

Although the manual does an adequate job of explaining the program, it doesn't have much depth. We think that users will occasionally want more explanation than that provided in the manual. There also is no master reference section that explains all the commands.

The table of contents is adequate, but the index is not detailed enough, making it sometimes difficult to find the answer to a question.

Another problem is that the manual is not very durable. In fact, the cover began to separate from the pages after repeated use. And its dimensions make it difficult to store with our other Mac manuals.

The biggest problem we had was figuring out how the tabs worked. Because Ready-Set-Go does not maintain tab formatting from imported files, you have to re-create tabs within Ready-Set-Go. The program includes a powerful and complicated tab formatting feature. Although Ready-Set-Go now comes with a separate four-page addendum entitled "Guide to Tabs," it does not lucidly explain how to use them. After grappling with the tabs and the documentation, we ended up calling the support line for help, where a spokesman for Letraset said the firm is working on a more thorough manual, including a more comprehensive discussion of the tab functions.

The manual includes a tutorial that is linked to files on the program disks. The tutorial covers the program's basics, as well as many of the product's special features. Although the tutorial gets the job done, we found that Pagemaker's tutorial, which also includes sample files on-disk, is better organized and thus easier to use.

Because there is no on-line help, you'll have to refer to the manual to answer incidental questions about the program.

The documentation is not as thorough or as well-done as Pagemaker's, but it is adequate, and we rate it satisfactory.

EASE OF LEARNING:

This new version of Ready-Set-Go is much more intuitive to learn than its predecessor, primarily because it follows Macintosh interface conventions much more closely than the earlier release.

On the left-hand side of the screen are toolboxes for controlling text and graphics. The navigational commands along the bottom of the screen show exactly where you are in a document, and they make it easy to move to other pages.

Those familiar with page layout and design will probably be able to learn the essentials of Ready-Set-Go within a few hours. Novices, though, will need to spend time learning the basics of the craft. The manual includes a chapter called "Layout Basics" that within a few pages gives an overview of the subject.

Ready-Set-Go is a snap to install. Because it is not copy-protected, all you have to do before using it is to make a backup floppy disk or copy the application onto a hard disk.

The program's intuitive design is somewhat offset by the lack of on-line help and the merely adequate documentation, but it's still helpful enough to earn a very good rating in ease of learning.

EASE OF USE:

Ready-Set-Go is basically intuitive and easy to use. First you create areas on pages containing the frames that will hold text or graphics; then you import previously created text or graphics files. Once these are in place, you can rearrange any element of a page, just as if you were using Mac Draw. You can also edit text with Ready-Set-Go's built-in text editor, which is handy.

Ready-Set-Go makes it easy to choose the columns into which you pour your text. You click on a link tool in the tool box, click once in the column where you want to start, and then click once in columns where the article will continue. It's a piece of cake. In Pagemaker, by contrast, you must proceed column by column.

As you become proficient using Ready-Set-Go, there are many keyboard command shortcuts that speed the process. These shortcuts follow standard Mac conventions, and there are several unique command keys as well. It's too bad that there isn't a keyboard command for moving to succeeding pages.

Although Ready-Set-Go essentially follows standard Macintosh interface conventions, there are some exceptions that slow the program down and sometimes cause unexpected results. For instance, clicking in the gray area of a scroll bar normally advances the window by a screenful. But Ready-Set-Go jumps ahead too far, and you have to scroll back to see what just zoomed by you.

Another departure from Macintosh text editing conventions is that when you double-click to select a word, Ready-Set-Go does not automatically select the space following the word. This creates confusion when you switch between Ready-Set-Go and your normal word processor. And, although Ready-Set-Go takes advantage of the Macintosh Plus keyboard, pressing the up-arrow key moves the cursor to the beginning of the

With Ready-Set-Go, the size of a document is limited only by available memory.

previous line rather than just straight up. Likewise, the down-arrow key takes the cursor to the beginning of the next line rather than straight down. Remember that these idiosyncrasies are more annoyances than major flaws. But we hope that the next release will mop these up.

We thought we had found a problem with Ready-Set-Go's Paste command when we tried to paste to another location and nothing seemed to happen. We later discovered that, when working with the clipboard at the object level, Ready-Set-Go pastes the copy right on top of the original, regardless of where the cursor is. You are required to then grab the copy and drag it to the new location. This is supposed to be useful for situations in which you don't want the coordinates to change, especially when duplicating entire pages. We couldn't quite get the hang of it, but fortunately when you're working with the text editor functions, the program follows the normal Mac conventions for cutting and pasting.

Many of the new features also add a good deal to ease of use. The powerful new tab functions, once you've puzzled them out, are one example; the automatic hyphenation means you don't have to insert your own discretionary hyphens; the spelling checker, glossary, search and replace, and other enhanced word processing features make it a lot easier to make changes to imported text.

Meanwhile, the exceptions to Macintosh conventions become less important

as you become familiar with the program, and we grew quite accustomed to and comfortable with the product. Despite its shortcomings in some areas, we rate ease of use as very good. We actually find it more useable than Pagemaker 1.2.

ERROR HANDLING:

Ready-Set-Go shields a user from accidentally deleting a document. And, unlike its earlier version, the latest release has an Undo command that works, although it still does not reverse all possible actions.

The trade-off you make for having such a speedy program is that your entire document is stored in memory. One power failure and you've lost your document, unless you save it often. We think this is a fair trade-off.

None of the many small bugs mentioned in the performance section are fatal; we never lost data due to them or any other design flaws. The program does a satisfactory job of handling user and system errors; we rate error handling satisfactory.

SUPPORT:

As this review was going into print, marketing for Ready-Set-Go was being moved from Manhattan Graphics to Letraset. The support we describe here is that provided by Manhattan Graphics; remember that some details could change under Letraset.

Users with questions can call Manhattan Graphics toll free for unlimited support. Support is now available from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time. We occasionally had to wait several hours for a return call from a technical support person, but when we spoke with him, he was patient and helpful in answering our questions. We tested his expertise by asking several difficult questions, and were pleased to receive good, accurate answers.

Customer support has been buttressed by a quarterly newsletter called *Pages*, sent free to registered users. The issue we received includes tips, a guide to high-resolution scanning, and a Q&A column.

The vendor will replace defective disks for 90 days, but there is no warranty about the program's performance. Owners of the earlier version are able to upgrade to Version 3.0 for \$70.

The phone support we received was better than average. We also appreciated the toll-free line. As a result, we rate support at this time as very good.

VALUE:

Ready-Set-Go is the best value of any desktop publishing application now available — as long as you can live with the program's many niggling quirks. The program has more features — including kerning, automatic hyphenation, and text flowing — and is faster than the current version of Pagemaker.

As icing on the cake, until February 15 Ready-Set-Go costs \$295 — which is \$200 less than Pagemaker. (The price then rises to \$395.) If the vendor fixes all of Ready-Set-Go's minor problems, then it should easily hold its own against both the price rise and the impending Pagemaker upgrade, slated for a March shipping date.

In the arena of desktop publishing programs, this heavyweight packs a knockout punch. Because of its speedy performance, its advanced features, and the lean price, we rate Ready-Set-Go 3.0 as a very good value.

Keith Thompson is the editor of two microcomputer newsletters for small businesses and the author of *The Macintosh Office*.

Word Perfect, Version 4.2

Heavy-Hitting Market Leader Improves a Bit With Update

By John Lombardi, Review Board

In a hotly contested market, Word Perfect has emerged as one of the leading high-end professional word processing programs. The program was already reasonably quick, extremely powerful, and absolutely loaded with features, and the latest version (4.2) represents another minor, but nonetheless useful, upgrade. (See "Word Perfect Version 4.1: the Best Improved," November 4, 1985.)

Word Perfect competes in the major leagues, where the likes of Microsoft Word, Office Writer, Multimate, and Wordstar 2000 are the heavy hitters. Together these programs include nearly every imaginable feature, but what sets them apart is their user interface — and this is where Word Perfect differs most dramatically. For such a powerful program, Word Perfect offers a surprisingly sparse user interface.

Although expensive (\$495), Word Perfect remains a good buy because its blend of power and ease of use keeps it at the top of its class.

FEATURES:

Document oriented, Word Perfect sees its text as a continuous stream of words, sentences, and paragraphs that moves through our screen with minimal attention to page breaks. Word Perfect presents a stripped-down screen at the bottom of which is a single status line that shows only essential information about page, line, and column, and a few other status markers.

As you write, no formatting codes complicate the screen display, no menus appear unbidden to disrupt the writer's flow. Yet this deceptively simple user interface hides a complete help system, only a keystroke away, that will present screens of information about the program's commands.

This approach differs from page-oriented programs like Multimate, which force the writer to pay close attention to the process of ending and starting pages, and from menu-driven programs like Displaywrite 3.

Word Perfect's feature list is awesome. This program edits files of any length (limited only by disk size and speed), and it contains a complete set of basic editing commands for insertion, deletion, and cursor and text movement. The program finds and replaces forward and backward using wild-card search criteria.

On-screen formatting includes boldface, underlining, centering, and several different styles of indenting. The program handles decimal tabs, regular tabs, multiple margins in a document, and continuous automatic reformatting. You can easily add special printer control codes anywhere in the text. In addition, Word Perfect supports up to 24 columns, newspaper-style, that can be shown and edited parallel on the screen, or in sequence, column by column.

In addition to these standard capabilities, Word Perfect offers additional features. The program has an extensive document management facility that lets



Word Perfect, Version 4.2, can display multiple columns — up to 24 across at once. The sparse user interface consists of a single status line at the bottom of the screen.

you locate, save, insert, copy, append, view, search, or delete text files.

New in Version 4.2 is document annotation, popular in corporate word processors. One attaches a nonprinting document history to the file that you can view from the directory management screen. Another lets you insert short nonprinting comments throughout a file that you can display or suppress.

Word Perfect has an excellent mail-merge function that allows you to make sophisticated selections from lists in order to generate special-purpose letters. It also has powerful sorting and math functions, permitting column and row math. Its sorting capabilities are superior, letting you sort lines or paragraphs with multiple keys defined in many ways.

Like other high-end programs, Word Perfect generates automatic footnotes either at the bottom of the page or gathered together at the end of the document. It handles paragraph numbering, indexing, table of contents generation, and section numbers. New in Version 4.2 is a concordance feature, which lets you create a list of key words you can include in an index.

The program includes strikeout and Redline capability, both of which will be popular with the legal crowd. And Version 4.2 now lets you generate a table of authorities, a standard formula lawyers use to list references. It can also print line numbers for all or just a part of a document, although the numbers do not display on screen.

Word Perfect's dictionary and speller are on a par with those of its competitors, and its thesaurus is reasonably good. Although both the dictionary and thesaurus have been improved in Version 4.2, and although Word Perfect now performs automatic hyphenation, the program does hyphenation by rule rather than by the more accurate dictionary lookup method used in Office Writer 5.0.

We could fill pages from here to Oxnard listing Version 4.2's features, but the point is this: Word Perfect has more features than nearly any other word processing program.

PERFORMANCE:

Performance in a word processing program is a complex combination of speed, power, and accessibility. For raw speed, Word Perfect is a relatively modest performer compared to word processors like XyWrite and PC-Write. While the cursor moves around the screen with agility, the program spools long files to disk and thus experiences appreciable

delays when moving long distances in files, or when editing multiple columns displayed side by side on the screen.

The Word Perfect speller is one of the best, its capabilities exceeding those of even a fine performer like Office Writer. You can check one page of the document at a time, or the whole document (but only from the beginning).

The facilities for marking, deleting, moving, adding, saving, and otherwise manipulating blocks of text are comprehensive and work well. Though the block commands are quick and effective, Word Perfect does not leave the block active after a move or copy, a minor drawback.

The program also lets you insert standard ASCII text files in several formats. New in Version 4.2 is an option that lets you remove hard carriage returns from ASCII files you are importing, a useful tool that works quite well.

Word processing programs use special codes to indicate changes in such document characteristics as margins, tabs, boldface, indents, or underlining. Word Perfect has a Reveal Codes feature that splits the screen horizontally, showing normal text above and the text plus codes that control special features in the screen below. A wonderful diagnostic tool for understanding complex document formatting, the Reveal Codes system gives access to a visible representation of special codes and a clean, uncluttered editing and writing screen. Even better, you can use the search feature to find and replace the codes.

Word Perfect is famed for its host of special printer drivers, and the ones we tested (Diablo 630, HP Laserjet Plus) worked well. However, users of the HP Laserjet and other proportionally spaced printers will soon discover that considerable effort and tinkering are required to get Version 4.2 to produce what you want on the Laserjet with proportional spacing. The problem seems to arise because Word Perfect measures by characters rather than by inches, and it is difficult to tell the results when the program measures by characters.

Version 4.2 also includes improved printing features. You can now print just sections of a document. Especially helpful is the new preview feature, which writes an exact image of the print file to the screen so that you can check for correct placement of page numbers, headers, footers, footnotes, and the like before sending the document to the printer. The preview feature will show you justification, but you won't see proportional spacing (because of limita-

tions in the display hardware).

In general, Word Perfect is a fine performer enhanced by graceful editing style, an outstanding set of features, a first-rate spelling checker and good thesaurus, and a smooth integration of text management tools. As an all-around package, Word Perfect 4.2 remains every bit as good as the very best in its class. Once again, Word Perfect earns an excellent rating in performance.

DOCUMENTATION:

Word Perfect's documentation includes a hefty manual in a three-ring binder. The manual is elegantly printed, well-organized, and relatively easy to use. The main sections — "Getting Started," "Learning," and "Reference" — include material for a disk-based tutorial, useful information about starting the program, and a command-by-command description of features and how to use them.

Another section describes the speller and thesaurus, the mail-merge commands, the math capabilities, and other special features like columns, paragraph numbering, footnotes/endnotes, and keyboard macros.

The manual follows a consistent style, provides good examples, and offers substantial explanations. The index is good, and it's easy to find things.

The on-line help is top drawer stuff, and we haven't seen another system that's better. It stands out for several reasons. First, it's context sensitive. Second, once you're in the help, you can go to any other part of it easily. Third, it is complete, and nine times out of 10 you won't need to refer to the manual.

Included with Version 4.2 is a booklet that defines printer drivers. It also explains how to use the special printer program included with Word Perfect. This program lets you adapt printers and special character sets to the system. This manual, or at least a previous incarnation, was included as a disk file in Version 4.1, and the printed booklet is a significant improvement.

A very useful help program on-disk describes each printer driver's capabilities. It is better, for example, than the similar documentation provided by Microsoft Word and Office Writer.

Finally, there is a set of updated pages for the changes in Version 4.2 to be added into the main manual and a special pamphlet that helps with installation and troubleshooting.

Thorough, well-done, complete, and consistent — and including some of the best on-line help available anywhere — Word Perfect 4.2's documentation improves in its rating to excellent.

EASE OF LEARNING:

No program as powerful and complex as Word Perfect is easy to master. Word Perfect helps the user learn, but complete command of the program takes time.

Word Perfect offers several tracks to learning the program. There is a substantial on-line tutorial that walks the user through most of the program's major features. (Be aware, though, that this works only on full compatibles.)

The manual and pamphlets have examples and lesson files that illustrate many of the program's complex features. These work well, and users who work with these learning materials systematically can get up to speed quickly.

One of the program's strengths is that you can use it with only a perfunctory introduction. Beginners who know how to type take to Word Perfect like ducks to water; you throw them in and they swim. Several things make this possible. First is the straightforward screen design; second

is the superior on-line help. This system neither intimidates nor intrudes, it is simply there. Strangely enough, beginners with no preconceptions seem to find it easier than those familiar with some of the more advanced competitors.

The learning curve we've observed after training a number of computer novices indicates that this program is quite easy to learn, especially for novices, which is remarkable for a program of this power. Compared to Displaywrite 3 or even the quite easy to learn Office Writer, Word Perfect can be very easy to learn. We rate ease of learning as very good.

EASE OF USE:

Many of the features that make this program easy to learn also make it easy to use, especially the on-line help. Users need have only a good conceptual knowledge of what indenting is, how sorting works; and what is meant by margins and tabs, for example, to use these features. Memorization is kept to a minimum. There are few menus to slow down the experienced user.

Word Perfect also has specialized subsets of standard functions that make the program easier to use. For example, it has a two-sided indent that provides a hanging indent from the left and right margin at a keystroke, useful for things like lengthy quotations. You can get this with other word processing programs, but in Word Perfect it is very easy.

Not only are there commands for deleting the word at the cursor but you can also delete from the cursor to the end of the next word, either left or right. You can delete in a command to the end of

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REPORT CARD

SOFTWARE
WORD PERFECT
VERSION 4.2

	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
9.2					
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

Word Perfect 4.2 is strong on features and flexibility. It can do just about anything to manage text and produce professional documents and correspondence. *Pros:* Power and flexibility combined with ease of use and strong support, top-notch on-line help, and money-back guarantee. *Cons:* Slow at some operations on 8088-based PCs, sensitive to some memory-resident utilities, and considerable complexity.

PRODUCT DETAILS

List price, \$495. Version tested (4.2) available for IBM PCs, XT's, AT's, and compatibles. Requires 256K of RAM, two 360K floppy disk drives, and MS-DOS or PC-DOS 2.0 or later. Hard disk drive recommended. Monochrome or color monitor. Word Perfect Corp., 288 W. Center St., Orem, UT 84057; (801) 225-5000.

line and to the end of page.

The program lets you edit two documents at one time, and you can split the screen horizontally into two parts to view both documents. However, this split screen cannot hold different parts of the same document.

The program offers several ways of importing and exporting text. You can save or retrieve blocks, and you can import or export ASCII files in several ways. Word Perfect also has a system for importing and exporting Word Perfect files from earlier versions of the program as well as a generic word processing format that removes all codes but preserves the form of the document. You can save data in a locked format that requires a password and that stores the file in an encrypted form.

A separate utility included with the program converts word processing and mail-merge files from Wordstar, Multimate, Navy DIF (spreadsheet), and both IBM formats (Final Form Text and Revisable Form Text).

Because everything except the specialized document conversions and the modification of printer drivers is accessible from the editing screen, Word Perfect presents an effective working environment. The file management utilities are

easy and useful, the printer selection and management is flexible and comprehensive, and its capability to adapt to the user's style of work is remarkable.

A number of minor enhancements in Version 4.2 improve the operation of several features. Tabs are more flexible, search and replace can be extended to include footnotes and other attached parts of the document, file names can be easily edited on the various command lines, and the options for printing a document have been expanded.

All these characteristics make Word Perfect easy to use and, combined with its style and power, account for much of its popularity, and again earn Word Perfect an excellent score in ease of use.

ERROR HANDLING:

Most errors are easily trapped and recovered in Word Perfect. Simple hardware errors such as an open drive door or printer not connected or turned off are all trapped with no problem or damage.

The program will back up your files automatically at a set interval, extra insurance against a system crash. When you save text, a backup of the original file is automatically created; this ensures that you'll have at least two versions of the document on disk.

We've found Word Perfect relatively sensitive to memory-resident utilities, and have been able to hang or crash it if some versions of Sidekick or Ready are not handled carefully.

The Undelete command in Word Perfect is as good as any in the business. There are three levels of Undelete that can recover the last three deletions. In addition, when you delete using the Cut Block command, the deleted block is saved until the next cut, so you can restore that block.

Although the program is a bit too sensitive to memory-resident utilities, this is offset by its excellent error recovery and deletion handling, and its many options for backing up files. We rate error handling as very good.

SUPPORT:

Among programs in this category, Word Perfect's support is above average. You can reach technical support via a toll-free line from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mountain time. We received correct and helpful answers to our questions, though the technician we talked to was not entirely familiar with the product. But she didn't hesitate to seek out answers from more knowledgeable coworkers.

Registered users of Version 4.1 can

update for \$35. Those who own earlier versions will have to pay \$60 to get the new version.

The vendor will replace defective disks for free for 90 days. In addition, the product comes with the following guarantee: If a user is dissatisfied, Word Refund Corp. will, at its option, either refund the purchase price or replace Word Perfect with a competing program.

Word Perfect Corp. has earned a deserved reputation for responsiveness. The good toll-free telephone support we received (and its long hours), reasonable update policy, and the bold warranty of performance handily earn Word Perfect an excellent in support.

VALUE:

The update to Word Perfect 4.2, while relatively minor, is a useful improvement to a first-rate product. The program's great power and flexibility, its great range of features, its relative ease of learning, and excellent ease of use show why this program is the one to beat. Even at \$495, a price on par with its competition, the program is a very good value.

John Lombardi is a professor of history and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.

Squish

File Compressor Crams Data Into Smaller Space, but Slowly

By John Walkenbach Review Board

If you're like many people, those once limitless 20 megabytes of storage space on your hard disk are rapidly dwindling as your files grow and you add new programs. An inexpensive way to regain some of that disk space is to compress your files.

Compressing data files not only reduces disk space needed to store the files, but it can also reduce telephone charges when the files are telecommunicated. A typical file compression program reads the original file, applies its compression algorithm, and then writes the compressed file back to disk. When the file is needed by a program, the reverse procedure is performed to expand the file.

Sundog Software's Squish attempts to make file compression easier. It allows applications to work directly with compressed files. While Turner Hall's SQZ program (see "Spreadsheet Users Find Extra Space With Squeeze," September 8, 1986) works only with 1-2-3, Squish is not limited to a specific file type and thus works with a whole range of programs.

The trade-off for its wider range of file squeezing is that Squish, while it performs its function fairly well, only halved our text test files, while SQZ can cram spreadsheet files into as little as 5 percent of their original volume. Squish is also more difficult to learn and deposits quite a few additional files on your hard disk.

And finally, while SQZ actually speeds up disk access, Squish slows down disk access so that saving and retrieving files takes a lot longer. Because of this performance overhead, you'll want to be picky about when you use Squish.

FEATURES:

The RAM-resident part of Squish uses from 40K to 64K and intercepts all DOS disk read and write calls. When a program accesses a disk, Squish looks for

a translation file in the current directory. If it finds one, Squish will apply its compression (or expansion) algorithm to the data. (See related story, page 56.)

In addition to its RAM-resident code, Squish has a menu-driven program that's used to compress existing files, change the program's defaults, and perform other tasks associated with maintaining your Squish system.

Squish also lets you import files that were compressed on other Squish systems. This step is necessary because of Squish's methods of ensuring file integrity: When Squish creates a new translation file, the master control file (and backup) is updated with the appropriate data. The translation file name and Squish serial number are also embedded in all squished files, thereby creating a foolproof method to ensure that a file always uses the proper translation file.

Squish can be used only for data files and will not work with program files. (You get an error message if you try to compress a file with a COM, EXE, or BAT extension.)

If you issue the DOS Type command with a compressed file, Squish will unsquish the file before it's sent to the screen so you'll be able to read the text. Similarly, you can quickly unsquish a file by copying it to a directory that doesn't have a Squish file control list. Finally, you also get a simple security system by using Squish, since compressed files are not legible without their corresponding translation file.

PERFORMANCE:

Squish indeed compresses files, doing better with some types than with others. Generally, it compresses database and text files more so than files that are larded with extended ASCII characters (such as spreadsheet files).

To see how Squish's performance compares with that of other file compression products, we conducted several tests. First, we compared Squish with SQZ on a 1-2-3 worksheet file. SQZ reduced our 94K file to 17K (18 percent of its original size), but Squish could do no better than 58K (62 percent of its original size). We also compressed the same 1-2-3 file with Arc, a batch-oriented public domain compression and archive program. Arc did a little better than Squish, reducing our test file to 55K.

According to the manual, Squish's best performance is with database files—especially those with many fill characters in the unused portions of the fields, a common waster of disk space. Indeed, we squished a 384K database file to 166K, or 43 percent of its original size. (SQZ, of course, doesn't squeeze database files.)

There is no free lunch, however, and the space savings you get from Squish come at the expense of speed. There is a noticeable delay when you access a squished file. We attempted to quantify this by timing a disk-intensive database sort and index procedure, with and without squished files. For our tests we used an 8088 IBM PC with a 20-mega-

byte hard disk.

The results were dramatic. The sort/index process took 9 minutes and 35 seconds with normal files, and 20 minutes and 8 seconds using files compressed by Squish. Thinking this may have been a fluke, we also conducted a test with a 225K Word Perfect 3.0 document file. Uncompressed, the file loaded in 31 seconds. Squish compressed it to 64 percent of its original size, but it then took 1 minute and 42 seconds to load—more than three times as long.

The manual doesn't mention any time increases, but our tests indicate that this is a significant and potentially serious factor. Slower disk access is an important trade-off, one that potential Squish users should know about.

Another consideration is that the files in the Squish directory occupy about 470K on your hard disk. You can delete some of these, but most are required. When you also consider the disk space needed for the translation files and control files, the efficiency of Squish may be questionable in some situations. Regarding compatibility, the manufacturer claims that Squish will work with all products that use the normal DOS

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REPORT CARD

SOFTWARE
SQUISH

	Unacceptable	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
5.5					
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

Squish is a RAM-resident program that compresses most data files about in half. It is not copy-protected. *Pros:* Compatible with most programs, good safety measures, can work in background during disk saves and retrievals, well-documented. *Cons:* Significantly slows disk access in background mode, difficult to learn.

PRODUCT DETAILS

List price, \$79. Version tested (1.0) available for the IBM PC, PC XT, PC AT, and compatibles. Requires 256K of RAM, DOS 2.0 or later, and either a hard disk or two floppy disk drives. Sundog Software Corp., 264 Court St., Brooklyn, NY 11231; (718) 855-9141.