Lotus leads word processing revolution


By John Lombardi, Review Board

And the best goes on. Big, powerful, fancy, elegant, flexible, and complex, microcomputer word processing continues to push the limits of standard hardware and to test the brain power of users. Lotus' Ami Pro, Version 2.0 challenges Microsoft Word for Windows with a new version that has an impressive collection of capabilities and flexibilities. The price of these new features is complexity and sometimes confusion. You can do almost anything you can imagine with this program, but you'll need lots of time to explore its many features and options. This review is based on criteria from our last comparison of professional word processors (January 7, page 69).

Features

Ami Pro 2.0 takes graphical word processing to a new level of power and flexibility. It has all of the standard word processing capabilities, and it offers an endless series of special features and provides an inescapable supply of views, preferences, editing styles, and uncustomizing options. Although Ami Pro has invented nothing particularly new or different for word processing or Windows programs, it has almost everything in a Windows package. Ami Pro can do almost everything quickly, sometimes easily, but always with multiple options.

Performance

Word editing: Basic editing with Ami Pro isn't anything but basic. You can have multiple columns of differing widths and different gutter sizes, and you can have them balanced or unbalanced. If you want paragraphs to carry different justification and formatting, you need only to apply one of the many predefined paragraph styles or create your own variants. Search and replace will handle wild cards, keep caps, or change them as you like. Unfortunately, Ami Pro will not underline the space created by tabs, although it will underline manually inserted spaces. Ami Pro has time and date stamping in various formats and will handle the revision marking of redlining and strikethroughs. Tabs include left, right, center, and decimal versions, and you can use tabbed columns if you don't want to bother with a table. Hyphenation options include setting the hot zone and the use of manually inserted hyphenation points. You can have several open documents in up to nine different windows, all editable, and you can have the same document open in two windows. Last, you think this program is perfect, Ami Pro still lacks an area cut and paste. With the completion of capabilities, we rate basic editing very good.

Proofing tools: Ami Pro 2.0's proofing tools include the usual thesaurus and spelling checker. The thesaurus contains synonyms, parts of speech, and definitions. You can get foreign language dictionaries for an extra $50 each. If you enter a correction, the spell checker corrects the correction also. Replacing main menus capitalization and punctuation. You can send in your registration card and receive a copy of Grammatic for Just the shipping and handling charges. If you install Grammatic, it will appear in your pull-down menus and run directly from Ami Pro. We rate proofing tools excellent.

Mail merge: Mail merge in Ami Pro 2.0 has variables, comparison operators, and access to the powerful macro language. You can do labels easily, and the program stops bad records without a hitch. In addition, Ami Pro produces lists, and it handles form letters. The program automatically formats the finished form letter according to the applied paragraph style. Mail merge will accept data files from common database formats. You can include graphics in merged documents, tabs, and other Ami objects. We rate mail merge very good.

Layout: As you might expect, Ami Pro 2.0 supports an endless series of layout options and tools. All information about the document's layout and format is saved with the document. You may, however, extract the layout information into a separate style and save it with included content. Graphic capabilities include everything you would expect from a strong graphics utility. You can import most known graphic formats. You can scale and crop, rotate, and reverse. Fit into a frame or maintain aspect ratio, adjust gray scale, edit, add text, draw lines, fill shapes, and do free-form drawing.

You can edit in a variety of modes that display the text large or small, one page per screen, using Strike through fonts. There is a facing-page display that is unadorned. The screen can be customized to show margins, including boundaries, show returns and paragraph marks, display icons, and show rulers. Formula editing takes place in a special window.
where a sequence of icons offers symbols, shapes, or other elements for complex, mathematical or scientific formulas. Funi and margins allow multiple, indented al- uminum, visible, and invisible elements. The program supports frames, which are spaced boxes treated as single documents, within a document. Frames are powerful layout tools for Ami Pro and permit an endless variety of special effects. They can contain documents of various styles and positions, and results with rounded or sharp corners.

REPORT CARD

INFO

WORLD

OFFICE PROFESSIONAL WOS PROCESSOR

Ami Pro

LESSON 1.2

Criteria (Weighting) Score

Basic editing (80) Very Good

Proofreading tools (80) Excellent

Memory (20) Very Good

Layout (30) Excellent

Style sheets (50) Excellent

Font/printer support (30) Excellent

Reference wps (20) Excellent

Import/Export (20) Very Good

Networking (30) Very Good

Speed (50) Very Good

Mazes (30) Excellent

Documentation (30) Good

Ease of learning (30) Good

Ease of use (120) Excellent

Error handling (40) Good

Support policies (20) Very Good

Technical support (20) Satisfactory

Value (20) Excellent

Final score: 8.4

PRODUCT SUMMARY

Company: Lotus Development Corp.
Word Processing Division, 6000 Iden- tify Drive, Atlanta, GA 30329-0184. (404) 234-2227, (404) 234-8507.
List price: 1,499.
Required: 386 or compatibile (88 recommended), with 1 megabyte of RAM (2 megabytes recommended), DOS 3.3 or higher, Windows 3.0, 8 me-abytes of disk space, EGA or better video recommended.
Pros: Superior macros, fonts, dialogues, outline, indexing, merging, hard copy, supports most complex document-processing tasks. Cons: No cross-references in text, handles only single indexes or thesauruses; can’t do tables of authenticity of cut, paste, delete rectangle or column text, macro documentation costs extra, requires large disk space, lots of memory, operates slowly on low-end hardware. Summary: Ami Pro 2.0 offers the price in Windows word processing. For users who require new improved or simpler formatting requirements, Ami Pro 2.0 is now the program to beat.

We rate layout excellent.

Style sheets in Ami Pro also has a superb set of style sheet tools. You can specify an extensive style library supplied with the program that includes default text, page, and column styles. You can add your own, or modify a style. You can change text styles from the formatting of an existing document, or you can create a completely new style. Ami applies style to paragraphs, and special style features handle table layout requirements for columns and pages. We rate style sheets excellent.

Font and printer support excellent. Font and whatever the printer can deliver, and with the included Adobe Type Manager screen fonts reproduce exactly what you see on the printed page. Ami Pro 2.0 handles all fonts and printer support available under Windows 3.0. Ami Pro 2.0 has excellent printer and font performance.

Reference wps Ami Pro’s reference tools include sophisticated outlining. Based on paragraph styles, in addition to a large number of numbered options. You can collapse or expand outlines. Footnotes numbering is updated when deleting or adding footnotes. However, Ami Pro does not permit both footnotes and endnotes in the same document. However, you can enter notes or annotations that will carry the initials of the user making the note. These notes also can be printed with the rest of the document.

The table of contents feature permits several levels and will work across multiple files for one document. Easily, the index can include cross references and will work with multi-volume documents. However, you can only have one table of contents and one index per document. We rate reference tools excellent.

Import/Export tools: Import and export includes almost every known word processing and graphic file format provided with its own filter. We didn’t test each filter, but we did test printing an imported WordPerfect file. This may have been due to AIT or something in the file. You can import and export most file formats and graphics formats.

Ami Pro 2.0 supports both DDE and OLE linking mechanisms for complex linking of applications. With this, you can import the results of activities in another program, such as a spreadsheet, and expect them to be updated when the underlying spreadsheet changes. We rate import/export very good.

Formatting Ami Pro’s formatting options allow a second user to read an open file. You can open and edit the first user’s original version, but you can save your changes in a separate file. Spelling dictionaries and style sheets can be saved in the user’s home directory in AMI. Ami Pro includes OLLE and DDE linking. Lotus Notes and cc:Mail. We rate formatting very good.

Speed: Ami Pro performed well in our benchmark tests and compared favorably with Word for Windows. In its overall operation, Ami may feel a bit sluggish. However, the amount of free space on your hard drive may affect how quickly Ami Pro responds. We rate speed very good.

Mazes: A distinguishing characteristic of this generation of word processing programs comes from the complex language included. Word for Windows, for example, has full programming language as part of their maze facility. Ami Pro’s maze or-

simple things, such as record keystrokes and play them back, but they can perform complex operations to provide automatic editing and document control. The result can be a sophisticated data base management capability. Beyond a superb macro programming language, Ami Pro 2.0 has a drawing editor that creates custom dialog boxes that run within Ami and can be used to create menus, buttons, selections, and branch decisions. We rate macros excellent.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation comes in a large user manual with explanations of the program’s features arranged by category with a complete index. The documentation also includes booklets for installation, the Adobe Type Manager; style sheets, and a tutorial. There is extensive on-line help; although not always present in the document. There is also a quick-reference card. The macro programming language and the dialog box editor have no printed documentation, but there is complete on-line documentation and help. You can get the printed version of the macro manual by filling out an order form that comes with the macro documentation and help. We rate documentation good.

EASE OF LEARNING

Ami Pro is no picnic to learn. A novice can easily produce a solid, clean document from the installed version of the program without any involvement with the program’s features. It comes with a simple interface, some elementary foramen into Ami menus, options, and alternatives can make your word processing neophyte lost. Expert users will need to study some of the implementa- tion of complex features to be able to understand how to use them for the first time. The tutorial and documentation help make the product accessible enough so, it’s tough going among the most elementary to encounter. Ami Pro has an array of menus that can be selected, which make the menu disappear just when you might want to select another one. We rate ease of learning good.

EASE OF USE

If Ami Pro 2.0 is a chore to learn, it’s a breeze to use. That is partly because you can invent many special icons for frequently used processes and actions, eliminating the use of menu sequences. Ami Pro also has a button bar at the bottom of your window that allows you to change attributes such as font, size, and style. The program supports full screen customization options and user-modifiable func-
tions lets you tailor a version of Ami Pro to your own special preferences. The macro facility contributes substantially to this efficiency. The more complex and repeti-
tion, the more valuable Ami Pro’s features become. We rate ease of use excellent.

ERROR HANDLING

Ami Pro handles errors with aplomb. It has a lot of error messages, which can save you time. However, some are confusing and some are not very useful. It’s relatively difficult to lose data. There is a multiple-level undo available. You can select whether it will undo from one to four actions at any time. However, if you have auto save, the undo works only until the next save operation, when the undo is erased. If you fail to name the backup directory differently from your document directory, Ami will rename your save backup file on top of your original file, thus erasing it. We rate error handling good.

SUPPORT

Support policies: Lotus’ word processing division offers free, but not toll-free, unlimited technical support from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday. In addition, there is BBS support via Compuserve, fax support, and computer support via the Internet. Lotus technical support is overloaded with calls, and the wait is made longer by irritating messages that interrupt the music. When you get through, the help is effective and well informed. We rate technical support satisfactory.

VALUE

Ami Pro 2.0 is head and shoulders above the competition, although other vendors are progressing rapidly with their new offerings. Ami Pro 2.0 is one of the leading word processing packages. We are impressed with the program’s power and the flexibility, combined with its ease of use, makes it a solid choice for almost any word processing need. At $495, within the Windows word processing environment, Ami Pro 2.0 is an excellent value.

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