Apex 3 announced

Titan/Black Scorpion Software (BSS) have announced a new art package with the working title Apex 3. Apex Media developer Douglas Little explained the strange choice of name: "Apex was intended to be a range of BSS media-related products," he said. "Apex 2 was Apex Animator. Apex 3 will be Apex Paint or something similar. Apex 4 might be Apex Audio or Apex Animator Professional or whatever" - so now you know!

Apex 3 is a standalone paint package for the Falcon designed to compliment Apex Media. Its paint and image processing capabilities will far exceed the paint functions found in current versions of Apex Media, according to Black Scorpion's David Encill. As well as the usual tools found in a normal art program you will also find:

- Full 24 bit image editing.
- Extremely fast real-time operation.
- Real-time zoom to any level of detail.
- Anti-aliased (mip-mapped) real-time block operations.
- Alpha channel paste operations (8 bit masking).
- Real-time alpha-channel tools.
- Variable alpha on gradients and masks.
- Analogue chromakey range masking.
- Compound (multiple) filtering using a real-time brush.
- Quick and easy cloning of pages for backup/editing.

Apex 3 will run on any Falcon with 4Mb or more memory and will take full advantage of any hardware modifications available such as the BlowUp FX card, Afterburner040 and Black Scorpion's own hardware accelerator called Nemesis. Apex 3 is expected to retail at a price of £99.00 including VAT and carriage in the UK.

Afterburner040

Titan/Black Scorpion Software (BSS) are the UK distributors for the Afterburner040 accelerator. Doug Little revealed some interesting details on NeST recently.

"Afterburner can be fitted with one of two processors, either a 68040 (includes CPU, MMU and FPU) or a 68LC040 (CPU and MMU no FPU).

A standard Falcon fitted with an Afterburner operates at 16/32/64MHz depending on which area of the board you're talking about. In general, the middle value (i.e. 32MHz) is the actual effective clock rate of the processor.

The 68LC040 CPU is considerably cheaper, but incapable of hardware floating point (68881/68882) operations and it's not possible to fit a 68881/2 externally. If you use FPU software such as POV-Ray, Pheonix, NeoN and some CAD software you have to go for the full 68040. The LC version can perform software floating point operations but this means avoiding 68881/2 specific programs.

The 68040 with built-in FPU performs much better than an external 68881/2 device, but still requires software emulation to supplement the 68040 FPU (which isn't identical to a 68881/2). This emulation slows the 68040 FPU down a little, but it's still between three and a half to four times faster than a 16MHz 68882, the emulation software comes with the board. No such emulation is possible for the LC version of the chip.

Apart from the obvious processor benefits Afterburner includes with 2 SIMM sockets enabling up to 64Mb of 32 bit FastRAM to be fitted. The developers appear to claim 128Mb is possible, but the FastRAM is definitely addressed in two 32Mb banks which makes 128Mb an unlikely prospect. This FastRAM is very fast - 32 bit instead of 16 bit, and effectively 32MHz access instead of 16MHz access (not strictly true but near enough speedwise). Afterburner FastRAM is a minimum of four times faster than normal Falcon RAM - and up to 12 times faster during burst access.

Performance: Expect anything between five to ten times normal performance in general. There are exceptions (notably the lack of DSP acceleration) and specifically the lack of acceleration on the display. Screens have to be held in normal Falcon RAM so they cannot benefit from quick-access FastRAM although Nemesis makes a difference here by speeding up the bus. As for software such as compilers, GEM software, text editors and most of the software you'll want to use you're in for a real treat.

Fitting isn't easy. It involves the careful lifting of two of the 68030's pins and soldering of nine wires to various locations. The Afterburner itself is plug-in, but after the modifications you can't use the machine without it plugged in which makes the need for thorough testing important."

Nemesis

Titan/Black Scorpion Software (BSS) produce this accelerator. Again Doug Little via NeST revealed some interesting details. "Nemesis should be easy to fit (we reckon most people should be able to carry out the modification themselves) and it accelerates the bus and CPU to 24MHz and the DSP to 48MHz. Apex Media and Expos, users also benefit from this hardware modification especially during DSP operations. There's also an increase in Expos,'s capture rate. Figures of 25 frames a second at 256 by 160 are expected.

The idea is to allow the user to change to a higher system clock, without causing the machine to stop working. Nemesis offers these advantages:

- Speed
- Faster video bus - quicker graphics, bigger display
- Faster dot clock - bigger display and higher monitor refresh rates
- Afterburner uses the system clock (16/32/64MHz becomes 20/40/80MHz)

Performance: The system clock affects everything except the DSP (which Nemesis accelerates separately), so a jump from 16MHz to 20MHz produces a 25% boost across the board - including the display. A jump from 16MHz to 24MHz produces a 50% boost across the board!

Nemesis also allows large VGA Truecolor modes due to the higher bus bandwidth. 640x480 TrueColor VGA is definitely achievable - maybe more!

We're hoping most Falcon users monitors will be able to cope with a vertical refresh rate from 50Hz to 60Hz so they can run Apex 3 at 640x480, with a Nemesis board running at 48MHz (24MHz bus) - a demo program and a pre-release version of Apex 3 already takes advantage of this display."

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Nemesis is expected to cost between £30 and £50 - but this is still to confirmed. For more information contact:

Titan Designs Ltd, 6 Witherford Way, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4AX Tel: 0121-693 6669

Photoline Now Available

System Solutions reckon this is "a new killer application" for the Atari. It's a high-end image editor which offers powerful functions. The program is feature-packed, and supports both bitmap and vector graphics. Unlike Apex Media, Photoline uses GEM extensively to enable you to use the program on any Atari or TOS compatible machine. The enhanced GEM interface will also take advantage of any extra graphics modes available and is multitasking aware. We've had a sneak preview of Photoline and can report it looks and feels like a slightly cut-down version of PhotoShop, the industry standard high-end graphics programs, available for the Mac and PC. Our platform has needed a package like this for ages and it's great to see a software publisher producing software of this calibre. Here's just a few features of the program, some of the main ones are:-

- Bitmap functions include user definable paint-brush, clone, finger, erase, stamp, fill, gradient, etc.
- Change intensity of all paint functions.
- Vector tools include all the standards like straight-line, Bezier curves, move to front/back, etc.
- Work on as many images as memory allows.
- Drag and drop between image windows.
- Work in RGB, CMYK, greyscale, monochrome or vector on any monitor.
- Powerful cut/paste/copy tools which can work on the image or on the mask
- Add to or subtract from selections to make a new selection
- Magic-wand tool, including the tolerance and feathering * Using NVDI 3 (or greater) it's also possible to use vector font technology to add text to any image
- Loading formats include all the standards, inc. PhotoCD Pro, you can save to TIFF, JPEG, IMG, CVG and GEM formats.
- There are filters, special tools, rotation, scale, distortion, picture projection in 3D space.
- Print or plot to NVDI/GDOS printer/plotter drivers and it can use GDPS drivers to scan images directly into the program.

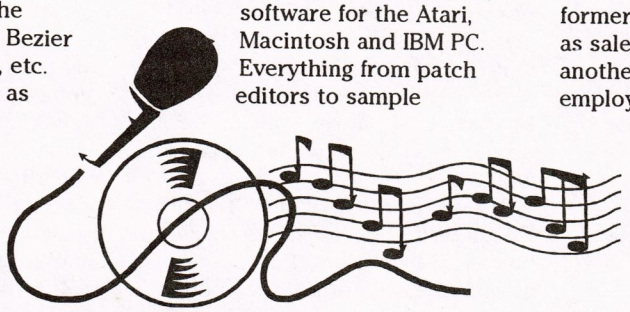
Photoline comes on 3 double-sided floppy disks, which include one disk for ST computers, one for TT's (and other machines with a minimum of 68030 CPU and FPU chips) and one containing a range of utility files. It includes a ring-bound 50 page manual. The program is available now from System Solutions for £169 including VAT - call them on 0181 693 3355.

Cubase CD-ROM finally available

After what seems a lengthy wait the Cubase CD-ROM from System Solutions is now available. A boon for musicians of any standing the CD-ROM includes 605 MBs of information, spread across 400 drum loops, 1200 samples, 400 MIDI files and shareware software. The CD-ROM is packed with useful files for any musician, but it's specially tailored to be the ultimate companion for Cubase - on any platform.

All the loops, samples and MIDI files are of professional quality, covering a vast range of musical styles and tastes. The loop and samples are available in the standard AIFF format, ideal for Cubase Audio and the MIDI files are all GM compatible. In addition there are mixer maps, device drivers and a whole host of other files.

The CD-ROM also contains utility software for the Atari, Macintosh and IBM PC. Everything from patch editors to sample librarians to audio calculators is included to make the Cubase musician's life easier. The Ultimate Cubase CD-ROM is available now from System Solutions (0181 693 3355) for £69.95 including VAT.



Power PD to close

James Matthews has closed Power PD to concentrate on his commercial company Top Byte Software. He claims this will give Top Byte more time to focus attention on the development and release of new commercial titles. "The Atari market needs another commercial supplier more than it needs another PD library" he said. "Top Byte is still 100% Atari and will be for a long time to come." If anyone is interested in taking over the full time running and ownership of Power PD they should send their offers to 3 Salisbury Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 2TY. Two new products will be released shortly. The first is called Computer History, a three disk product containing details of over 1,500 differentcomputers. You can search for a particular computer and find out when they were made, their specifications, their uses and their history, among other details. The information is accessed through a custom written shell and it will retail for £11.99. It requires 2 megabytes of memory. Kryptonite Data is the second. It is described as a cross between a shoot 'em up and a sci-fi flight simulator. You have to control a tank or plane and try to save fellow humans from kidnapping evil alien hordes. It's a 3D title and contains some of the fastest routines of this type ever seen on the ST (now where have we heard that before? - Ed). It will cost £19.99 and is available now.

New C-Lab offshoot

C-Lab Digital Media GmbH has announced that its Falcon range is now being marketed and sold in the UK and France through a new company formed especially for the task. Digital Media Ltd, is to be headed by John Sharp, previously with Digital Village, and Paul Wiffen, formerly with Digital Awareness, joins as sales director. Gilbert Tycl,, another ex-Digital Awareness employee, will handle the product in France. So what does all this mean for Atari users? Very little, we suspect, other than that existing users of the hardware will soon have access to a telephone hotline service from 9am until 12 noon. However, at the time of going to press the number hadn't been announced. The company claims it will be heavily promoting the new Falcon Mark X with a series of instore presentations and other events. However, most of the advertising and promotion is aimed at the music market and mainstream Atari owners have seen and heard very little from the company and its products since its launch. The Mark X Falcon has the standard Falcon innards (with a number of sound-oriented modifications) built into a PC-style tower case with a PC keyboard and Atari mouse. There is an optional SCSI bus and it can use 3.5 inch IDE hard drives or a SyQuest

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