

Using Autostitch

T.O.M.S.

In Part 2, we briefly described *AutoStitch*, the ‘demo’ version of *PanoramaPlus 2*, mentioning that some of its features were limited and it wasn’t very user-friendly. We take the view that its status is rather more as a development vehicle than a demo.

In particular, if you load in some source images and simply let it do its thing, the result will be a relatively low-resolution JPEG which is clearly not up to the same standards of quality that *PanoramaPlus 2* routinely achieves.

However, we’ve since fiddled and twiddled with a few settings (as it our wont) and find that, provided you’re happy to accept some hefty overheads, the *AutoStitch* output can be greatly improved. The overheads are a much longer processing time and a *lot* of hard disc thrashing.

The fiddles and twiddles come in two parts. Firstly, *AutoStitch* needs to be pre-configured to output a high-resolution and high-quality image. To do that, *before* loading the images, click on *Edit-Options* to open the configuration window.

Ignore all the scribble in the middle. In the top-left corner, in the *Output Size* area, click on the *Scale (%)* button and select *100%* (Fig 1). This seems to be the direct equivalent of selecting *Optimum Size* in *PanoramaPlus 2*.

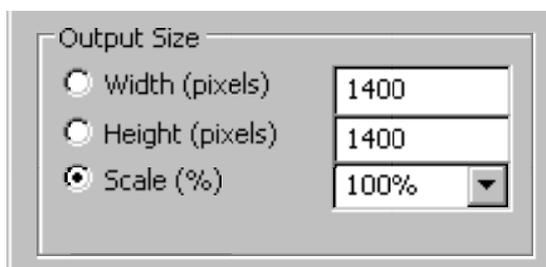


Fig 1 Output Size section

In the bottom-right corner, in the *Other Options* area, set the *System Memory (Gb)* to whatever RAM is installed in the machine, change the *JPEG Quality* from the default *75* to, say, *95*, click on *OK* to close the window (Fig 2) and proceed as normal.

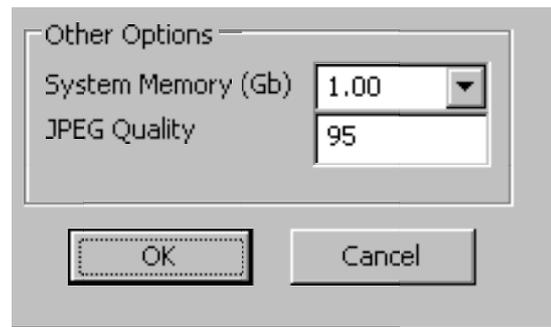


Fig 2 Other Options section

In principle, this will enable *AutoStitch* to output a much higher-quality, blended image (albeit as a JPEG). *However*, don’t be surprised if, at a fairly early stage in the blending process, it all falls over due to lack of memory. Drat.

In theory, Windows XP should automatically increase the amount of “virtual memory”^{*} to allow for this (indeed, you’ll probably get a pop-up window saying that it’s doing so) but, in our experience, this doesn’t actually happen and you hit the buffers. Double-drat.

(^{*} Virtual memory is an area reserved on the hard disc to simulate system RAM [a.k.a. ‘Paging file’]. Data is transferred between system RAM and virtual RAM when required; hence the increased disc thrashing).

So the second part of the fiddles and twiddles (where necessary), is to *manually* increase the virtual memory to suit, before using *AutoStitch*, and things should then eventually proceed to completion – but it may take a long time and with lots of disc thrashing to get there.

Here's the manual process:

- Click on **Start–Control Panel–System**.
- Click on the **Advanced** tab and, under **Performance**, click on **Settings**.
- Click on the **Advanced** tab and, under **Virtual memory**, click on **Change**.
- If you have more than one hard disc drive installed, select the required drive to reserve space as virtual memory; e.g. **C: [HDD]**.
- Under **Paging file size for selected drive**, click on the **Custom size** button.
- In the **Initial size (MB)**: window, enter a suitable figure; the recommended value is *1½ times* the system RAM so, if you have 1GB RAM in the machine, type in **1500**.
- In the **Maximum size (MB)**: window, type in a suitable figure. No recommended maximum is given but, bearing in mind this will be deducted from the hard disc's general storage capacity, we suggest twice the system RAM; in this illustration type in **2000**.
- Click on **Apply** and **OK** to save the settings and then on **OK** (twice) to close the other windows.

If you now re-attempt to blend the source images, it should all proceed to completion without hiccup, noting however that the processing time is much extended (roughly 1½ times that taken by *PanoramaPlus 2*) and with *lots* of hard disc thrashing.

However, the end result from *AutoStitch* should now be on a par with its release version; *PanoramaPlus 2*.

Increasing the virtual memory needs to be done only once and the machine does not need to be restarted. However, the *AutoStitch* configuration settings are not saved.

This isn't the nuisance it may sound as, for instance, you can do an initial, low-resolution 'first-cut', then decide to output a high-res version, make the configuration changes shown in Figs 1 and 2, and proceed.

The quality of the end result is normally identical to that from *PanoramaPlus 2* with **Optimum Size** set – and the money thereby saved can be put towards getting a new hard disc drive...

T.O.M.S., toms@ndirect.co.uk
