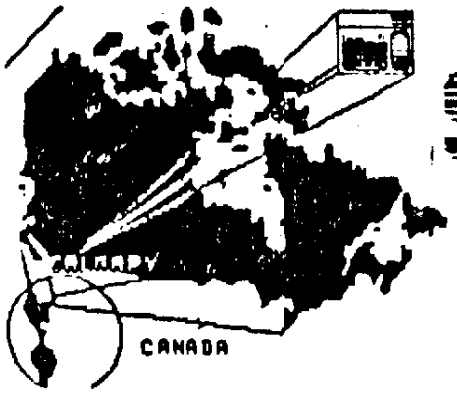


# CALGARY 99'ERS USER'S GROUP NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is produced through the efforts of individuals who are members of the

CALGARY 99'ERS USER'S GROUP

BOX 935 STATION T

CALGARY ALBERTA,

CANADA, T2H-2H4

The opinions are purely the writers. The club does not assume responsibility for these opinions. The sole purpose is to obtain information, from any source, to further the knowledge of its' readers with regards to the 9900 based computers or compatibles. We, the writers, wish not to offend anyone, regarding sources of information. We will identify those publications or persons who originated the information found herein.

Feb. 85

CALGARY 99'ERS

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DALLAS TI HOME COMPUTER GROUP
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The Jan '88 meeting was in complete disarray, due to key executive not attending. We, that did attend, have decided to keep going, at least until the remaining funds are gone. Which should keep it going 'til Sept/Oct '88. After that, you, out there, can either, want to continue, or let the club die.

We got the 1080 Amiga monitor running in RGB, and it showed spectacular near-photo graphics with, really, very little flickering, that I was worried about. Some people, couldn't discern any flicker! As far as the My-Word program, there is a way, (read the docs) that set the interlace to lower resolution, therefore eliminates any flicker. The King Tut Mask picture was the convincer. A brilliant Gold, that appeared, almost, touch-able!

By the time you read this, Harold Murray will have a 1084 monitor. We'll see if it is any improvement over the 1080! I fiddled with the keyboard a bit, and changed colors of the My-Word program, while at the meeting. Black on Yellow, is my favourite (I know I know), and I wasn't all that pleased with it. Have to get my own 9640, and maybe change the CHARA1 char sets. I'll be reporting whether the APPLE-LIKE font is an improvement over the Myarc fonts. One thing I noticed, was that there isn't any descenders, (but there is room) and some lower case letters were wider than others of the same bit width. A single vertical line of pixels, of say, the "I", were really fine (thin!). A little bit of tweaking of the monitor's innards (convergence) will solve the problem. I know it will improve, 'cause I have seen another Amiga with the 9640 displaying better, clearer lines! So There! Any color control is lost, from the front controls, of the Amiga, while using RGB, but that's OK, the most important ones, Brightness, and Contrast are still useable, and the wheel to move the screen sideways, if needed.

There was expressed interest in looking into hardware/software purchases, however that costs M-O-N-E-Y. And none could agree, in the short time, what direction they wanted to go.
There was dismayed remarks about the 9640 computer owners, having no interest in 4A software, and 4A owners can't run 9640 software. It isn't necessarily so. The 9640 users will be accessing 4A software, when and if it is available! A SIGroup is already set up for you know what, with a combination of both clubs.

Harold Murray has taken all the newsletters from the other clubs, and pulled them apart. He collated them into subjects. This is a great help. I found an article by the Charlotte U.G., that gives instructions on changing the printer instructions in the object code for GRAPHX. Using a sector editor, you can search for the strings that may not be what your printer is expecting, and replace them with your printer Hex instructions. This was found in the Graphics folder.

Our bbs sysop is working to configure the MXT bbs system to operate with the files and messages of the Techie bbs. As it stands, in late January, it works (I did it) downloading multiple files as the user demands. MXT is public domain available on the NETWORKS.

Renewed my Micropendium subscription. Still the best publication for the 4A and 9640. Got the January issue, in almost a wink of an eye. (6 days) The publisher/editor addressed one of my pet peeves, namely giving too high a rating to reviewed software, when the software does not handle the maximum the computer can take, in operation. EG:J.KOLEON's review of MY-Art, which cannot handle the full 512 X 424 resolution. In his editorial, he quoted another reviewer. His bottom line is: They cover a lot of parameters, when evaluating software. So I'm willing to accept their ratings, like I do the ski hill conditions, and just subtract a notch, from the stated value.
The Jan issue was packed with small programs, fixes to other programs, tutorials on M-DOS, with further enlightenment of operations that aren't even in the manual, and plans of software for the 9640. Including a FLIGHT SIMULATOR, CAD by the author of MY-Art. A multitasking operation system called GEME (Pronounced Jimmy not Gimme). Sooooo, if you don't subscribe, you won't get the pleasure of a good read of this publication! I find it hard to believe that subscriptions come to around 1700 per year. What a shame. I'm sure you won't be disappointed, in the future, like a lot of us where when other magazines/newsletters folded. Simply there is just too much to cover, such as continued support for the 4A, and now the Geneve 9640! There isn't much about the IBM clone crossover unit from MG, except, Miller communications (no known relation to MG) in Seattle Wash, is building PEBoxes which will hold 4A cards, the 9640, and IBM cards. We are told, from the Jan issue, that the IBM card is insertable into the TI PEB!!

NOW I KNOW THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION - "WHICH WAY DO WE GO?", WHY, EVERY WAY IMAGINABLE!

The guys who ordered the 9640, found that sending certified cheques wasn't the way to go, in one instance. Seems, from the 1st National, to the 7th National, the dealer couldn't find any guts in the banks to cash it. "They might lose a few pennies", if the exchange rate fluctuates, a hair!
However, the L-M dealer sent all the units, anyway, with the offending certified cheque.

Vibrations from the grapevine. The GIF is causing a sensation through the computer world, and the 9640 owners. Some people can't see the point of just being able to put pretty pictures on the screen. Well, ergonomically speaking, we will see more human oriented software, such as communications packages that will give us a look and feel of pageing through a library book, right over the phone lines, one day. In this day and age, that will be the only way to keep up to the piles of information that demand is reaching for. And, by the way, the City of Calgary Library, is installing a BBS like-system, for referencing, and who knows, may have pretty pictures, with text, accessible via modem. One day?

Dave Lovering
Calgary 99'ers U.G.

NEXT MEETING 9 FEBRUARY!!?

My-Art: An Alternative Review
====== == ========== ======

By: C. Bobbitt

Several reviews have recently been done of Myarc's My-Art drawing program for the Geneve. Unfortunately, in all of them, the reviewer fell into a classic trap of computer reviewers - reviewing the hardware the program runs on and not the program itself.

My-Art is the only drawing program available at this time designed specifically for the Myarc Geneve computer. As such, it can't be compared to other 9640 programs since none exist. This is pretty much the same problem as trying to review Multiplan or TI-Writer for the 99/4A - since the competition is for the most part lacking. However, the CONCEPT of a drawing program (or that of a spreadsheet or a word processor, to use my analogy) is universal. Hence, a drawing program on the Geneve can be readily compared to those available on other machines in regards to features, ease-of-use, and whether it is suited for it's intended purpose - just as any program.

The job of the reviewer in this case is to seperate those features offered by the program from those built into the computer. The assumption the author has to make is if other programs of this type were available for the computer this program is on, THEY WOULD ALSO CONTAIN THOSE THINGS BUILT INTO THE HARDWARE AND OPERATING SYSTEM OF THE COMPUTER.

This is a pretty reasonable assumption. It would be pretty much of a waste to write an arcade game for the 99/4A without using sprites wouldn't it?

After seperating those functions that are dependant on the hardware of the computer the program runs on, the reviewer can then compare the program to similar programs on other machines. In this case the reviewer is judging how well the program does the job and how it compares on a feature-by-feature basis with like programs elsewhere - not how it stacks up to similar programs on the same machine.

With this lengthy pre-amble out of the way, let's get to the review:

PERFORMANCE:

My-Art is a drawing program designed for use with the Myarc mouse that is included in the package, and the low and medium resolutions offered by the Myarc Geneve's 9938 graphics chip. Comparing this chip to the 9918A found in the 99/4A is kind of like comparing a combine to a horse-drawn plow - both of them get the job done but the combine can do so much more, so much faster and efficiantly. The 9938 graphics chip has 4 major resolutions: 256 x 212 pixels in 256 possible colors per pixel, 256 x 424 in 256 colors, 512 x 212 in 16 colors, and 512 x 424 in 16 colors. For the sake of my fingers typing this, I've dubbed the 256 x 212 mode "low resolution", the 256 x 424 and the 512 x 212 modes "medium resolution", and the 512 x 424 mode "high resolution". My-Art in it's current incarnation supports both the low resolution mode and the 512 x 212 medium resolution mode. Myarc apparantly chose not to support the second medium resolution mode and the high resolution mode because only very expensive color monitors can display a picture in that mode well enough to be useful.

My-Art also takes advantage of the mouse-support built into the 9938 graphics chip. What this means on a technical level is that unlike almost every other computer manufactured today (from the Commodore 64 up to a Mac II or IBM PS/2), the CPU doesn't have to do anything to move the mouse cursor around the screen! On a more practical level, this means that the cursor moves flawlessly, almost instantaneously, and with none of the "jumpiness" found in other mouse systems. This is a testament to the 9938 and the Myarc Disk-Operating-System (MDOS), and not to My-Art.

Since the graphics chip handles 2 of the three buttons on the mouse (why Myarc decided on a 3 button mouse is beyond me - the Apple Macs do very well with only 1 button), and the 9995 processor built into the 9640 is VERY fast, this means the response to a click is almost instantaneous. The secret to the speed of My-Art is the 9995 chip - which makes anything 3-5 times faster then it would run on a 99/4A. A programmer could even write very poor 99/4A assembly code and it would be blindingly fast on a Geneve - even in the slowed down 99/4A mode.

My-Art supports a pretty standard set of features found in drawing programs today. The selection is, however, by no means "rich". A lot of the fancier features that found there way into GRAPHX, TI-Artist, JoyPaint and the myriad other drawing programs for the 4A 2 years ago when most of those programs were written, are lacking in My-Art. I'm not even going to compare them to the features in graphics programs found on the Amiga or the Atari ST - computers with similar, if inferior, graphics hardware to the Geneve.

Within My-Art the user can select colors, draw with a pencil, clear the screen, fill a shape, draw lines, circles, boxes and rectangles, and control the speed of the mouse. The user can also use more "advanced" features such as moving or copying parts of the screen, printing the picture, typing text in various sizes (unfortunately only in one typeface), saving and loading pictures to disk, and doing a disk directory or formatting a new disk. All in all, this list could almost be used as a list of the basic features that should be found in any drawing program. The three more advanced feature that distinguish My-Art from the standard "bare-bones" drawing program is that it sports a help screen (which is pretty essential unless you prefer thumbing through the manual every few seconds the first times you use the program), a very well done "zoom" mode that is truly impressive, and an "oops" key.

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The "zoom" mode allows you to examine a picture in truly microscopic portions (the cursor icon changing into a microscope at that level is a cute touch) - with a grand total of 12 pixels on the screen at once. While the necessity of zooming that close may be argued (particularly within a program that has excellent cursor control - thanks mostly to the hardware), it is very dramatic and makes for a neat demonstration.

The "oops", or "undo" function is something that should be standard on all drawing programs, but usually isn't. It allows you to erase the last thing you did - whether it was drawing a line free-hand in the pencil mode or filling an area. In using a mouse-based drawing program, this is almost a necessity. While computer users have been going ga-ga over rodents for a few years now, graphics professionals for the most part detest them - they tend to prefer drawing tablets and trackballs as they are considerably more precise for experianced users (even if they aren't as cute).

My-Art, for the most part, performs almost all of it's functions flawlessly. I emphasize "almost". The move/copy function is perhaps the most frustrating part of the program. Despite a pretty good description in the manual, I've found it virtually impossible to use. If it's any consolation - the same function in the beta version of My-Art was even worse. However, it remains that the Move/Copy function is particularly ill-concieved and confusing (even to someone, like myself, that has used dozens of drawing programs). In fact, if Myarc changed just one thing I'd ask them to re-do those functions to the way they are in TI-Artist.

How does it stack up to other drawing programs? Well, for the most part My-Art is a pretty basic (I would almost say "primitive") drawing program. It lacks most of the features that you take for granted even in 99/4A drawing programs - a clipboard, rays, fill patterns, various brush widths, an eraser of sorts (currently you have to redraw over what you want to erase pixel-by-pixel in the background color for that area, or by "boxing" it over), the ability to make ovals, a spray-can function, and maybe bit-mapped font capability. Perhaps, if the designers are ambitious, they could add some of the popular features of drawing programs from other machines: color cycling (see an Amiga demo if you want an explanation), object-oriented drawing (where you manipulate object instead of pixels), picture merging, and the ability to print to color printers and plotters.

My-Art, in fact, doesn't even begin to demonstrate any of the capabilities of the machine it runs on beyond raw speed, and a few of the basic things found in the 9938 chip such as the resolution, colors and mouse control.

DOCUMENTATION:

The documentation that accompanies My-Art is servicable. It does an excellent job of concisely describing the features of the program. However, it is more distinguished by what it doesn't have then what it does.

For instance, it doesn't have an index (I pray for them, but most program manuals don't have them), it doesn't have a tutorial, it doesn't have any reference at all for programmers that want to use My-Art pictures in programs, and finally, it has no illustrations (which would definately help some users). Like the program itself, it is the acceptable minimum and little else. It DOES at least have a Table of Contents, which is more then a lot of programs have.

It would have been nice that for $125 Myarc would have thrown in a keychart, or perhaps a keyboard overlay listing the commands. Putting all this in a help-screen only partially mitigates the absence of either. It also would have been nice if the manual was a bit longer, and perhaps a little chattier and less terse. You often learn as much in asides found in manuals then you do in the listing of functions and their explanations. If Myarc had been truly generous, they could have even thrown in a small section on mouse drawing techniques for that large majority of 99/4A users that have never used a mouse (or have only used it with TI-Artist).

It is safe to say that the manual does the job, and no more (or less).

EASE OF USE:

This is my biggest bone of contention with My-Art. While it has the minimum features that a serious computer artist could use to produce spectacular art - they are arranged in a such a way that it is a wonder that anything can be made with the program.

First of all, the 9640 keyboard has all those wonderful function keys. So what does My-Art use for all it's major functions? Everything BUT the function keys! Some attempt was made to attach the keys mnemonically to their function (L for lines, etc..), however even the sparse number of features found in My-Art would soon exhaust this scheme. Witness the K key used to format a disk. Even more senselessly , many important features are found on control keys, which require pressing 2 keys at once to activate. If Myarc had bothered to attach all the features found on control keys to one of the 10 function keys, as well as those commands that didn't fit the mnemonic key assignment scheme, they still would have had a function key left over! There is no sin in key-driven graphics programs - but there is in doing it haphazardly. Not everyone has the time to program text or icon menus such as those found in GRAPHX or TI-Artist.

My second major gripe with My-Art is even more fundamental. The color list is apparantly arranged at random. While this is no problem in medium resolution with only 16 colors on the screen at once, in high-resolution with 256 colors available it's the pits! I've literally spent an hour trying to find the closest shade to another I had been drawing in. Apparantly, the author(s) of My-Art just put the color choices on the screen as they are stored in the 9938.

continued 3

Ideally, they should have arranged them like the color spectrum anyone who has taken a chemistry class is familiar with. Then, if you are drawing in red, and want to simulate a shadow with a darker red, it is no problem. The way it is now it is truly a test of will-power to do any kind of shade-drawing work in My-Art.
Since the ostensible reason for having 256 colors in the first place is to produce more natural drawings, this defeats the whole purpose of the program! Sloppy programming can make even the best program worthless.
To it's credit My-Art does have one feature I found very nice. Normally, the way the colors are arranged, if you draw in one color for a while, and switch to another, finding the first again would be close to impossible. My-Art gets around this by letting you drag the color-selection cursor over the screen on to any color in your picture. Hence, getting your original color is simple - even fun (as you drag the cursor over the screen all the other screen colors it passes over are flashed on the border of the picture). To me, though, this looks like a "fix" for an abominally planned color palette.

VALUE:

This is the perhaps the most subjective area of ANY review. In fact, it is so subjective I'm not even going to rate My-Art in this area. If you can live with My-Art's shortcomings, then it will have infinite value since it is the only game in town. If it lacks too much for you to use it seriously, then the thing is worthless.

Judge for yourself by what I've said above.

CONCLUSION:

As John Koloen put it in his review, the "Myarc Mouse appears to be well-built and will probably last a long time under normal use". I felt this pretty much summed up what I felt about the program.

The price of $100-125 for My-Art is about what you'd expect to pay for a PC mouse of perhaps the same quality. After looking over the program, I feel I bought My-Art primarily for the mouse. Hence, I don't feel I was "taken". I'm also confident that Myarc will release future updates of the drawing program - it's in their best interest to have a nice drawing program in order to sell more 9640's, which I assume is their main business. How they will get them to the users I don't know since they didn't bother to enclose warranty cards with the package - at least mine.

Myarc is just getting used to being a software company. In fact, their first "official" commercial release has convinced me that Myarc should have sold the SOURCE CODE for My-Art to 3rd-party developers, just to show them how to make a graphics program for the 9640, and given away the object code to anyone. They could have then sold the mouse for $25 less. To anyone that wanted to use the program.

When I tried to explain this to Myarc they looked at me as if I was crazy. I guess, at least for them, they don't need program examples to begin hacking out code (most Myarc programmers seem to be the type that started writing reams of assembly code after a casual, relaxed reading of the Editor/Assembler manual).

In fact, Jack Tramial (you know, the guy who tromped TI when he ran Commodore back in 1983) did pretty much what I suggested Myarc do, with a program better than My-Art in almost every respect, and as a consequence there are dozens of drawing programs for his computer - the Atari ST. In fact, he made providing source code of programs such as telecommunications and word processors to developers a top priority. That is why with an established base of perhaps only 250,000 machines there are THOUSANDS of commercial programs available for his machines - and lots of graphics programs, telecommunications packages, and word processors.

He has made a LOT of money too, with something that was totally incompatible with everything else when it was released. Heck, the 9640 has the advantage of 1000s of 99/4A software programs the ST didn't have.

It seems to me it is in Myarc's self-interest to have as many programs available for the Geneve as possible.

Enough philosophizing, now to the report card:

| | |
|---|---|
| Performance..... | B- |
| Documentation..... | B+ |
| Ease of Use..... | C- |
| Value..... | (your guess) |
| My final grade..... | B- |

If you are interested, I'd like to hear how YOU rate My-Art. I'd also like to hear anyone's thoughts on the future of the Geneve.
(DOWNLOADED FROM GENIE JAN '88)

end of p. 3 of 3

Geneve is up:

While on the subject of the Myarc Geneve, I am happy to say that my Geneve is running well enough to have done all the editing of this issue of Newsletter 9T9, through the 9640. The MDOS is working fine and MYWORD is a fairly complete utility. The editing functions are in 9640-mode while disk I/O's are in TI-mode. Three local members have the Geneve running, and another has one, on-order.

So far, it seems that you must have certain peripherals, in order to use the Geneve satisfactorily. You need a P-Box or equivalent, a good monitor, and a controller card with "fast" disk drives as a bare minimum, to get started.

The Geneve card draws quite a bit of power,(remember it does the work of several: a 640K RAM keyboard interface,real-time card,80-column hi-resolution card,a mouse port,joystick port, P-Code interpreter,print spooler,etc.). This power-consumption may play a part in disk problems one user had with origional an TI PHP-1250 drive in the P-box. Either because of the current draw, (Paul Chalton's theory), or slower speed of the belt-drive, (my idea), the system fails to initialize or do file read/writes on these drives. Substituting one of my Shugart 455 half-height, beltless drives corrected the problem. These drives are both faster and two of them draw less current than one origional drive. I am not sure whether the final DOS will address this problem, but it appears that the 9640 in TI-mode is still too fast for the old 1250's. Whether or not the new third party boxes can cope with the needs of the Geneve is still not answered. Also, I am not sure whether the relatively slower belt driven DS/DD drives give the same problem, as the 1250 series.

As far as monitors, the 9938 video chip generates a high resolution output, like the PGA or EGA hi-res boards for the IBM world. It is for this reason, a TV or Composite color monitor performs poorly, especially with MYWORD. I found a monitor, like the monochrome Amdek does fair, though my small 10" unit made reading 80 columns very tedious. Colour bleeding on composites, also was too much. The Geneve normally supports a resolution of 256 by 212 pixels, but has another mode with 512 by 424,(Refer to Vol.1 No. 1 Call Myarc).

Be prepared to invest in a good monitor. The Amiga and Comodore 2002 monitors have a 640x200 usable resolution,(the 640x400 spec. can't be used by the Geneve). These two can be bought at Computers For Less for $500(Amiga) and $450(2002), and making a cable is not easy, ask Randy. Radio Shack sells a COCO monitor(which has sound,see last issue of TId Bits), also has a non-standard cable. This units has lower,640x192, resolution. Parts can be ordered to make a cable, for more info. contact Blair Birmingham at the Fairview store,(401-6555), or even Dave Rust,(remember him?),at the Bay/Cumberland Radio Shack. Another is the Thomson 4120, with a res. of 560x240. It has a green-only text mode and colour is available from Exeltronics,(in Canada),for $500 or Texcomp,( 1-213-366-6631),for $250US(+duty and shipping). Then, there is the more expensive Magnavox Pro 8CM873, which sells for $500US(UPS shipping included, duty extra), from MICROTECH Peripherals, (1-203-325-1895). This unit gives a super 926x580 Res., with Green-text and colour modes.

Finally, you will need the MG,(Millers Graphics), replacement EPROM set, if you use a Corcomp Disk Controller and the RAM Disk EPROM, if you use the Horizon Ram Disk,(only one EPROM will support a a maximum of two RAM Disks), for reliable operation of the Geneve.

Frequently, I'm asked why did I invest in the Geneve and not an IBM clone, which costs about as much, ($700 or so Canadian)? Also asked: why buy a clone, which isn't 100% compatible with the TI? In reply, I must say that the Geneve, as previously stated, is the equivalent of several peripherals all mutually compatible, as they exist within one card. Both in price and compatibility, the whole is better than the sum of its parts. The average IBM clone does **not** come with a PGA card, (for hi-res. colour graphics), which would add $600 to $700 to the cost. Most IBM-clones come with 256K RAM, which must be epanded by the user, for an extra $75. Then, to get the mathematical accuracy of the 9995, the clone needs a math co-processor chip for $300 or so. As for the speed comparable to the Geneve the turbo option adds another $50. In many cases, an joystick and mouse ports are extra's, as well. So a bargain shopper may be able to save a few bucks here or there. But realistically, how many of our community are willing to read through catalogs and call all over, to find the best price on all these numerous peripherals, which gives no guarantee that the cards will work with each other, or with your software! So let's be fair in our comparisons!

The software I use; MYWORD, PR-Base, and Fast Term2 are all I generally use. I am interested in learning more about Multiplan or Lotus 123, and they will be around for my Geneve. The software I use, the IBM-style keyboard and 80 columns are the main reasons why I made my purchase. If the TI 99/8 ever made it to production, I probably would have bought it, with its smaller memory,(64K), 40 columns and higher list price. So, instead of seeing the 9640 as different clone of a TI-99/4A, I see it as a package of several useful peripherals for my TI-99/4A.

Anyway, I hope to be able to bring my Geneve to the September meeting and invite you to bring your favourite software for evaluation. I think this is the best and fairest way to present the 9640, rather than to run "canned" graphic programs.

Well that's about it for this TId Bits. Until next time. BFN.
P.S., this rather long article consisted of 273 80-column lines or 77 SECTORS on disk and I still have 73% of available RAM free in MYWORD!-(BYE For Now)-

from COMPUTER SHOPPER, AUGUST 1987 Page 375

**TI Forum**

**continued from page 374**

**Newsletter of the month goes to the Toronto Users Group (#109-2356 Gerrard Street E., Toronto, Ontario M4E 2E2) and forwarded by Steve Michelson. I have always known the creativity of the Canadian users (as manifested by some super Fairware software offerings) and now I have to marvel at the quality of their newsletters. Marvelous and thanks, Steve.**