Research

Title: First XLEnt Word Processor
Season: 4
Episode: 2
Dates: 2017.09 -> 2017.10

Overview

Software

Word processor. From the manual:

Congratulations on your purchase of the First XLEnt Word
Processor. This is the first time XLEnt software has
released a program that can be directly compared to others
on the market. In the past, we have given you unique,
powerful applications such as Typesetter that have no equal.
However we think this is the best word processor for your
Atari.

It is powerful and full featured, yet a breeze to use.
Powerful enough for us to write the manual, yet simple
enough for personal letters. Don't be overwhelmed by the
number of features, they are there so that you'll never
outgrow this word processor. In keeping with our goals, we
have given you a powerful tool at a reasonable price.
Congratulations again for purchasing the first word
processor good enough for us to put our name on.

Thats what this episode is about. Let find out if it lives
up to its billing.

Publisher

About the publisher:

-Not a lot of information out there.
-XLEnt Software was based in Springfield, Virginia.
-Rather short lived, from 1985-1988.
-XLEnt software had many programs written by Patrick
Dell'Era
-Randy Dellinger 83-87
-The name still exists today as a Nevada based company, but
I dont think its the same or even another incarnation of
this company. The one that exists today deals with z/OS
[mainframe] security software.

About the author:

David Castelli was a student in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. [SNB: Allison: Take off, eh!] He was also the president of his local Atari users group. David had owned at Atari 400 since 1981, but at the time this was published also had a 130XE and 520ST. [SNB: Allison: Queue sixteen thirty two atari podcast] [SNB: ST Bell].

David had written a couple of video games intended for commercial release. Unfortunately, by the time the first game was finished, it was already outdated by games with better graphics. The second game, which boasted better graphics, was finished in the midst of video games declining popularity. [SNB: Allison: That must be the great crash of 83.] So both games gathered dust in his disk case.

It was at this point he gave up trying to conquer the elusive video game mart and started concentrating on writing a word processor and several utilities. One of the utilities was accepted by ANALOG magazine, but had yet to be published when this word processor was released. Some of his other programs made it to the public domain, and others never made it out of his disk case.

As of this release, David was writing programs on the 520ST, but still planned to continue programming on the 130XE.

Technical Data

-Supports Joystick use as well for navigating a document, and menu selection.

Manual

Printed on 5.5 x 8.5 paper, double sided, in black and white. It is spiral bound and 64 pages cover to cover. The front cover is mainly black and white. In the upper 2/3rds, there is a light gray piece of notebook paper. In the upper half of that is the program title and author in large text, using two fonts. The first font is in black thin letters and says "The First XLent" at the top, and "by David Castell" at the bottom. The second font appearing between the previous two lines, is in larger, red, and wide fancy lettering and says "Word Processor" across two lines. In the bottom left corner of the notebook paper in red letters, it says "For the Atari 130 XE & 48K Home Computers". Well, thats what my copy shows anyway. I have the later 2.1 version. My copy also includes a single sheet single sided flyer in black and white of the same size promoting the software.

There are no screen shots or tutorials included. Written
well for the most part, though some parts can be confusing.

Includes a word on piracy since the disk is not copy
protected:&R|R&R&R|| the staff of XLENT software are computer
users. We know that having copy protected programs can be a
royal pain in the temple. Looking to our legitimate users
needs first, we have decided to NOT copy protect the First
XLENT Word Processor. This means you will be able to make a
back-up copy of the program. This is what we have done for
you.

Here is what we ask you to do for us. Please do not give
away copies of the program to anyone. Not only is this
stealing, but it deprives David and XLENT Software from
making a modest profit on the program. If the thin line of
modest profit disappears then XLENT might follow suit, and
David might return to the cave from which he appeared.
Seriously, pirating hurts the entire computer community.
You honesty and support is appreciated.

[SNB: Allison: Crap. [[sinc 500]] Where can I send my
money?] At least my copy is legit.

Packaging

Not 100% sure. Many of XLents products where packed in a
6x9 inch vinyl folder with the disk on the front covers
inside sleeve and the manual in the back covers inside
sleeve. My copy does not have said vinyl folder, nor do I
think it would fit in one because of the spiral binding.

                          Usage

When booting, [after ramdisk on 130XE], press any key to
interrupt the load and bring up an OPTIONS menu. This menu
includes a choice of loading the Word Processor, a
MicroScreen Picture Formatter, and Printer Driver
Construction.

Memory sizes on different equipment:

1:
800: 18024 bytes free
XL: 28774 bytes free
XE: 28630 bytes free. can get 28774 if disable ramdisk

2.1:
800: 18257 bytes free

XL: 28968 bytes free
XE w/192: 28824 bytes free. can get 28968 if disable
ramdisk

Screen

-Top of screen is tab line or ruler, then 20 lines of edit
window, and the last 4 lines are the command window.
-Command window has status messages and prompts on the left
side (as well as copyright at the start). On the right side
are 6 icons, 3 across in 2 rows. The top row from left to
right is a P icon for Print, then a camera icon for Copy,
then a scissors icon for Cut. The bottom row from left to
right is a bottle of paste icon for Paste, then a glasses
icon for Search, and last a floppy disk icon for disk
utilities.

Menu

-Press ESC or use the joystick button to access the menu&|K&A♥-
The HELP key will bring up help on the XL/XE, and this is
Ctrl-Shift-H on the 800.

Functions

-Editing: word wrap on hyphen and space, software selectable
CR or LF (useful if two different computers share a
printer), single pass double column printing, dual pass
available too for stubborn formatting commands, file insert,
document comments, widow and orphan control, soft hyphen,
verbatim bytes, and word count
-Text formatting: margins, automatic indent, physical and
logical page length, force page eject, conditional new page
(based on how many lines left on the page), line spacing,
text centering, text justification, page numbering, line
feeds (why not just press return), dividing line, offset
directive, hard space
-Window mode: doesn't split screen, but allows you toggle
between two files in full screen mode. Both a blessing and
curse.
-print preview, in 80 columns
-Block functions, cut, paste, save to file
-Search and replace, and also search and delete. The search
string is limited to 30 characters. A wildcard of * is also
support for single characters. Search can also be used just
to find text.
-Document marks, which serve as shortcuts to locations in
the text, but limited to 5 per document

-HEaders and Footers, though limited to 1 line
-File chaining
-disk file preview - view contents of a file on disk without
modifying/losing document in memory&R |K&R♥-Printing - seems
obvious. It supports partial document printing, as well as
multiple copies. Printing to screen and disk is also
supported. Though There is a caveat with this program.
Instead of lining the print head up with the top of the
paper, you line it up about 1" down the paper [where you
want printing to begin]. This was done to reduce the chance
of sheet feed paper from slipping or jamming because the
printhead is too close to the top of the paper.
-Graphcs printing, but you must have epson compatible
printer for automatic printing. Anything else and you'll
need to embed the graphic codes yourself. pictures can be
embedded anywhere in the text. It supports uncompressed
images, B/graph, and Xlent Software Typesetter Icons. You
have the option to print the entire image or part of it,
with various formatting options like condensed or reverse
image.
-Mail merge, which supports Synapse Software SynFile +, in
addition to its own format.
-Dos functions are also included, as indicated by the floppy
disk icon referenced earlier. Functions are:
    -DIR which can display 40 filenames
    -LOAD loads a file into memory. There are 3 options
which are NORMAL to erase memory and load the file; APPEND
which adds the file to the end of memory; and insert which
loads the file into the current cursor location.
    -SAVE saves a file to disk. You can save the entire file
or just part of it.
    -DELETE deletes a file on disk.
    -FORMAT lets you format a disk.
    -SPOOL which lets you display the contents of a disk file
directly to the screen without effect what is in the editor
memory.
    -Need more DOS functions, press CTRL-D from the DOS menu
and exit to DOS. If MEM.SAV is working, you press RESET and
return to editing.

The disk also has a printer driver construction utility.
You'll need to break out your printer manual for this. It
lets you build custom printer configurations for use within
the program.

Files

2.1 Uses Atari DOS 2.5. You can however substitute whatever
dos you want, or use a ram disk, etc.

AUTORUN.SYS - Main loader program.
EDITOR.SYS - XL/XE version of the word processor

PRINT.SYS - text formatter for XL/XE version
WORDPRO.OBJ - 400/800 version of the word
processor&R|K&R♥DRIVER.MKR - Print Driver Construction Utility
PICTURE.MKR - Microscreen Picture Formatter Utility
HELP - Has the help screen information
HELPM65.SRC - Mac/65 source code for help
DRIVER.SYS - Printer configuration [driver], used by both
800 and XL/XE versions of word processor
PRINTSET.SYS - Printer special characters access, used by
XL/XE version of the word processor
FNT files - Alternative fonts

Fun Facts

-Won Outstanding Product award from Antic in May 1987.
-Manual written with it.
-On the XL/XE the menu icons blank while searching. This is
because the icons and the international character set can
not be displayed at the same time. This was done so the
search function could search strings with international
characters.
-THe back cover of the manual has a characterature of the
XLent staff. It's titled "Presenting the Xlent Staff", and
shows 11 different halloween themed cartoon characters. It
also has a note underneath that says "not pictured: Jennifer
Brebson".
-January 1987, this word processor received an Antic Award
from Antic magazine for being one of the best word
processors with numerous unique and useful features.

Summary

Rather small copy/paste buffer at 800 bytes. This is one
screen. This is probably because of a feature I'll mention
in the likes section shortly. You can work around this,
with some patience. Though today it's not uncommon to cut
and paste several pages of text, and modern word processors,
er rather the operating systems, handle it with ease.

One thing that can be annoying is the inconsistent
application of command between the 800 and XL/XE. The 800
uses CONTROL, whereas the XL/XE uses OPTION. Not a big
deal, but if you started with an 800 and moved to the XL/XE,
you might have some retraining to do.

One of the commands OPTION-F, or CONTROL-F, depending on
what your running on, inserts a special formatting line into
the document. These lines are used to set formatting
options for the text.

Proper use of the ESC key. In this program, just like with
PaperClip reviewed in the last episode, ESC is the operation
abort key for practically every function. It will also back
you out of menus sequentially. On a side note, theres an
interesting use of the Break key. The break key will move
the cursor to the start of the next line. While were
talking about keys, the Inverse key [SND: Bell] is used to
invoke text alignment mode.

There are also a couple of ways to track memory usage. Got
a large document? Check to see if there is enough disk
space to save it [SND: Allison: in 125 byte sectors]. If
you would rather see free memory in bytes, yes thats me, you
have that option too. The only down side is that its not
readily displayed all the time, requiring a key sequence to
view. But thats not too big of a deal.

Tracking memory becomes especially important when splitting
the editing window for two documents. Each window is given
half of the systems memory. If you have a particularly long
document when you split the window, it is possible to
truncate the document. Today systems have more memory than
they need and word processors have robust multiple document
windowing. My mac has 16GB memory. Thats enough memory to
hold the complete 48K memory banks of 349,525 Ataris. No
worries about running out of document memory here.

When your ready to print there is a section in the manual
that tells you how to integrate with XLent Software's
MegaFont, should you wish to print your documents with more
flare than the standard dot matrix font. The manual even
tells you how to print to a serial printer by printing to
file and using DOS copy command to copy it to the printer.

The first XLent Word Processor, while having plenty of
features, falls down a bit in its implementation of text
formatting. The way its done you enter ascii text commands
on a formatting line. Doing it this way allows documents
created with this word processor to be read by virtually any
other editor or word processor, and likewise loading
virtually any other file. But the command structure can be
a little complex or confusing. The manual in this area can
be helpful, but it in itself is a bit confusing. Mess one
up and it ignores the whole line. I like many of the other
word processors formatting commands that embed a binary into
the text better. I would fore go the ability to read the
document in another program for ease of use/reading.

One thing that was unique was the ability to skip text. You
can set a marker on section of text, and when printing, this
section will be skipped. Useful if you want to remove some
from print but retain it in the document.

Another pseudo neat trick was the inclusion of a print

spooler for the 130XE. With it you can print and edit at
the same time. Its installed as an AUTORUN file on the disk
at boot time. Due to how the Atari works, it will
periodically freeze when the spooler sends data to the
printer. So somewhat useful if your patient and tolerant of
interrupting your flow.

Likes

-It inverses the text when you define a block of text making
it super easy to identify the selection. [SNB: Bell] Oddly
not for block delete. Today we have colored highlight
depending on the word processor in use.
-Heres a neat new trick. An editable cut and paste buffer.
-Double column printing. often overlooked in word
processors of the era. this can do it in a single pass.
some formatting commands require dual passes which is also
supported. double column printing is only available on the
130XE.
-80 column print preview thats actually legible.

Dislikes

-80 column print preview, though rendered graphically,
doesn't display expanded or condensed print
-Cant save your program customizations like cursor speed,
shape, screen colors, etc.
-Inserting text at the beginning of a large document can be
slow. They do provide an easy work around which is to
insert some blank lines, change to type over mode, then
insert the text. Just make sure you insert enough blank
lines first!
-Text formatting command system

1985/86 Perspective
-

Retro Perspective
-

Bit Rating
-

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