A: There is no set rule about the working space needed as it all depends on the software you use. WordStar for instance when editing a document needs sufficient space for the backup .BAK file, and the temporary file of your live edits which WordStar creates in case you abandon the current edit.

You do not of course need to keep a copy of each WordStar file in every sub-directory. You need only the one .COM file with a PATH to it. Then the .OVL overlay files would be best copied to a RamDisk if you have sufficient RAM. Finally if you can get hold of MS-DOS 3 and either APPEND or SUBST you can avoid altogether the need for any duplicate copies of WordStar files.

MAKEDISK.BAT

Q: What is the format for MAKEDISK.BAT for the F10. The manual falls short of explaining this - I am OK on BACKUP etc. [UPH 42]

A: We have never used an F10 [hence why the F2 Guides are described only as F2 Guides] but on the other Apricot hard-disk machines MAKEDISK.BAT was Apricot's attempt at a batch file either to put their Master Disk software only the hard-disk in the first place or for the user to be able to re-create the hard-disk later.

To be able to re-create an F10's hard-disk you should need:

a. A micro floppy with an F2/F10 operating system on it (eg by using a FORMAT B: /S [RET]), the FORMAT.EXE utility from the GEMTOOLS sub-directory, and the RESTORE utility. The utilities must not be archive copies created with BACKUP but straight COPIES.

b. Your set of micro-floppy disks with your complete BACKUP on.

If necessary you could re-create the hard-disk by booting up from your floppy, re-formatting the hard-disk and then using RESTORE to RESTORE B: A:\

MULTI-MICRO HARD-DISK

Q: Is there a hard-disk that you can plug into an IBM one day and an Apricot the next ? [UPH 141]

A: There probably is such a hard-disk but all the ideas we have are quite expensive with fk's involved. We have used a Bernoulli Box which is a large external box (almost as big as a PC/X1) - a sort of cross between a floppy and hard-disk. If you purchased both an Apricot and an IBM interface board/card for this you would be able to move the interface cable from one machine to the other, but Bernoulli's are very expensive although they do use exchangeable 5Mb or 10Mb "cartridges" rather than a fixed disk.

You don't say why you want to be able to swap the hard-disk between the machines. You might find an Apricot network with a proper shared hard-disk one possible solution, but expensive again - up to £600 just to get the IBM onto the network. The Plus 5 firm also do some hard-disks with "Plus-Net" which enables Sirius/Apricot/IBM to be wired into a shared hard-disk.

BASIC & GRAPHICS

Q: I have problems getting any BASIC graphics commands to work - eg LINE, PAINT etc - have I missed something ? [UPH 160]

A: All you missed was something not put in the manual as it seems to cover standard GW-BASIC not Apricot's implementation. See UPH Issue 1 page 7 - you need a SCREEN 1 command (or perhaps SCREEN another number).

Q: Lack of information about GW-BASIC GRAPHICS commands. [UPH 97]

A: You should have an Apricot GW-BASIC manual - try your dealer.

DESPERATE TO USE BASIC

Q: I cannot input and run BASIC programs - I think I need chapter and verse on this. [UPH 101]

A: Sorry - but it's probably appropriate for you to take a walk to your local library or bookshop and see what full scale books they have available.

SORTING RANDOM FILES

Q: I have set up various Random data files for use with GW-BASIC programs - eg one has ledger balances as single precision numbers. Can the DOS SORT command be used with such files ? [UPH 158]

A: Afraid not. The DOS SORT utility only sorts complete lines of a text file. BASIC random files are just one long string of characters, not individual lines of text.

GW-BASIC ESCAPE CODE PROBLEM

Q: I understand that various ESCape code sequences in MS-BASIC will for example set up colour mode for monochrome monitor, set/re-set underline mode, enter/cancel reverse video mode. Can these be accessed from GW-BASIC ? [UPH 158]

A: No, as far as we know. See UPH Issue 1 page 8.

IBM SCREENS & MS-BASIC GRAPHICS

Q: The so-called Apricot MS-DOS User Guide (p15-9) suggests you can access the graphics 320x200 or 640x200 via ANSI escape sequences but I have been unable to. I can plot in 80x25 mode using ESC Y to position the cursor but how, if at all, can I utilise that 800x400 mono graphics resolution with MS-BASIC 5.28? [UPH 25]

A: The references to 320x200, 640x200 and ANSI sequences are almost certainly just a left over from the world of IBM. As you know the Apricot PC/XI/XEN monochrome monitors have 80x25 text and 800x400 graphics.

You can access GSX graphics from within MS-BASIC - or at least Apricot used to be able to. Originally they provided a GSXBAS.COM which had to be run before MS-BASIC to enable graphics to work, but we believe that in later versions of MS-BASIC they fixed it so that GSXBAS.COM was not required. GSXDEM01.BAS was the Apricot demo BASIC file to illustrate the GSX graphics.

Your best course of action is probably to get an updated set of Apricot Master Disks including GW-BASIC which extends BASIC to include its own graphics generating commands.

RAMDISKS FOR WORDSTAR & DOODLE

Q: I have added 512Kb to my 256Kb PC/XI. What is the ideal RamDisk configuration for WordStar 3.30b? Likewise for Doodle [UPH 46]

A: General things to think about when wanting to use RamDisk to increase program performance :

- a. Aim to put all overlay files in RamDisk (.OVL and .OVR);
- b. If RAM is tight don't bother putting the actual program file (.COM) into RamDisk as it is only loaded once when you run the program;
- c. Some programs like to know what drive they are being run from (eg WordStar) so you may have to install the software;
- d. DOS 3.1's APPEND and SUBST can ease or complicate performance strategies;
- e. Some programs create their own temporary work files and you might have to leave room for these in your RamDisk.

With WordStar 3.3/3.4 the fastest performance is with all three WordStar files in RAM, so the optimum size for the RamDisk would usually be 128Kb, ie two blocks of 64Kb. Now you've decided to keep the program, or at least the two overlay files in RAM, you should consider what else to keep in RAM for instance you could keep your pro-formas in RamDisk, or even copy your text files to RamDisk before printing them so that WordStar can load them quicker.

As for Doodle we've never splashed out on it, but the demo copy we once had comprised 3 files TRILEX.CON, DO.EXE and TRILEX.HLP. These totalled 164Kb so presumably a 192Kb RamDisk might be sufficient.

WORDSTAR NOT SO PERFECT

Q: We have switched from WordStar to Word Perfect 4.1 - we may not be the only ones? [50]

A: Indeed you may not - this UPH Issue 2 was mostly written with IBM Word Perfect on a Toshiba T3100 as our first experiment with this package. Although it is very early to make a judgment having been daily and extensive WordStar users for the last 3 years, we have to admit to being very impressed with IBM Word Perfect 4.1. We have also just got 4.1 for the Apricot PC/XI as well, and it seems to run OK although you reading this will be the proof as this text has been transferred onto the XEN for final editing and Hewlett-Packard LaserJet laser printing. This gave no problems other than the function key template being designed for the eight grey keys of the PC/XI not the 10 F1-F10 keys of the XEN.

Word Perfect has a very different approach to WordStar being almost entirely function/cursor key driven in Normal/SHIFT/CTRL/ALT modes (hence some differences with no ALT key, but a microscreen). We initially thought it would be difficult to pick up but haven't actually had many problems, although we do have to keep looking at the function key template. One nice feature of Word Perfect is multiple columns like this, on screen, with only a few simple definition keystrokes - and that is just one of what seem like hundreds of extras. One thing which does appeal is that when you press the HELP key then a function/cursor key it tells you about that key's use, or gives you an alphabetic list of commands. WP can even do different headers and footers on even/odd pages as on this & other UPH Issue 2 pages.

WORDSTAR AND EPSON DOT-MATRIX

Q: How can I persuade an Epson FX105 to recognise WordStar dot-commands or WordStar to accept Epson escape codes so that WS can vary line spacing during a file? I can only obtain .LH12 via a version of WordStar patched so that the printer advances 1.5 lines as default - this is clumsy & inflexible. [UPH 75]

A: The way we would suggest to achieve your 1.5 line spacing is with WordStar's "user-defined functions" : ^PQ ^PW ^PE ^PR. Each of these ^P characters can have assigned to it up to 4 characters to send to the printer. The user defined functions are set as part of the Installation under the option D - Custom Printer Installation [page 3-8 of WordStar 3.3 Installation manual].

1.5 lines spacing is equivalent to 4 lines per inch which means a line feed of 18/72nds of an inch. The command to get an Epson FX105 to this line feeding spacing is ESC A 1 8 (in hex - 1Bh 41h 31h 38h). To reset to the more normal 6 lines per inch single spacing the command is ESC 2 (hex 1Bh 32h). You could install these commands as ^PQ and ^PW and toggle into and out of them by using these functions in your text. The only thing to watch out for is that WordStar will not correctly adjust the screen page breaks for the reduced number of lines which will get printed on a page at 1.5 line spacing.

SMARTPATH & .COM FILES

Q: I purchased SmartPath to enable me to call WordStar from anywhere. It will call WS and its overlay files but not WS via RWS because SmartPath will only find .OVL files not .COM. [UPH 116]

A: We have SmartPath for the IBM but have never used it as we have used DOS 3's APPEND and SUBST as cheaper and fully DOS supported alternatives.

In MS-DOS 2 and 3 a .COM file from a non-current directory can be found by the DOS PATH command being correctly set. RWS.COM was Apricot's attempt at bringing a customised microscreen display and keyboard in force for WordStar while getting round the problem with KEYS version 1 which slowed the micro to a snail's pace. As such RWS.COM contains the name of the program which it has to run and this is set as WS.COM however RWS does not call it via DOS correctly!

SmartPath's manual says that the normal DOS PATH still works, and is added to by the SPATH for overlay files. Hence if your RWS.COM and WS.COM were both in a sub-directory A:\WP you would expect PATH=A:\WP and SPATH=A:\WP. This does not work from other directories not because of SmartPath but because RWS runs WS.COM from the current directory. To get around this you would need to patch the start of the RWS.COM where it currently says WS.COM to A:\WP\WS.COM. This worked a treat for us, anyway.

PORTABLE MONITOR

Q: Can I run a Sony Trinitron monitor from a Portable? What is the least expensive way to run a monitor? Anyone do a board to convert a colour TV to Apricot second screen? [UPH 61]

A: The only monitor interfaces we are aware of for the Portable are ones we have read about in the Gateway User. Frazer Associates of Buckingham (0280 816087) do a couple of such interfaces.

GW-BASIC SCREEN SCROLLING PROBLEM

Q: My Portable's screen does not scroll when listing programs written in GW-BASIC [UPH 82]

A: To be able to run GW-BASIC you have to have GSX graphics installed. The scrolling problem was an occasional bug with early versions of the GSX drivers according to something we once saw. Certainly a Dixons Portable LCD driven with GSX dated 8/08/85 with GW-BASIC 3.10 does not exhibit this problem.

PORTABLE SNAIL CURSOR

Q: When using my Portable the cursor sometimes slows down almost to a crawl, resulting in even one screen of text taking many seconds and a whole page about a minute (seems like hours). This can sometimes be cured by saving the file to disk. The problem occurs with all software I am running. [UPH 86]

A: No ideas - sorry except that this may be some spin off effect of the dreadful KEYS.EXE version 1.

PORTABLE LCD PROBLEMS

Q: The top left quarter of my Portable's LCD display often either remains entirely blank or is corrupted by displaying whatever is on the screen in the quarter below. This can sometimes be cured by pressing on right hand side of screen. What's wrong? [UPH 139]

A: Sounds as if you have a genuine hardware fault - either caused by some physical abuse (pre or post purchase?) or perhaps due to an internal display circuitry fault. The former sounds most likely based on pressing the top right curing the problem, the latter sounds more likely if the top left quarter does duplicate the bottom left. Either way you're going to need a repair. The bad news is that if you're unable to convince your supplier that it is a genuine warranty repair, it's possible that the repair will be very expensive - probably a new LCD and perhaps circuitry and these are probably in extremely short supply nowadays. We guess that based on your description the Portable is currently almost unusable, so you might find it better in the long term to put your Apricot Portable'ing down to experience and think about buying one of the new Amstrad PC1512's.

XEN MONITOR PROBLEMS CONFIRMED

Q: You may be interested to know that if you treat yourself to a high-res colour monitor for the XEN you cut the range of software you can use - eg WordStar 2000 won't run. I wanted to upgrade due to the grey lines down the left side of the XEN paper-white monitor. [UPH 58]

A: Thanks for yet more confirmation of why Apricot had to give in and produce IBMs. Of course we did tell you about the paper-white problem on pages 2 & 31 of the UserPrompt XEN-WIND Guide. Even with a standard 12" green monitor [the back of which incidentally is prominently labelled to say it is ONLY for use with the a PC/Xi - Apricot strike again!] WordStar 2000 produces an initial screen of garbage (see p22 of XEN-WIND), although Apricot have told their dealers of a patch they can make with DEBUG to prevent this.

We only ever saw the very first working high-resolution colour monitor (in their VIP suite at the NEC Show in January) and they did have it working with SuperCalc3 and graphics. It produced an impressively pretty picture but it also crashed as soon as one of us tried some hands-on! It would be interesting to know if any UPH reader did splash out on either of the colour monitors and what problems you have been having.

#### SOFTCLONE FOR THE XEN

Q: Can I get SoftClone for the UK XEN. I believe it was available for the XEN in the USA and I have seen it on the Research Machine NIMBUS [UPH 95]

A: We too have seen SoftClone on the RM Nimbus running Lotus 1-2-3 and it worked OK. For those who don't know SoftClone is/was a "shell" to sit between an application written for the IBM PC and a non-IBM micro's MS-DOS, BIOS and hardware so as to fool the application into believing it was running on an IBM compatible micro and providing all sorts of translations and fudge factors. As such the "shell" had to be very extensively tailored to cope with all the idiosyncratic ways the software used the micro it was run on.

We would take all reports of SoftClone for the XEN being available, indeed given away free with all XEN's in the USA, with a very large pinch of salt. SoftClone for the XEN seemed to be mostly an Apricot smokescreen to cloud the issue of the XEN's lack of IBM compatibility, to divert attention from their "secret" XEN-i and flagging fortunes in the USA, while simultaneously building up interest in running IBM applications on micros made by Apricot. If SoftClone for the XEN works at all [and we have been assured so by several people who used to work for Apricot UK] it is probably only in a package tailored for Lotus 1-2-3 version 1a and that program is already available for the XEN in an Apricot version. The only potential source might be Apricot but you probably know how difficult it is to get anything out of them - they will probably tell you, with some justification, that if you want to run IBM software you should get an IBM compatible [a XEN-i ?].

#### NETWORKING & DELTA

Q: We are currently running Delta on the network and would like to run it stand alone on an F1. We think it is possible to copy all the relevant files onto one disc and run it on that. When we put this to our local dealer they said that to do this we would need an F1 operating system version 3 which is not available. The other alternative would be to buy a new Delta program designed for a stand alone computer. [UPH 88]

A: There seem to be two issues involved here : networking and F1 BIOS versions. When the F1 was originally launched it had a screen resolution of 640x250 dots. With the launch of the F2 Apricot revised the screen resolution to a more IBM compatible 640x200 and offered to update, via dealers, existing F1's by replacing their ROM chips with new BIOS 3.1.n chips (which also contained many bug fixes) and adjusting the monochrome monitor so the new 200 lines filled the space the 250 lines used to fill. The upgrade to BIOS 3.1 provided increased compatibility with the original PC/X1 and newer XEN, although the standard version of MS-DOS for the F series remained MS-DOS 2.11. MS-DOS 3.1 for the F series, which is required for networking, is only available as part of an Apricot Point 32 or XEN MainFrame network.

The version of Compsort's Delta you have may require either or both of these:

- it may need your F1 to have ROM BIOS 3.1.n
- it may require MS-DOS 3.1

as it is not clear which of these your dealer's "version 3" comment refers to, and I suggest you check with Compsort direct. Remember of course that Delta is copyrighted and Compsort may not approve of using versions in the way you wish.

To throw a further spanner in the works it does sound remarkable ambitious to try to use a sledgehammer database like Delta on a feeble little F1. Even if you can fit the program on a single-disk what about the data? If you do have to buy a new Delta (trade in your existing one?) it may work out cheaper and far better for many other reasons to get something like the Amstrad PC1512 and the new budget Delta 4 at just £99.95.

#### MAINTENANCE

Q: Where can I get decent maintenance. Is being asked £750pa for two Apricots and a printer a rip-off? [UPH 163]

A: Not if, as it appears from your form, both are hard-disk 20Mb machines. With the recent price plummet on PC/X1's there are two counter arguments: with original hardware cost so low how they can justify the same old prices; with the models now out of production maintenance costs are bound to increase.

#### BATCH FILE "FILE CREATION" ERROR

Q: We have a long batch file of about 50 lines to which 5 parameters are passed. We get a "file creation error" not usually on the first execution but certainly on the second. The batch file sends a sorted directory listing to a disk file, sets up the printer by COPYING control code files to the PRN, then copies the directory file to the PRN, and resets the printer by COPYING control code files again. The parameters determine the files to list and settings for the printer to use. Sometimes the error message "EXEC failure" appears. We use MS-DOS 2.11 and have tried both BIOS 2.7 and 3.1. [UPH 148]

A: Unfortunately you do not include a listing of the batch file but our guess is that you are asking DOS to do too much at once - ie for it to have more files open than it can normally cope with. We suggest you try increasing the number of files which DOS can handle by including a FILES= command in your CONFIG.SYS. The default is 8, so try overkill with an extra line in your boot-up disk's CONFIG.SYS file of FILES=20. Increasing the files in this way has a very small memory overhead of about 50 bytes per extra file, but this should not normally be a problem, particularly with your 896Kb X1.

#### SUPERCALC EPSON LINE SPACING

Q: Can I alter the line spacing with an Epson FX80 to get more than 66 lines per page - I was able to do this with Sharp MX80A and BASIC using CHR codes. [UPH 101]

A: The codes to use in the output to printer setup string might be to press ESC 0 [RET] which will give 8 lines per inch.