Wordstar 2000 Plus, Release 3

Faster Word Processor Now Ranks Among Best

By John Lombardi   Review Board

Over the years, Wordstar 2000 has grown from a clumsy, slow program into a graceful, fast competitor in the professional word processing category, an intensely competitive field including such heavy hitters as Microsoft Word 4.0, Multimate Advantage II, Samna IV, and Word Perfect 4.2. Wordstar 2000 Plus raises the ante in this contest of speed, power, and complexity with Release 3, offering an awesome features list, significantly improved performance, excellent documentation, and superior support.

FEATURES:

Like Gaul, the 21 disks that make up Wordstar 2000 Plus, Release 3, Personal Edition may be divided into three parts: a main program that does the word processing; a set of extra features handling mail lists, form letters, indexing, telecommunications, and file conversions; and a collection of stand-alone programs that manage graphics (Inset II), produce page-size text displays (Show Text), handle outlines (PC-Outline), and permit the use of preprinted forms (Fill-A-Form).

In addition, the package includes HP Font and PS Font for managing Laserjet and Postscript fonts. These elements vary from the complete integration of mail-list and telecommunications functions to the virtual stand-alone operation of Fill-A-Form. Taken together, they constitute one of the most powerful word-related tools currently available. (A legal version has a slightly different mix of add-on products; you can also buy Wordstar 2000 Plus, Release 3 with no add-ons for slightly less.)

Wordstar's speed jump represents a new feature for a formerly sluggish program. Cursor operations, locating text, reformatting, and general operations all zip along as fast as any competitive product.

Release 3's long list of new attractions includes superior laser printer support, with special emphasis on HP Laserjet and Postscript printers; and Inset II, a graphics program that can be called from within Wordstar 2000 to capture any screen image and insert it into text. Inset II can expand, rotate, clip, move, and otherwise edit graphics images and flow text around them, providing a highly superior graphics system to the one in Microsoft Word 4.

The fixed-field mail-list program has more and longer fields. Mail List prints Rolodex cards

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and includes an alternative fixed-format form for inventory management.

Now supporting Xmodem protocol, the Telmerge program supports an expanded command set for building automated scripts for calling data services, logging on, and extracting information.

Fill-A-Form lets you fill in a screen form and then print the data, and also keeps name and address files. PC-Outline is a stand-alone outliner with good capabilities but only modest interaction with Wordstar 2000. Show-Text, a program that creates page-size visuals using text of different sizes, colors, and type styles, is a useful tool. Finally, the excellent thesaurus includes completely redone and improved documentation.

PERFORMANCE:

With a product this complex, performance is difficult to characterize in a word. In terms of speed, Release 3 is much faster than previous versions, partly because of background reformatting. When you change anything that requires text to match new margins or longer lines, the process takes place in background mode while you return to typing. Further improvement comes from a cursor speedup option that varies the speed of the cursor's movement from slow to blazingly fast.

Other performance improvements include the new thesaurus with some 40,000 root words and about 500,000 additional synonyms. When looking up a word, the thesaurus permits cross-references, provides synonyms in categories by parts of speech (verb, noun, adjective), and provides a general definition for each word form.

Release 3 supports two or three equal-width columns. The program does not display the columns side by side for editing purposes, but a preview command displays the page as it will print. Although slightly less powerful than the equivalent feature in Word Perfect 4.2, the Wordstar implementation is much easier to use.

Expanded key macros now permit 11 lines for each keyboard macro and up to 40 macros within one macro file. The complexity of possible programming is impressive and Release 3's ready-made macros include excellent examples.

Widow/orphan control, reprogrammed function keys, automatic line numbering, and the capability to get a quick count of lines, pages, words, and words by length of word all make this a superior performer.

The companion programs all work more or less as advertised. Inset II is an excellent performer, easily and effective-

ly capturing screen images from virtually every commonly available display device. Inset asks some questions about the placement of the graphic on the page (left, right, centered) and whether to flow text around it or not. A preview mode in Inset II lets the user see how the graphic will look in the text, although the regular Wordstar Page Preview command doesn't show the graphic.

The Telmerge program works as well as in previous versions, although the power of the telecommunications automation language for script files is enhanced significantly. Telmerge now supports the Xmodem protocol and manages a completely automated dial, log-in, interrogate, capture, save, and log-off sequence. The program does not, however, support the Kermit telecommunications protocol.

Wordstar 2000, Release 3 continues a tradition of powerful mail-merge capabilities. Complex form letter processing using free-form, comma-delimited databases remains easy, and the commands for conditional data file processing remain strong. The indexing program, however, is still clumsy and wastes disk space.

Although the spelling checker is good, it ran into a number of common but unrecognized words: *departmentalization, John, Robert, subunit, unrealized, staffers, underway,* and *unclarified.* Word Perfect 4.2's speller had no difficulty with these words. The speller does not check for double words such as "the the." There is no option to correct a mistake on this occurrence only; instead, all subsequent occurrences are changed. No convention exists to ignore words with numbers such as *3rd* or *1960s.*

Despite these complaints, Wordstar 2000, Release 3 can be judged in performance by placing it alongside the most powerful, robust products in the market: It is as full-featured, powerful, and fast as Word Perfect 4.2 and Microsoft Word 4.0 and better on most counts than Multimate Advantage II. As a result, it rates an excellent in performance.

DOCUMENTATION:

Release 3 includes three elegantly produced manuals, totaling almost 1,500 pages and comprehensively covering the program and its accessories. The documentation is well-written, clearly illustrated, and fully indexed. Each program contains extensive on-line help files, and a quick-reference guide synopsizes the material fully.

Given its clarity, organization, and completeness, we rate Wordstar 2000,

Release 3 excellent in documentation.

EASE OF LEARNING:

There's no doubt about it: In spite of Wordstar 2000's extensive user aids, such as an effective tutorial, excellent manuals, and sensitive on-line documentation, it's still a complex program. There are so many possibilities, features, opportunities, and capabilities that no one can hope to have a gentle learning curve. Some of the features require specialized knowledge; for example, Release 3 has excellent support for a wide range of video display devices, but many users lack the knowledge to respond to the selections.

The main word processing program is relatively easy to use at a simple level. Most of the general word processing functions work predictably, and the on-line help usually offers the right level of assistance. However, if general word processing is all that a user requires, Wordstar 2000, Release 3 is overkill and too expensive. What makes this package a good value is its multiplicity of features. But because many of Release 3's special features are in add-on programs such as Inset II, Fill-a-Form, and PC Outline, the commands, operations, and instructions vary significantly, greatly increasing learning time and complexity.

In short, given the complexity of the programs and the variability of the user interface for the different modules, we rate ease of learning good.
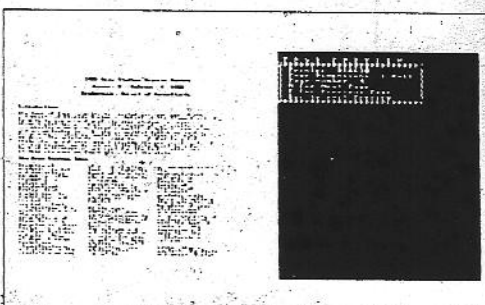
EASE OF USE:

To some extent, the program's complexity and different user interfaces reduce the product's ease of use. With increased familiarity, conversely, Wordstar 2000 offers numerous tools that aid ease of use. The powerful macros can create custom-key sequences to accomplish frequent editing tasks. Redefined function keys, with four levels (key, alt, ctrl, shift), provide versatile customization capabilities. The installation program has a superior set of utilities to customize the program for different purposes, and the telecommunications module can be programmed for automatic use.

A file locator lets you find files by name, any word in the file, or a complex combination of words and relational operators (Word 1 and Word 2 but not Word 3). Subdirectory management and a document history facilitate ease of use. The file conversion utility, permitting document exchange between Word Perfect, Multimate, and IBM RFT/FFT/TXT formats, can be customized, making document conversion easy for experienced users.

Wordstar can be modified and enhanced relatively easily to match virtually any user's environment, but the expertise required to exploit its capabilities is substantial. While the product is strong in ease of use for experienced users, it is complex and its components have different user interfaces. Overall, we rate ease of use good.

ERROR HANDLING:

Release 3 handles errors relatively well, catching open drive doors and other operating errors without problems. Each file has a backup copy saved at all times, so the previous version is always avail-

able. An Undo command (actually an undelete function) retrieves deletions of more than one character, but only at one level. Error messages are good, with suggested solutions.

Yet the complexity of the add-on programs are such that the memory-resident graphics utility, Inset II, can conflict with other memory-resident programs or exhaust memory, thereby locking up the keyboard. While the manual warns of this, it is nonetheless surprising to find the keyboard locked with no error message.

We found this release stable and solid, and we rate error handling good.

SUPPORT:

Evidently, Micropro has decided to support this product. Not only does the product offer the best telephone support policy in the business — unlimited, seven-day-a-week, free support for the life of this release plus six months — but an additional printer support disk comes with the package and font support for HP Laserjet soft fonts is available on request. Micropro notifies registered users of upgrades and new products with considerable frequency.

Micropro offers a 30-day money-back guarantee but only if you buy directly from Micropro, so we'll only give that half-credit. Corporate and extended support are undefined. Upgrades from the earlier version of Wordstar 2000 cost $149 for the Personal Edition or Legal Edition and $89 to upgrade just Wordstar 2000 without the add-on programs.

On one occasion we called on a Friday and were put on hold for a few minutes. We gave up, but later we called the toll-free support line on Saturday and got through. We asked a number of questions and received quick, useful answers: "Can you find all ruler lines?" (No); "Can you have different-width columns?" (No); "Why does Release 3 freeze up with Sidekick 1.56A loaded first, Inset loaded second, and Release 3 loaded third?" (Probably ran out of memory).

This new support system is a welcome improvement, and we rate Wordstar 2000 Release 3's support excellent.

VALUE:

Among the high-power office word processing packages we have reviewed, Wordstar 2000, Release 3 at $495 offers a price close to the others in this class (Word 4.0, Word Perfect 4.2, Samna IV, Multimate Advantage II), but the range of features it offers puts it at the top of the class. As powerful as the others and packed with features and superior laser support, we rate Wordstar 2000, Release 3 an excellent value.

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

INFOWORLD WORD PROCESSOR BENCHMARKS

	Wordstar 2000 Plus Version 3	Wordstar 2000 Plus Version 2	Microsoft Word 4.0	Word Perfect 4.2[1]
File Load	0:02	0:02	0:01	0:03
Save/Exit	0:04	0:05	0:04	0:06
ASCII Export	2:31	4:18	0:02	0:30
DCA Translate	2:54	1:22	2:52	0:46
Cursor Top/Bottom	Immediate	0:18[2]	Immediate	0:04
Manual Scroll	0:33	4:10	2:31[3]	2:29
Repage 20 Pages	Automatic	Automatic	0:07	Automatic
Search	0:02	0:32[2]	0:07	0:05
Search/Replace	0:35	1:11		0:10
Append Document	0:03	0:51	Immediate	0:12
File Size	93K	86K	89K	86K

Times are shown in minutes and seconds (e.g., 1:10 is 1 minute and 10 seconds) System Configuration 8 MHz IBM PC AT with 640K RAM, 40 ms hard disk access time.

[1]Word Perfect, Version 4.2 dated 9/10/87. [2]Tested in character mode. Manual scroll in graphics mode took 3 minutes and 33 seconds. [3]Insufficient memory to search and replace all hits in our standard file. Search and replace on a file shortened to one third the size of our standard file took 10 seconds. Hypothetical speed for a search and replace in our standard file would be 30 seconds.