

UTILITY FILE

If the early releases are any criterion 1987 looks set to be a bumper year for programming utilities. Ron Massey checks the early crop.

QKick Ultrasoft £34.95

A second entry into the U.K. market from the German software house Ultrasoft, *QKick* is a kind of background front-end and differs from similar utilities in that invoking *QKick* will suspend all other currently-running programs, both Basic and jobs, temporarily.

Exceptional in that it is written in Interrupt Seven, *QKick* is entirely menu-driven; invoking *QKick*, by pressing **<CTRL>&<SHIFT>**, initialises a menu bar at the top of the screen along with a window containing copyright and owner's registration information.

Command entries are generally made with **<SPACE>** and the cursor keys; the "opps" option is usually invoked with **<BSC>** or entering a null string pressing **<ENTER>**, with no other input.

Pressing **<SPACE>** initially highlights the left menu header, **DESK**, and gives access to the sub-menus for information concerning the immediate operating environment such as System, Memory, Channels and Clock. Other **DESK** options include:

A choice of *QKick* entry keys. Defaulting to **<ALT><SHIFT>**, other combinations include **<ALT><CTRL>** or

<CTRL><SHIFT>, if the default combination is being used with a program such as *Keydefine*.

Screen off time. Defaulting to a delay of 120 seconds, if no input is made at the keyboard for the set period of time the monitor display is disabled. Pressing any key will re-activate the screen. Options range in increments of 30 seconds from 30 seconds to 15 minutes.

CQueue char. The usual convention followed for switching between **QL**

altering these values determines the delay before a character will repeat and the latter value determines the repeat frequency rate. Setting both values to zero makes for very fast typing.

Selecting **FILES** invokes its sub-menu containing a list of options for a complete range of file controls:

Directory provides successive pages of files on either floppy or RAM disc.

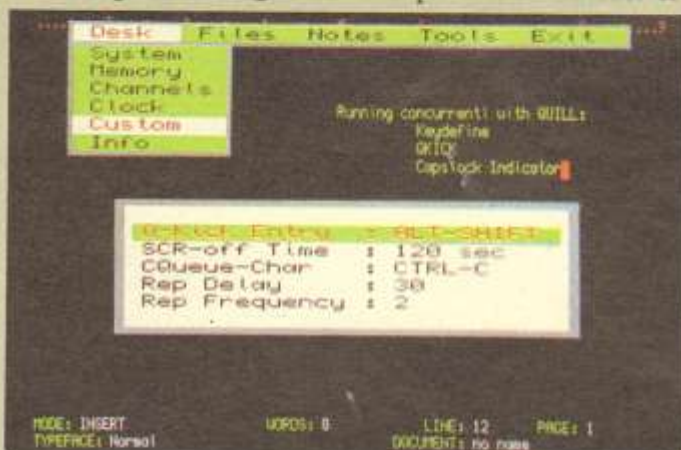
View — an option for copying a file to the screen.

File Info provides a directory from which a particular file is selected. Another window provides the statistics regarding type, length, dataspace and last update.

Copy, a selected file to a named drive.

Backup, a whole media from one drive to another.

Change will convert every occurrence of one string with another and provide a report of the number of



jobs and SuperBasic is by pressing **<CTRL>&<C>**. If for any reason other key combinations are required, characters from **chr\$(1) - <FDTRL> & <A> - to chr\$(255) - <ALT>** and any key other than **<CAPSLOCK>** or the cursor keys — may be selected as replacement keys.

Rep Delay and *Rep Freq*. Defaulting to a value of 30 and 2 respectively,

conversions at the completion of the option. **Delete** will delete selected files.

Format will format a selected floppy or RAM disc.

The **NOTES** menu header — a useful 800-character, two-page Notepad.

QKick Diary — entries are made against a time-scale starting at 0700 and

ending at 2200. Diary files may be saved as separate page files from within QKick and loaded subsequently into the page, as required. Calendar — in conventional calendar format, preceding and successive months may be paged. Hex and decimal converter.

The TOOLS main menu header provides a further indication of the real power of the QKick system. The options from the sub-menu enable you to Edit Memory, a File, or a Sector directly; the Job control option produces a further menu giving access to Job information, Job pointers and setting Job priorities.

More options from the TOOLS menu allow you to Load or Save Memory and to Save a screen directly. The latter facility is useful for producing screenshots of games or saving particular screen layouts for introduction into one of the graphic programs for modification.

Because of the exceptional nature of QKick coding, it is not possible to access Microdrives from within QKick. Another minor limitation is that <CTRL> <F5> — the QL listing pause — will produce a system re-set rather than cause the QL to hang.

One point which must be observed is that programs such as Quill, which have a tendency to grab every available bit of memory, will not leave sufficient working space for QKick. Whenever QKick is to be loaded prior to the main program, a RAM disc should be formatted. In the case of Quill, once running, users should enter <F3> <0> <F> <F> — for format — and RAMI_ — with or without sector.

Failing to observe this point can make the screen switch-off facility unreliable and could cause a keyboard lock-out. If that occurs, the last image you will have of your just-complete 20,000-word document will be just prior to its dissolving into a multi-coloured display.

Planned additions to the production version of QKick include an address and telephone number database with a software interface to the Psion Organiser; a background printer spooler and data string transfer to the current foreground program.

Although possibly a little on the expensive side, QKick is an extremely useful addition to any routine library and will not very easily be equalled.

Information

Product: QKick version 4.0

Price: £14.95

Product: Disktool

Price: £9.95

Supplier: Schon PCP,
Northcote Crescent, West
Horsley, Surrey KT24
6LX.

Tel: 04865 3836.

Emerging from a period of relative quiet in a manner not unlike the mythical Phoenix, Ultrasoft has released two new products — one of which will be reviewed in the near future — and added a number of features to an established product.

Making its first appearance two years ago, QKick is now in its version 4.0 release and is fully QRam-compatible.

QKick, used in much the same way as QRam, is a kind of background front-end and, once activated, suspends temporarily all other currently-running programs. Although some of the QKick and QRam functions are similar, for the most part they complement each other.

Activated with the default <ALT> <SHIFT> hotkey, QKick offers five main options from its GEM-type menu. Each option has a main pulldown sub-menu and, from left to right, you can select Desk, Files, Notes, Tools and Exit. Options are selected with the left-right cursor keys and <SPACE>. The call-up key can be re-defined by selecting DESK, moving the menu bar to CUSTOM and pressing <SPACE>.

Hotkey

In addition to the hotkeys, options on this sub-menu allow you to define the spool device — ser1 or par — and the QKick database sort order. Other CUSTOM options include: Hotkey definer, defaulting to <ALT> <SHIFT>; other combinations include <ALT> <CTRL> or <CTRL> <SHIFT>, if the default hotkey is being used with a program such as *Keydefine*; screen off time, defaulting to a delay of 150 seconds; if no keyboard input is made for the set period of time, screen display is disabled. Pressing any key will reactivate the screen. Range is

in increments of 30 seconds from 30 seconds to 15 minutes; CQueue char which alters the QL default <CTRL> <C> job switcher.

If for any reason other key combinations are required, characters from chr\$(1) — <CTRL> & <A> — to chr\$(255) — <ALT> and any key except <CAPSLOCK> or cursor keys — can be used; Repeat Delay and Repeat Frequency defaulting to a value of 30 and 2 respectively; the former value determines the delay before a character will repeat itself and the latter value determines the repeat frequency rate.

The FILES sub-menu accesses a complete range of file management controls for either floppy or RAM disc; Directory; View — an option for copying a file to the screen; File Info provides a directory from which a particular file is selected. The selected file is shown with its statistics regarding type, length, dataspace and last update; Copy; Back-up named files to a named device; Change will convert every occurrence of one string with another and provide a report of the number of conversions at the completion of the option; Rename; Delete will delete selected files; Start a job; Format will format a selected floppy or RAM disc.

The NOTES menu: An 800-character, two-page Notepad; Diary Calendar, in conventional calendar format, preceding and successive months may be paged; Database; Altkey definer; Calculator; Hex and decimal converter.

The TOOLS sub-menu allows you directly to Edit Memory, a File or a Sector; the Job Control option produces a further menu giving access to Job information, Job pointers

and setting Job priorities. Other options from the TOOLS menu allow you directly to Load or Save Memory, to Save a screen or to spool a file.

Disktool

Until now, the ceiling for formatting double-sided QL discs has been limited to a maximum of 80 tracks of nine sectors each, totalling 1,440 sectors.

The Ultrasoft *Disktool* system requires version 1.14 or newer of the QJump Pointer Interface and version 1.08 or newer of the Window Manager, both of which are supplied; or the complete QRam system, version 1.14 or later.

Using <ALT> <D> as its hotkey, Disktool functions are displayed in the familiar QRam format. Icons and menu bars may be selected by moving the cursor over them and pressing <SPACE>. All functions are available with equivalent keypresses except for a FORMAT and COPY DO command.

The *Disktool* range of functions falls into one of five broad categories — Disc Protection/De-protection, drive selection, formatting parameters, copy select and format select.

Previously, protecting data from unauthorised personnel has usually meant encrypting it. While this form of protection is undoubtedly effective, its one shortcoming is that encrypted code repeats itself and, even with three eight-character code words, an experienced hacker can eventually work out the encryption sequence used.

The Ultrasoft protection routine works in a completely different manner. First selecting PASSWORD, you can enter a four-character code which can be any QL printable character from chr\$(33) to chr\$(191). Clicking on PRO-

TECT — or pressing P — you are offered a chance to accept or abort the routine. Once accepting your defined code-word, the disc is made unreadable. Asking for a directory of a protected disc will yield only: PROTECTED 0/0 sectors

Unprotecting a disc is done by entering the same password, which is also case-dependent, and clicking on UNPROTECT — or pressing U. You are offered an ACCEPT/ABORT option as with protect. Failure to use the exact decoding password will render disc data permanently inaccessible.

The left-central group of icons is used to specify source and destination drives for copying. You can specify either copying to the same drive, from drive one to drive two or drive two to drive one.

Seven options are available for formatting discs — single or double-sided formatting, format the media in drive one or drive two, format at 80 or 84 tracks and the volume name.

In addition to being able to click on individual icons, you can also press <1> or <2>, to select the drive, <T>, to toggle between 80 and 84 tracks, <S> or <D> to format a disc, single or double-sided. The COPY and FORMAT menu bars must be selected.

Provided you have the appropriate QRam utilities available, Disktool can be put on EPROM and a version of the code for blowing on to an EPROM is included on the supplied disc.

Short and to the point, Disktool is one of those utilities which, when you have used it for a time, you begin to wonder how you fared without it. I have used successive versions of QKick regularly since its first release and find it indispensable.

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