TEST DRIVES

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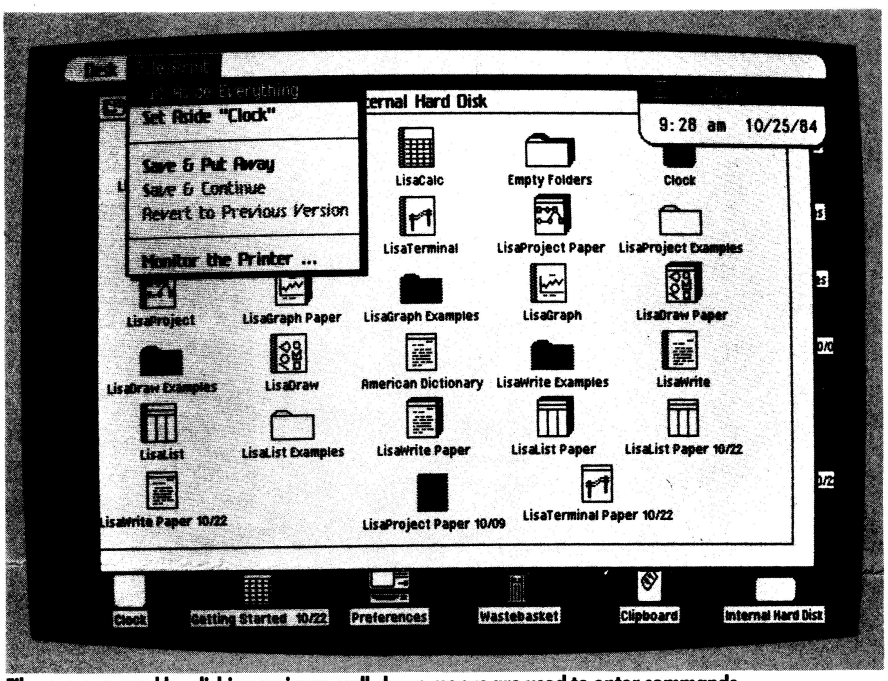
Venerable Lisa Software Improved

LISA 7/7 *Apple Computer, Inc., 20525 Mariani Ave., Cupertino, CA 95014, (800) 538-9696; $695 retail (Circle 475).*

Whenever integrated software or the amorphous concept of the "desktop metaphor" is discussed, talk is likely to turn to Apple's Lisa computer, the first popular commercial product to use these ideas.

Lisa now dwells in the shadow of its smaller and less-expensive counterpart, the Macintosh, but it is by no means obsolete. While sales of the original Lisa were dismal, the updated and upgraded Lisa 2 is finally finding its way onto the desks of corporate America, in part because it is riding the coattails of Macintosh's success, but also because the Lisa 7/7 software is still a viable set of productivity tools. An upgrade of the original Lisa Office System, which set standards for all software to live up to, Lisa 7/7 is faster, better integrated and more capable.

Lisa 7/7 consists of seven applications packages: spreadsheet, word processor, data base, business graphics, free-form graphics, project management and communications, as well as such desk accessories as an on-screen calculator and clock. The quality of the individual packages varies widely, from LisaCalc, which is an excellent spreadsheet program, and LisaProject, which makes excellent use of the mouse and high-resolution screen graphics, to LisaTerm, which is an antiquated and barely serviceable communications program.



Files are accessed by clicking on icons; pull-down menus are used to enter commands.

Anyone who has stared with confusion at the cold, unrelenting A? prompt of MS-DOS can appreciate the greater ease with which Lisa 7/7 pull-down menus allow the new user to learn how to run each application. The documentation is also good, although inconsistent; new packaging breaks the documentation up into separate easy-to-use spiral bound booklets.

Starting Lisa when you first enter the office is done simply by pushing the button beneath the computer's jutting bezel. The button lights up and the screen informs you that the computer is preparing itself for the day by loading software from either the external ProFile hard disk, if the machine is a Lisa 2/5, or the internal 10Mbyte Winchester in the case of the Lisa 2/10. This takes a couple of minutes, which indicates the amount of software which is being transferred from the Winchester.

When this process is completed, Lisa displays a line of pull-down menu categories atop the screen, a column of icons for any files ready for action along the right of the screen, and a row of icons for more physical entities such as the hard disk itself along the bottom of the screen. Pushing the solitary button characteristic of an Apple mouse after scrolling the cursor arrow to one of the menu items causes a pull-down menu of categories to appear. Clicking the mouse button twice quickly while the cursor is atop one of the icons causes its contents to expand to fill an on-screen window. We'll pick the hard disk itself to access all our programs and data files.

This opens a window that will generally be full of rows of symbols. Some for the applications programs that comprise Lisa 7/7 and several others for files are collections of files created when using those programs. Commands issued through pull-down menus can be used to open files, but after very little time most people take a shortcut, clicking the mouse button twice rapidly when the cursor is on the file they want to select, known as double-clicking. Applications are represented by symbols for pads of paper; in Lisa's jargon starting a new spreadsheet is done by tearing off a sheet of LisaCalc paper, requiring a double-click on the calc pad.

What Lisa then displays is

a conventional spreadsheet, although as with all Lisa 7/7 applications, the crisp screen image makes the columns of numbers easier to read than the vast majority of other computers. This may seem like sacrilege to Lotus 1-2-3 or Multiplan devotees, but there is probably less differentiation between competitive spreadsheet products than in any other major category of applications software. Whether any given spreadsheet suits a user depends, in typical applications, largely on subjective evaluation of whether the style of the spreadsheet fits his or her work habits. LisaCalc provides a large spreadsheet: The extreme lower right corner is cell 255 by IU. (Alphabet characters going from A to Z and repeating as AA, etc., denote column positions.)

More significant is how well suited the Lisa 7/7's window manipulation features are to maneuvering about a spreadsheet. Located along the right and bottom edges of the LisaCalc window are several symbols that facilitate navigation through what can turn into a large sea of numbers during a budget planning process, for example. One is the elevator. This simple box can be slid up and down the side, or from left to right on the bottom of the window causing the spreadsheet to scroll up and down or from left and right within the window. Clicking on arrows in each corner scrolls the display a line at a time, while clicking a page symbol (a rectangle with a down-turned corner) causes a screenful of information to shift in one direction or the other.

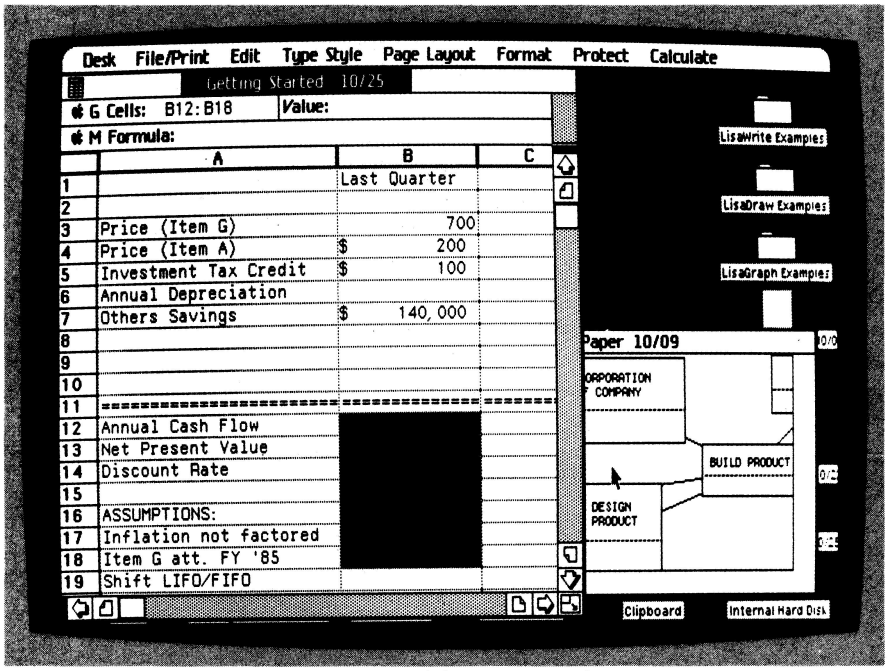
A specific cell can be located by selecting Find What? from within the Calculate pull-down menu, which yields a prompt line for typing in the specific item to be searched for and clicking in a selection box delimiting whether a value or a formula is being sought. This is closer to the search function typical of word processors than the "go to" functions in most spreadsheets, and thus is more flexible.

Entering equations and numbers is straightforward: if you've learned how to do it in one spreadsheet you've mastered them all. Since the Lisa lacks cursor control keys, the fastest way to enter items in cells is to type with the right hand on the numeric key pad, while moving the cursor with the mouse from cell to cell. This can be a little like the old exercise of patting your head while rubbing your stomach, and rapid fire number entry certainly requires more coordination than simply typing a number and hitting Enter on a conventional software/hardware combination.

If the mouse is cumbersome during entry, it is a gem during manipulation of the spreadsheet. If an entry is too large to be displayed within a column's width, simply grab hold of the column "handle" atop the lines dividing columns and drag it with the mouse. No need to wade through levels of command menus; just point, click and move. Selecting a range of cells to be protected or entered in an equation takes only a quick swipe of the mouse. These equations can use a full range of functions from the standard Average and Sum to such arcane items as Xrr, a modified internal rate of return where negative values are brought to the present and positive values to the future unless a Boolean operator value shows up as false; or Regression, which computes linear regression results under a variety of conditions. An explanation of LisaCalc's functions is about the only on-line help to be found, an apparent example of Apple's attitude that since the computer is so relatively easy to use no help menus are needed.

Integrated programs tout the ease with which spreadsheet numbers can be turned into graphics either for analysis or presentation to others. None matches the combination of simplicity and capability found in Lisa 7/7. To transfer numbers, merely select a range of cells with a swing of the mouse, which turns the selected area to white characters on a deep black background; select Copy or Cut from the Edit menu; open LisaGraph and Paste the numbers in. The graph appears in any of the standard forms selected: bar, line, pie, area, scatter, solid bar, or stacked bar. Axis labels, legends and captions can be added and modified.

This graph can then be Cut and Pasted into LisaDraw, a Lisa 7/7 tool that resembles a number of paint, or freehand draw, programs entering the market. Here, any kind of drawing, from logos for your



The user can navigate between applications by clicking on icons in the upper right corner.

company or competitors to product sketches, can be incorporated into the business graph, enhancing the point of the graph.

The finished graph can again be Cut and Pasted into a LisaWrite document by simply pulling down the Edit menu and highlighting Select All of Graph and Copy. Other integrated packages, such as Framework, offer faster creation and manipulation of graphics, but none offers the ability to create graphs of this quality and flexibility as well as the ability to integrate the graph in final output into a document.

Similarly, graphics from LisaProject can be merged into reports and memos. This is likely to be a frequent application given LisaProject's facilities for creating PERT-type charts.

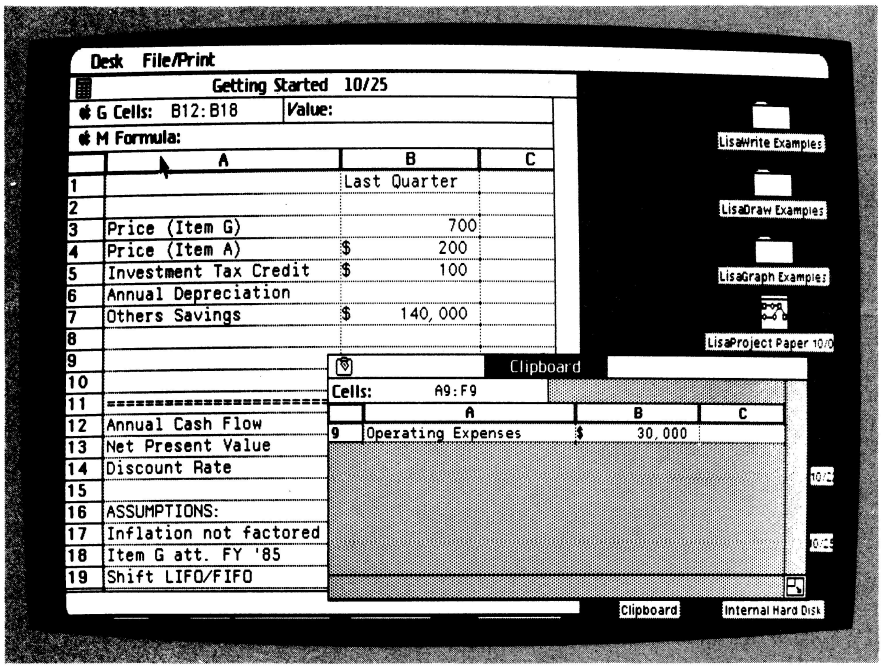
LisaProject benefits more from the computer's use of a mouse and high-resolution graphics than any other application (other than LisaDraw, which would be impractical otherwise). Where other project management programs start with tables of data, and then create the PERT chart, or skip it entirely and rely on the simpler Gantt chart, LisaProject starts with the PERT chart. To draw one, simply call up a sheet from yet another symbolic paper pad. The screen presents circles labeled Start and End. To insert a task or milestone, select one of those items from a pull-down menu, then click the mouse when a task or resource is to be entered. The outline of a rectangle (tasks) or a circle (milestone) appears and can be stretched to the proper size and shape by moving the mouse with the button held down.

Interdependencies can be shown by drawing lines between these circles and boxes, again done quickly by clicking on one and moving to the right to the next symbol, causing a line to be drawn, or as it appears on the screen, stretched between symbols.

Each symbol can be fully labeled, a feature lacking in most of the best-selling project management software. Resources, as well as word labels, can be affixed to tasks.

Moving to the task and resource tables by selecting their entries from beneath the Chart menu item allows full tracking of where resources are being allocated (costs and cash flow, as well as such deadlines as earliest start, latest start, earliest finish and latest finish). After these are entered, the PERT chart display shows the critical path as a bold line.

Tables of figures from LisaProject can, again, be pasted into LisaCalc for further financial analysis, or as with the PERT charts, pasted into LisaWrite, to speed preparation of detailed project reports. Similarly, Project figures can be pasted into LisaList, a simplistic filing system good for Rolodex or filing card applications.



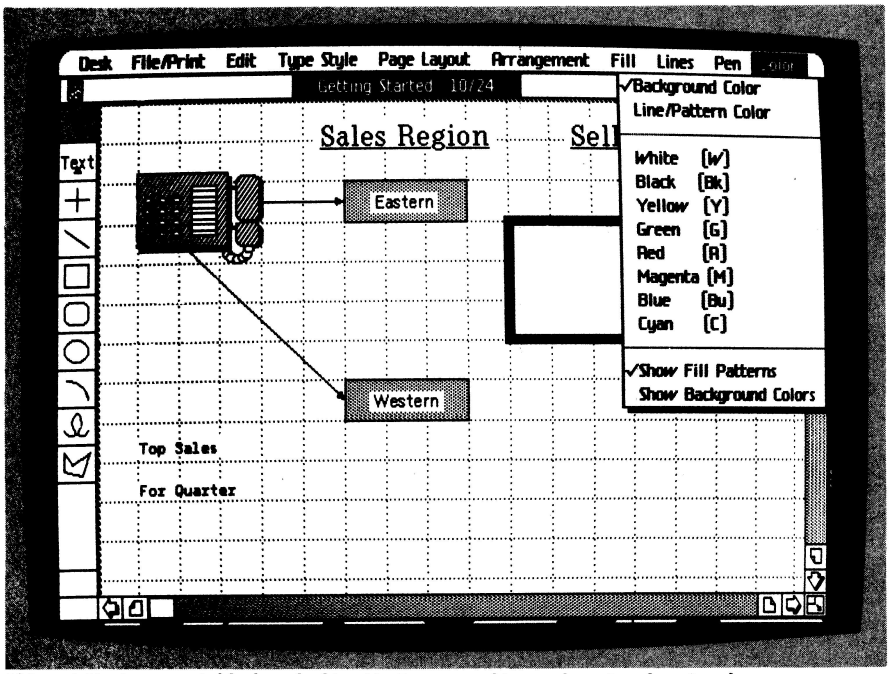
After the Copy is selected from the Edit menu, the selected row is placed in the Clipboard.

Judged on its own as a word processor, LisaWrite is quite capable, although as with all of the Lisa 7/7 software, less than blindingly fast. A dictionary has been added as a pull-down menu selection that will not only check for misspellings, but suggest corrections selected phonetically–for example, typing "Shicagow" and having the dictionary suggest Chicago as the correct spelling. Search and replace capabilities work well, but only forward.

Whether using the mouse to enter commands is viable or not is purely a personal choice: Excellent typists will find the word processor a bit slow and will want to keep their hands on the keyboard throughout text entry. Here, LisaWrite is lacking since some commands can be entered using the key labeled with the Apple symbol as an alternative to the pull-down menus, but not all, and the placement of the Apple version of a Control key is a bit awkward.

Document formatting capabilities are excellent, with the ability to display page numbering, center or justify text, display bold and italics as they will print, as well as set and reset rulers (margin, tabs and line spacing) several different ways within each document.

Type sizes and typefaces can also be set and alternated throughout the document from the pull-down menus. Here, let's assume you want to use a standard heading for inter-office memos. Simply type in the text, a Memo heading with standard to, from and subject lines, then select, or highlight each of these with the mouse, turning the displayed words into reverse video on black, go the the pull-down menu TypeSize and select a type size. Re-



Although Lisa's screen is black and white, LisaDraw graphics can be printed out in color.

peat the operation to select Bold or Italic. Store this heading as a separate paper-pad symbol on the desktop by selecting one of the Save options under File/Print. Then each time you want to create a memo, simply call up the form by double-clicking on the pad symbol, fill in the text and Save under another name. Type and size selections are much more limited in LisaWrite than in its close cousin MacWrite, but these will suffice for most business communications.

Printing is similarly facile. Initial setup is accomplished by selecting Print Format under File/Print and clicking to select the printer. The Imagewriter, a daisy-wheel printer, and an ink-jet are the supported options. Paper size, sideways or regular orientation, and the equivalent of draft or quality mode, can also be selected. During regular use, all that need be done is to select Print and click OK. The setup in this box includes options for number of copies and ability to print selected ranges of pages.

If printing your document is easy and LisaWrite gives you a feeling of total control, your sensation will be substantially different when you are using LisaTerm to communicate.

Setup is fairly easy, *if* you use the standard Apple modem. Select the Setup menu, after selecting a pad of LisaTerm paper, and check off with the mouse button parity and other typical communications settings. Dialing can be set to occur automatically when the document is opened. Automatic word wrap, a feature that was inexplicably lacking in the initial release, has been added.

While communications software automates the tedious chores of memorizing arcane log-on sequences and wading through communication menus, LisaTerm offers little beyond automatic dialing. Programs in the PC-DOS world offer such capabilities as automatically sending a memo to a pre-defined list of addresses which might involve dialing The Source to send some copies to electronic mail boxes, dialing MCI Mail to send courier delivered printouts to others, and dialing Western Union EasyLink to send overseas telegrams to others, all with one command. With LisaTerm, each name requires a separate, repetitious effort.

Should you be among the majority of people who buy your modem from a company other than Apple, LisaTerm gets even less user-friendly. If you use a Hayes or other non-Apple modem, you'll find there is no way to turn off the modem while in terminal mode.

LisaTerm does offer one unusual, but important, feature–it can operate in background. If you're receiving large amounts of data, you can begin the session with the LisaTerm window in background and open another window to create a spreadsheet, edit a document, or do any other task without waiting for the session to end.

If LisaTerm's performance is otherwise mundane, the program does have one very extraordinary–and apparently undocumented–capability. LisaTerm can receive documents unattended while the computer is used for another application. Simply open a LisaTerm pad, set to receive, and activate another window to run another application. LisaTerm receives the incoming transmission without supervision, then rings a bell to notify you that the message was received.

Given the breadth of applications programs bundled in Lisa 7/7, Apple's accomplishment is substantial. Merely having seven applications packages that use the same command structure and methodology is obviously valuable because it saves the user time in learning and using each package. Add to that the ease with which files can be transferred back-and-forth between any of the packages and Lisa 7/7 may indeed be the best, most integrated total package of productivity software that is currently available.

Lisa 7/7 also includes the capability, through MacWorks, of installing Macintosh software on a portion of the Lisa's hard disk. As the base of Macintosh software steadily grows and its quality improves, it will be interesting to see how many Lisa 7/7 users slowly migrate into the Macintosh world, spending more and more of their time in that environment where competition will create products that fill 7/7's holes, such as truly relational data bases, analytical data bases, and competent, flexible communications programs.