Death of the ImageWriter II
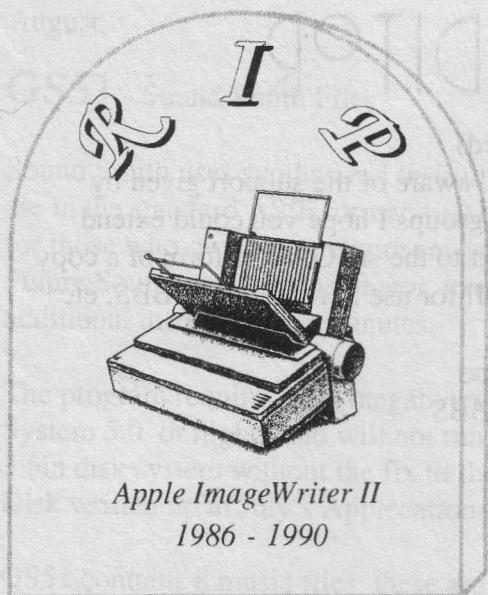
A Review of the Hewlett Packard DeskWriter Printer
by Tony Szabo - Contributing Editor

*Apple ImageWriter II
1986 - 1990*

The ImageWriter was once the first choice of all Mac users. All that is changing. The DeskWriter is now sure to be a contender for the crown.

In the beginning there was Macintosh and we all saw that it was good. The best for the rest of us. It ushered in a whole new era of high quality printing and coined the WYSIWYG word to describe its output to the ImageWriter. But like all good technology it doesn't take long to become obsolete. Sure the ImageWriter is still good but printing technology has left it lying in the dust of time.

Laser quality text is now what everybody wants. But the prices being asked for this printing solution restricts it to those who really need it or can write off the purchase for tax purposes. Not being in either category, as most of us find ourselves, I was forced to look for a cheaper alternative. I didn't even bother with the 24 pin printer line as I think they may be living on borrowed time. The only other option was an inkjet printer.

I had started looking early last year but the only viable option then was the DeskJet. This printer has excellent output but requires the purchase of a printer driver to use it on the Mac. A friend followed this avenue and reports the driver does work but slows things down considerably. He uses the DeskJet hooked to his Atari running a Mac emulator. The printer is also used to print in the IBM mode as well as its native Atari mode. This solution was obviously his best option.

My need was for a Mac only solution with solid Mac software. The DeskWriter appeared late last year and became an immediate success in the US. At a price of $US1195, $US895 on the street, this unit was a bargain. It was initially released in Australia at $2600 and I don't think many people bought it at that price. I wanted one but not for that amount.
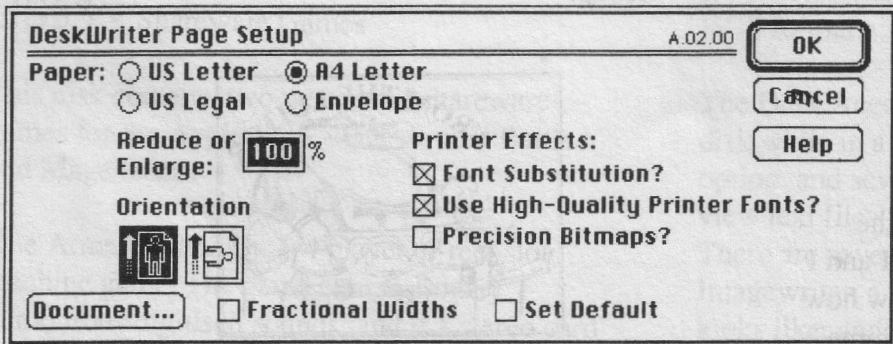
Prices have dropped and it is now available for $2190 list (*subject to change*). This is the price at which I parted with my money. Does the DeskWriter live up to its billing? Is it worth the price? Let's see.

The DeskWriter has recently been released, at the US Macworld in April, with both serial and AppleTalk available. This was added at no cost increase to buyers. This model is the one I review here.

The printer is well packaged and only requires the purchase of either the Localtalk or serial cables. Unlike other printers with AppleTalk this printer will not work in the AppleTalk network unless it is connected via a set of Localtalk cables. The printer senses which cable is being used and sets the single port accordingly. Try to set AppleTalk on with a serial cable will see the printout of pages of paper as the Mac interrogates what it thinks is a network for any connected printers.

Setup of the printer is simple to say the least. Remove it from the box, plug in your printer cable, the power supply (*a standalone job*) and install your software and you're away. The setup is described in two forms. The first is a Quick Setup Guide which shows the important (*read necessary*) steps in a large foldout format. The second is the very comprehensive Owner's Manual. In either case you are shown in easy steps with clear pictures and concise descriptions.

The driver software is a simple matter of dragging the DeskWriter driver (*serial or AppleTalk version*) into the System Folder and selecting your printer and port in the Chooser. Easy hey. Should be but I struck a few problems.

DeskWriter Page Setup   A.02.00   [OK]

Paper: ○ US Letter ● A4 Letter   [Cancel]
       ○ US Legal   ○ Envelope

Reduce or [100]%   Printer Effects: [Help]
Enlarge: ☒ Font Substitution?
Orientation   ☒ Use High-Quality Printer Fonts?
                      ☐ Precision Bitmaps?

[Document...]   ☐ Fractional Widths   ☐ Set Default

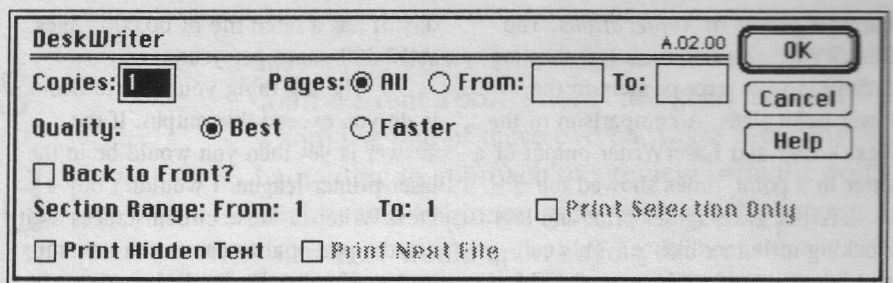*Selecting you Page Setup - Similar to the LaserWriter*

Not caused by the printer but my system setup. A small inclusion in the package is a list of software which has problems printing or doesn't print at all. Most of them are older versions. To that list they can add the Radius Accelerator driver. I tried a few test prints after setting up to see how it worked. The prints of directories in the Finder worked well in draft mode but in best mode the printer got a quarter of the way down the page and stopped dead, spat out the page and then printed an error message on the next page.

Suffice to say I was peeved. I tried the same from Word 4.0 using a previously entered document. Same result. I then began searching my System Folder for the culprit (*I guessed it was an INIT - correctly*). To cut a long story short the Accelerator driver turned up as the interloper. I cannot use the driver if I want to print in best mode. So, I am running without the driver installed. I have yet to hit a hitch (*fingers crossed*). I have also written to Radius in the US to see if a fix is available. I don't even bother with InfoMagic because they have been unable to supply me with any driver updates for two years. Hopefully a fix will be forthcoming.

This episode brings up the point that you can expect some problems with older software not specifically written for use with the DeskWriter. Hewlett Packard suggest you do as I did and approach the Manufacturer for an update.

The bad experience over, I must report I have had no further problems. I have tested my current stable of programs (*Word 4.0, Excel 2.2, Canvas 2.12, PowerPoint 2.0 and Xpress 2.12 to name a few*) and found no printing problems.

The DeskWriter comes complete with four font families of scalable printer fonts to give you good output. If you don't have ATM then these fonts (*CS Times, CS Triumvirate (Helvetica), CS Courier and CS Symbol*) are all scalable up to 250 points. The output they give you is indistinguishable from laser printer output. Should you need to use the full LaserWriter II font families then a further DeskWriter font set is

Printing couldn't be simpler

available also. These fonts are all from AGFA/Compugraphic.

I am a firm advocate of ATM and have many Type 1 Adobe fonts for use with that solution. All of these fonts are available to me at 300 dpi with the DeskWriter. Scaling of the fonts depends on the program in use. Word 4.0, for example, doesn't let you use fonts greater than 127 point. This restriction is the same on DeskWriter regardless of which font option you use.

Output from your application is automatic and requires no special dialog boxes to be used. All dialogs will be familiar all Mac users (*see the screen dumps sprinkled throughout this review*).

If you select Font Substitution in the Page Setup dialog the fonts like Geneva, Monaco and New York will be substituted with Helvetica, Courier and Times respectively at print time. The only thing you must keep in mind is that if you select Use High Quality Printer Fonts you must have that AGFA or ATM font available otherwise the driver will send a bitmap to the printer in much the same way as does the LaserWriter. This will increase your print times considerably. This output will be inferior unless you have the font in a 4 times larger size.

For example, if you print 12 point Chicago then you will need 48 point Chicago if you want a smooth printout. The driver software will warn you when this occurs. Users of ATM will see this warning all the time. Don't worry though as ATM picks up the font request before it reaches the printer and prints your font at 300 dpi (*if you have the Type 1 equivalent*).

Selecting precision bitmaps has the same effect as the LaserWriter by reducing the output by 4% to account for minor distortions of the bitmap

image at 72 dpi.

The DeskWriter has inherited the paper handling prowess of its bigger brothers the PaintJets. This gives you excellent printing options. The printable area on an A4 page is great and compared to laser printers is much more cost effective. The side margins are a minimum of 6.35 mm. The top margin 10.16mm and the bottom margin 11.43 mm. Very good.

The paper is stored in a paper tray set below the output tray. It has a capacity of 100 sheets. The printer will accept US letter and A4 paper. It will also allow the manual feed of No. 10 (US) or DL (European) envelopes. The best print quality will be achieved with good quality photocopier paper. A good point to remember with this paper is that it has a good and a bad side. Check for the direction of the arrow on the outside wrapper for which is the best side. This tip stands for laser printers also.

The ink cartridge is easily installed and, unlike the PainJet printers, is self priming. Output from the cartridge is 150 dpi in draft mode and 300 dpi in best mode. This cartridge is your print head and so is replaced with each new cartridge.

Now - the big question. How good is the output? Is it as good as that which you see here in this magazine? In a word YES! In fact this article was printed directly from the DeskWriter and sent to Roger through the mail. Convinced?

The three pages with ten different fonts (*and varying styles*) printed in 5 minutes 50 seconds.

The output of the printer is exactly the same as a LaserWriter in all non-PostScript aspects. If you need the PostScript output also then look out for a review of *Freedom of Press* in an

upcoming issue of *Applecations*. The DeskWriter gives noticeably better type definition than laser printers in the lower point sizes. A comparison of the DeskWriter and LaserWriter output of a letter in 9 point Times showed the DeskWriter gave lighter print and less blocking of letters like 'e'. This can also be attributed to the use of ATM. At the larger point sizes the print quality is almost indistinguishable. The PostScript printer has proprietary algorithms for hinting which even the DeskWriter using ATM has trouble matching. But compare the prices and you can immediately see the benefit of the DeskWriter.

Before you rush out and buy the DeskWriter there are some things you should be aware of. Firstly, its only a low usage printer (*what is the definition of low usage?*). The manufacturer recommends an average daily output of 20 - 25 pages. A maximum of 50 pages per day. It has a rated life of 60,000 pages at 12,000 pages per year.

The big thing you need to decide is do you exceed this output. If the answer is yes then you would be in the laser printer league. I wouldn't buy a DeskWriter in those circumstances as it has the potential to cause you unending bother. Hewlett Packard gives these figures as a guide and not a rigid regimen but don't tempt fate.

If you want a way to print high quality text and graphics at a low cost then I can fully recommend the HP DeskWriter. Although the printer lists for around $2190 you can do better. No not StatusGraph. I tried for days to get a price from them and failed every time (*they were always too busy*). In the end I tried DesignWyse in Melbourne. They will sell it to you for $2190 (*including cable*) but if you have a *good*, *working* ImageWriter II then they will give you a trade-in. I got $400 off the list price.

That's a total cost to me of $1790 and well worth it. Contact Rob at DesignWyse for full details on (03)706-8858. Don't try to fool them because you'll only get your old ImageWriter back in the mail without the discount.

The print cartridges retail at $40 but you may be able to get them cheaper overseas.

All in all I do believe that the DeskWriter is a very good option for the home and low volume business user. Other options for 300 dpi printing are at least double the cost. I do implore anyone looking for a new printer to seriously consider it. You won't regret the choice. The day of the dot matrix printer is over. It is rumored that by the end of this year a whole new choice of printers will have arrived but can you afford to live with that clunky dot matrix printer till then. If the answer is no then the DeskWriter deserves you attention. Happy Mac...

Some Examples of Type 1 Fonts Printed with the HP DeskWriter

Bookman 12 point
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Palatino 12 point
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Avante Garde 12 point
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Garamond 12 point
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789
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