Gerald's Column
by Gerald Fitton

I suppose the biggest news on the Fireworkz front at the moment is that Fireworkz Pro is now available so that must be my major topic for this month. Before tackling Fireworkz Pro I must cover the single topic from my bulky correspondence which has overshadowed all others.

Acorn's Standards

I was going to head this section Dongles, etc but it occurred to me that if I did so then many of you would either skip this section or even skip "Gerald's Column" altogether – as if you would!

I've had a few more positive letters referring to Dongles and other non standard hardware (eg the printer lead which comes with some Turbo Drivers) as simple cost effective methods of keeping piracy at bay and hence reducing the cost to genuine purchasers. Usually these people make a point of the fact that they've had no problems (and I believe them). I've had even more letters (some at second hand sent to other Archive authors) who complain at length and in detail particularly about dongles. The quantity of mail on this subject has overwhelmed my 'system' so let me apologise if I haven't sent you a reply yet. (Let me add that all who sent me a stamp have had a reply!)

Now that you've had your say here is a summary of my advice to you; let's see if we can make it the last words on this topic. It concerns standard and non standard hardware and software rather than anything specific like dongles.

Many pieces of hardware and software on the Acorn market follow Acorn's guidelines either completely or closely. If you buy just those items then you'll find that, as you gradually develop your system by making new purchases or upgrading 'old' hardware and software, then everything continues to 'work' (and work better with your new purchases) nearly all the time. Even when they don't work the problems are usually sorted out promptly and with a minimum of fuss. An example of such a problem with Fireworkz on the Risc PC arose when Acorn upgraded its sprite specification to include 24 bit sprites. This was sorted out quickly by Colton Software issuing a new TaskX module for Risc PC users. Fireworkz Pro checks what version of the Operating System yu have and loads the appropriate taskX module automatically.

On the other hand if you buy something which is non standard and there is a general upgrade then (a) you may find that the non standard item you've purchased still works and works well but (b) some other piece of (standard) software or hardware ceases to function (or worse, generates an intermittent fault)! An example is that Turbo drivers have caused many crashes in both Fireworkz and PipeDream (but Style and Artizan work perfectly). When that happens you will find that the supplier of the item built according to Acorn's standard (eg Fireworkz) will be mystified. Sometimes they'll blame Acorn but generally it will be only after some time has elapsed (often months) that the real culprit (and a solution) is found.

Hence my advise is to look at the benefits you will gain from using a non standard item and decide whether these benefits outweigh the future problems which may (or may not)

be created. On this basis I have rejected the (non standard) Turbo drivers (which I can manage without) but accepted Style which I believe is the definitive desk top publisher and which I prefer to Ovation. I have Publisher as well as Style but, only because of the dongle, I have relegated it to my A440 (RISC OS 2) machine; I use Publisher occasionally when I have need of a feature (eg guide frames) which it has and which Style hasn't.

Before you write to me saying that Style doesn't use a dongle and ask "What are you talking about when you imply that there is something non standard about Style?" let me ask you to look in your !System directory. There you will find that Computer Concepts have inserted their own !CCShared directory. The recommended method of including any modules specific to an application, utility or package is to place those modules within the specific application directory (eg in !Style) and not in !System. I do not know potential problems this creates but I'll bet we haven't heard the last of the unwanted effects of CCShared's contents! However, Style is so good that I've decided to take the risk and hope that i won't regret it.

Finally, thanks for all your letters on this topic. I'm sorry that replies to some of you have been delayed for so long. It does help if you send a stamp and a self addressed label.

Fireworkz Pro

The version of Fireworkz Pro which I have is 1.20. Fireworkz is still at version 1.07 and an upgrade to this version is not yet available.
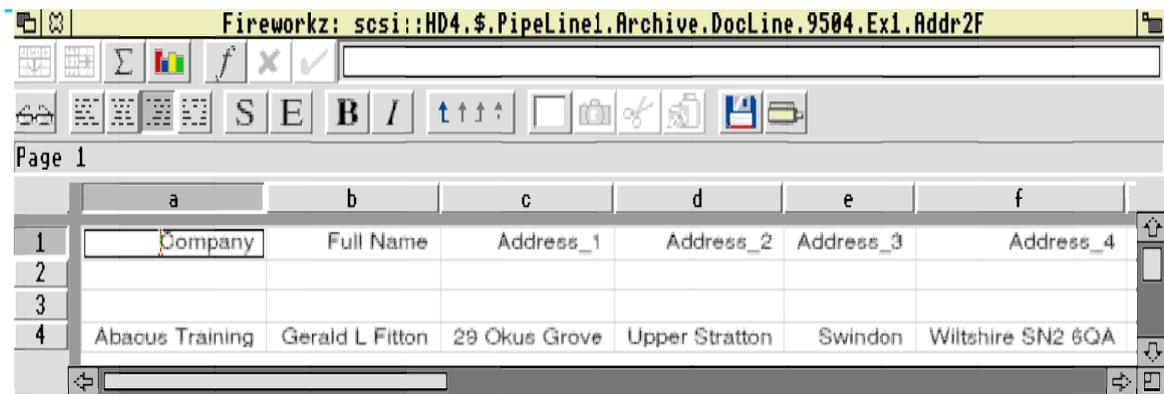
The press release from Colton Software gives the price as £149 + VAT but, if you don't have any of Colton Software's products and want Fireworkz Pro then you will find it is available at a lower price from NCS. If you have Fireworkz and want to upgrade to Fireworkz Pro then you can do so for £49 but only directly from Colton Software. If you have only Wordz the upgrade is £89; from Resultz it is £69; from PipeDream 4 it is £99; and from PipeDream 3 £124. To these prices you must add VAT and postage. Further details about these products are available from Colton Software on telephone number +44 (0) 1223 311881 or on fax number +44 (0) 1223 312010.

Recordz is available as a stand alone database for £99 + VAT but cheaper from NCS. Recordz and Fireworkz Pro use a database 'engine' called DataPower. DataPower was given a mini review by Simon Coulthurst in the March 1995 Archive on pages 45 to 47. In that article you'll find that DataPower is compared favourably with other databases. I don't wish to repeat details given in that article so I'll skip that by quoting one line: "My final choice is DataPower". My "final choice" would be Recordz (or Fireworkz Pro) because it has practically all the functionality of DataPower but without the software protection method about which Simon comments unfavourably.

What I shall concentrate on in this article is the way in which Fireworkz Pro integrates features from the DataPower database 'engine' into Fireworkz suite. Using two sets of examples I'll try to show you how these database features integrate with Wordz, Resultz and Fireworkz (non Pro).

When Do You Use a DataBase?

As an over simplified but general rule most of the things which you want to do with a database you can do with a spreadsheet such as Resultz! If you use a spreadsheet as a database then the usual way of doing so is to use one row per Record and one column per Field. In the screenshot below you will see a four line database in what I shall call Resultz format. It is part of the file [Ex1.Addr2F] from this month's Archive disc. The first row contains the column (field) headings. I have a total of 21 columns which run from column a to column u. The rows 2, 3 and 4 are space for three separate records. I have completed only the fourth record. You can add similar records into the second and third rows or add records after my fourth one.

When you have your records in Resultz format you can sort them by any field (column). In the same document or, more often, in a dependent document, you can select fields from any record. A typical application might be to pull from your database the address to which you want to send a letter when you are given only a name. To do this you use the lookup(,,) function of Recordz.

So when do you use a database rather than a spreadsheet? The over simplified version of my rule book (the beginner's version) contains "If you have only a few fields per record and what is important to you is that you want to scan the same field in many records (ie compare fields) then you should use the spreadsheet format." In this context, by spreadsheet format I mean the Resultz spreadsheet format and not the Recordz spreadsheet format. The second part of this rule reads "If you have many fields for each record and what is important to you is that you are able to look at and compare many fields of the same record then you need a database card format."

Let me give a couple of examples where a card layout is more easily read than a sheet layout. The first is a set of student records. Here you might wish to look at all the fields for a single student to see how their work, attendance, etc, compares from subject to subject. If you wanted to compare one student with another but only for one subject then the sheet layout would be easier to read.

My second example is a list of discs which I might have supplied to a customer. If I want to check on all the discs a single purchaser has bought (and is due to receive) then a card layout will reveal all the information about that customer.

If I want to compare one customer's choice with another but for only a few (of the many possible) discs then I prefer the sheet layout.
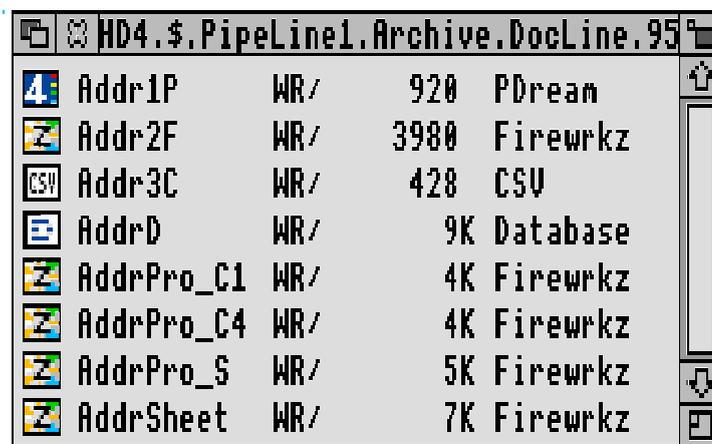
To summarise: Recordz database facilities will be most useful to you if you have many fields (rather than few) and if you want to see all (or most) fields but for only one (or few) records at a time. If you have few fields and want to compare one record with another then you should consider the Resultz format (which is the same as the spreadsheet of the non Pro version of Fireworkz).

File Conversion

Let's start with an obvious one which may be of use to only a few of you. If you have the DataPower database then you can transfer files between DataPower and Fireworkz Pro or Recordz.

Many more of you will have databases in either PipeDream or Resultz format. If you have Results then what you might expect is that data held in Resultz format would be automatically accepted by Recordz. This is not so; you need to go through the intermediate stage of using the CSV format.

In the following paragraph I refer to files in the Ex1 directory of the Archive monthly disc. Even if you do not have that disc you should be able to follow the descriptions of the package given in this article.

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HD4.$.PipeLine1.Archive.DocLine.95
Addr1P      WR/      920  PDream
Addr2F      WR/     3980  Firewrkz
Addr3C      WR/      428  CSV
AddrD       WR/       9K  Database
AddrPro_C1  WR/       4K  Firewrkz
AddrPro_C4  WR/       4K  Firewrkz
AddrPro_S   WR/       5K  Firewrkz
AddrSheet   WR/       7K  Firewrkz
```

The method of transferring files to Recordz (or to the database of Fireworkz Pro) is to load the PipeDream (eg [Addr1P]) or the Resultz (eg [Addr2F]) format file into PipeDream or Resultz and then Save the file in CSV format. The CSV format file [Addr3C] has been created this way. Drag the CSV file to the Pro icon on the icon bar and select the [db_sheet] template (see the screenshot below).

If you do this with a copy of the CSV format file [Addr3C] (don't use the original and don't try to do it by loading the file from your Archive disc) you will find that a Database format file called [Addr3C_f_d] will be saved automatically to the same directory as that from which you loaded the CSV file. The screen will display a Recordz format file called [Addr3C_f]. You don't need [Addr3C_f] so discard it!
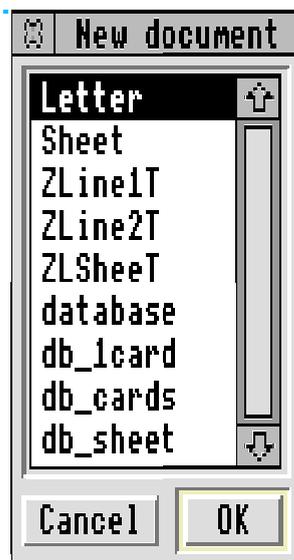
What I did next was to rename the [Addr3C_f_d] Database file as [AddrD]; you'll find it in the same directory as the CSV file. Then I dragged [AddrD] to the Pro icon and selected the template [db_sheet]. I changed the name of the displayed file to [AddrPro_S] and Saved it.

The combination of the two files [AddrD] and [AddrPro_S] is the Recordz format sheet combination which replaces the Resultz format sheet file [Addr2F]. The Recordz format might look similar to the Resultz format but if you look at the two files side by side you'll see that the button bars are quite different. For example there is no formula line in the Recordz format display.

The Sheet Layout

Click the <menu> (mouse middle) button on the displayed [AddrPro_S] document and select the Database – Layout menu. Within the Layout menu you'll find a Rows Auto radio button. Deselect it and change the number of Rows to 1. When you click on the OK box you'll find that the screen display changes to a single line. You can move through the database using the left and right arrows of the database button bar. Of course you can display as many or as few rows as you wish by using the Database – Layout menu.

The Card Layout

You can use the Layout menu to change the display to a card layout. I suggest that you investigate what happens when you change the number of Rows and Columns for the layout.

Starting from [AddrPro_S] I changed the layout to a single card layout and then saved the displayed file as [AddrPro_C1]. The file [AddrPro_4C] is a four card version. Both of these card displays will look different from the one which you have created. This is because I have moved the fields and field names around on the card so that I can see more at once. You move fields and field names by double clicking on the field and then dragging it as you would an object in a DrawFile. I find the tools available for doing this a bit rudimentary compared with tools available in DrawPlus. Before you ask me, I can't find a way of using DrawPlus to create card layouts.
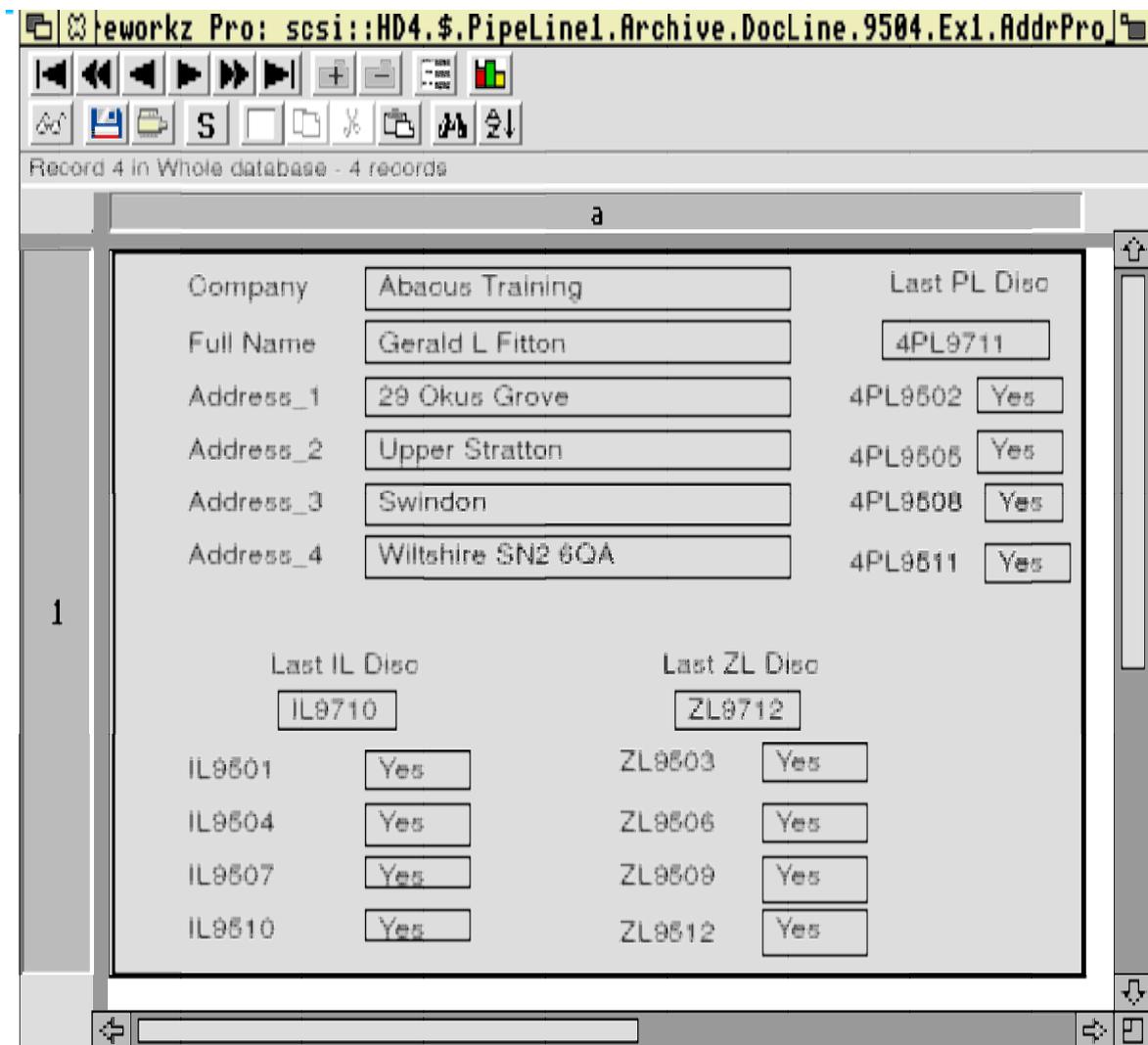

Recordz Cards into Resultz Format Sheets

Load the file [AddrSheet] and you'll see that I have a single card display in cell b3. Unless something has gone wrong then you should find that the cell b3 is selected.

Perhaps the best way of thinking about this combination is to think of [AddrSheet] as a conventional Resultz sheet but with the Recordz database file [AddrD] loaded into and contained within a single cell, namely b3, of [AddrSheet].

If you click on any cell but b3 then you will find that the button bar is what I shall call the Resultz button bar. Yes! I know it looks different from the 'old' Resultz button bar but I expect that, when the next version of Resultz (or Fireworkz non Pro) comes out the button bar will be like that of Fireworkz Pro. If you click on cell b3 then you'll find that the button bar changes to what I shall call a Recordz type with the database buttons.
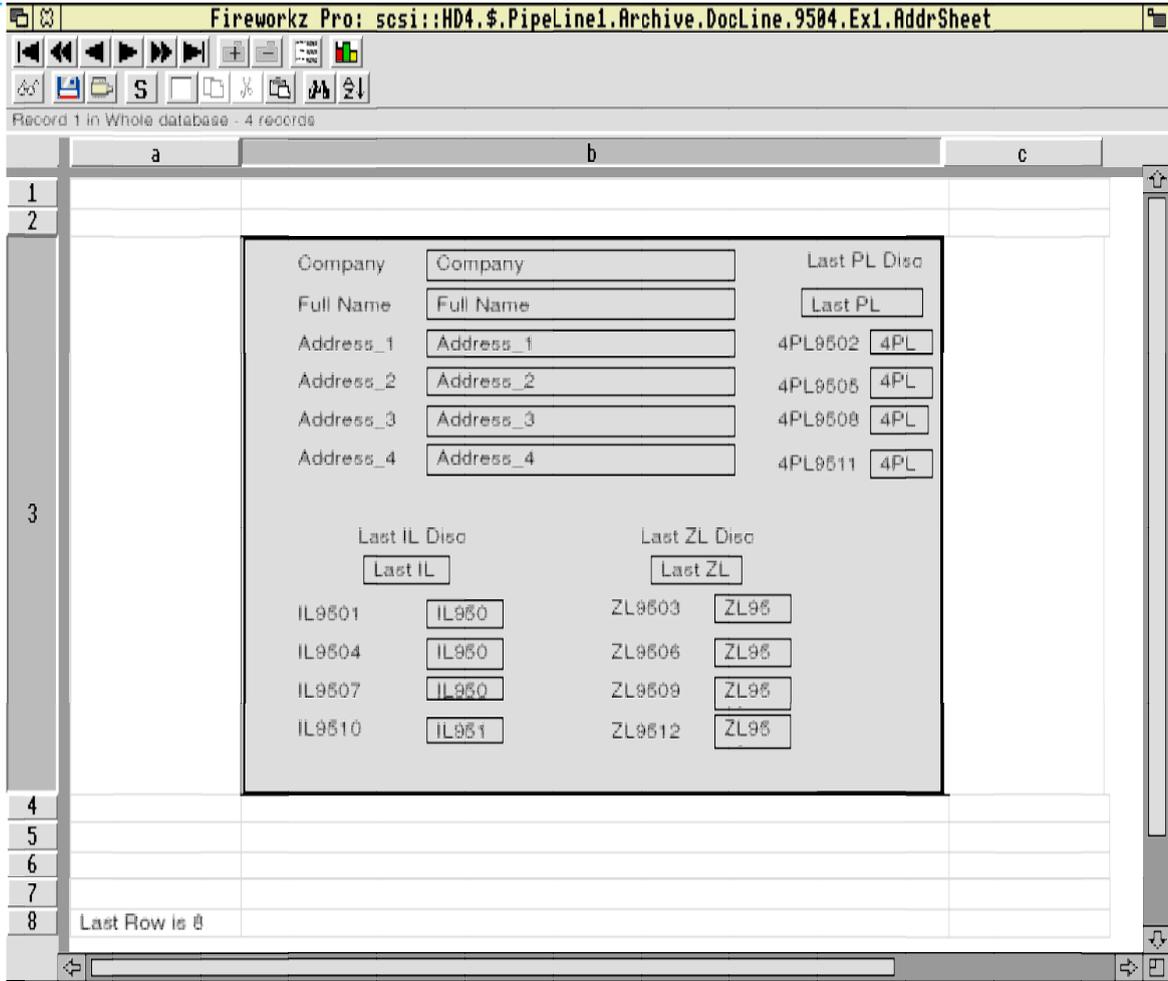
When you are 'in' a database cell all the database functions can be used. When you are in a Resultz cell then the database functions can not be used! I've tried inserting two different databases into different cells of the same Resultz sheet with reasonable success.
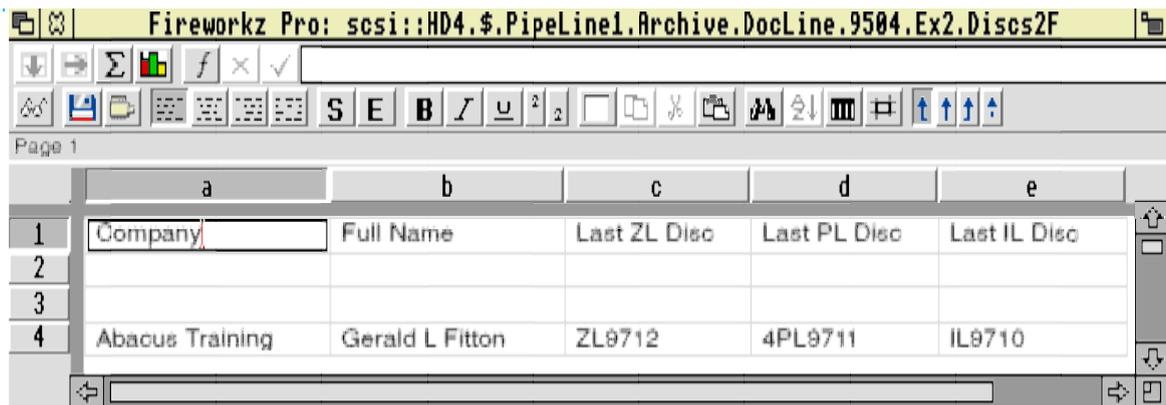
What inevitably causes a complete crash is trying to change the Layout (using the layout menu) of a database within a Resultz sheet. However, you can change the position of fields and field names and then Save the new card.

I was disappointed to find that [AddrSheet] did not Save the record number which was being displayed at the time of Saving. For me that would be a useful additional facility to include in the next version.

Recordz Sheets into Resultz Format Sheets

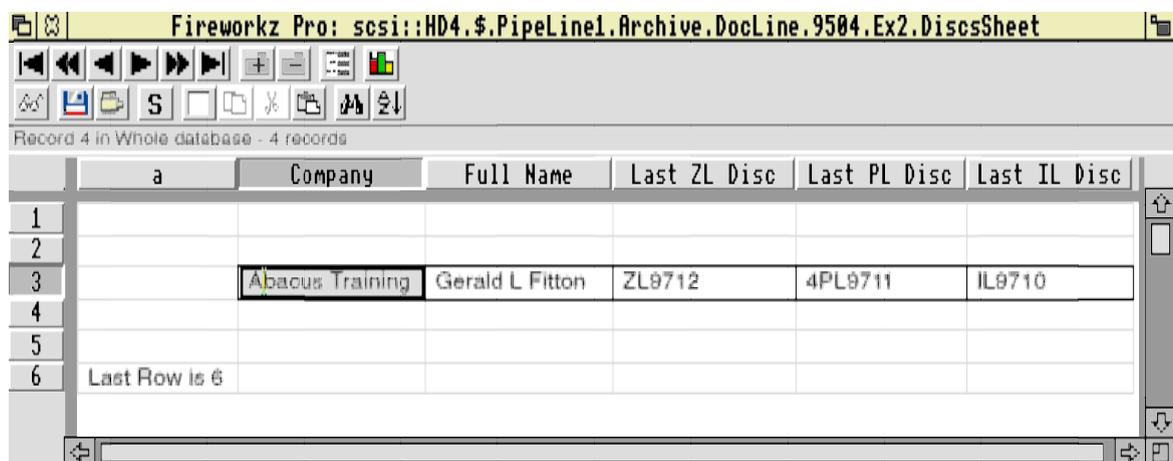The files to which I refer below are from the Ex2 directory of the Archive disc.

The screenshot below shows a Resultz format database consisting of four lines. The fourth line contains a single record. I have saved this Resultz type database as a CSV file and then dragged the CSV file into a Fireworkz Pro db_sheet template. I reduced the db_sheet to one row and Saved the result as [DiscsPro_S]. I loaded this database file into a Resultz type sheet to create the file [DiscsSheet].

In [DiscsSheet] I have a single record displayed in row 3. In the same way as the previous section you might think of this combination as the whole of the database file [DiscsD] loaded into and contained within the block b3f3 of the [DiscsSheet] display.

It is the database file [DiscsD] which is loaded into [DiscsSheet] and not the file [DiscsPro_S]. If you want only [DiscsSheet] (containing the database) then you can safely delete the file [DiscsPro_S] but you must not delete [DiscsD].

You will find that, as in the previous section, when you are 'in' a database cell the button bar displays database buttons and, when you're 'in' a Resultz cell the button bar shows Resultz type buttons.

I had hoped that, somewhere else in [DiscsSheet] such as in slot b6, I could enter a slot reference to a database slot which would change 'automatically' to follow the changing field in the database. When I tried this, all seemed to be well right up to and including saving the file. However, when I reloaded the file [DiscsSheet] it was always corrupted. Have a go and you'll see what I mean. This is a 'bug' which will be fixed in a later release of Recordz and Pro.

In a similar way to the previous section the record number is not saved by [DiscsSheet]. I would like to see the record number saved with [DiscsSheet].

Non Database Features of Fireworkz Pro

In this section I shall briefly describe changes from Fireworkz which have nothing to do with the database. It seems likely to me that these features will become part of the next version of Fireworkz (non Pro).

There is a new button bar. The icons are smaller and the status line is now in Homerton rather than System font. If you don't have a multisync monitor then you may find this change more difficult to read. I've had correspondence to that effect. On the plus side the smaller icons don't use up so much of the screen.

You can now edit within a cell rather than at the formula line. I find this a mixed blessing because I sometimes lose Styles (and Effects) applied to that cell and I have to reapply them. Cell types (ie text or numbers including formulae) are recognised automatically.

Something so many of you have asked for is now included – negative numbers in red. This is achieved by allowing you to specify two different Styles for positive and negative numbers.

The dialogue boxes for Names has been extended to include a description of the Name.

There are also features which will help file transfer from RISC OS to Windows such as an XLS (Excel) format loader.

Fireworkz Pro – Summary

Recordz is a database package which looks and works very much in the same way as the DataPower database (recommended by Simon Coulthurst as his "final choice" in last month's Archive) but without the software protection which he disliked and regarded as its only major 'fault'. recordz is cheaper than DataPower and is my "best choice" for a database.

Recordz integrates with Wordz and Resultz (and Fireworkz non Pro) to form Fireworkz Pro.

There are still a few 'bugs' in Recordz and Pro. Most of these seem to me to be related to the integration of Recordz within Fireworkz. Even now you can hold databases (such as [DiscsD]) in card or sheet format within a Resultz type sheet. Later you will be able to make 'pull' references from the database into a Resultz type sheet.

So far as use is concerned, I can see the addition of Recordz database facilities to Fireworkz (to make the integrated package Fireworkz Pro) will be useful for those databases which contain too many fields to fit into Resultz type sheet layout. However, I would still stick to the Resultz type of sheet for those databases of mine having few enough fields to fit them across a screen.

I would very much welcome your views and experiences of Fireworkz Pro. In the meantime, if you find any 'bugs' or differences from Fireworkz which you consider a 'downgrade' then please send an example on disc to Colton Software direct and, if it's not too much trouble, let me know the response from Colton Software and the outcome.

Finally

My address is that of Abacus Training which you will find on the back cover of Archive. I prefer letters on disc together with a short written note describing the nature of the contents; please do not try to describe a problem or feature without an example file on disc since it is far too easy for me to misunderstand what you mean. All discs will be returned and quickly if you include a self addressed label and (if you live in the UK) a stamp for return postage.