The **wheel** thing

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse — or even that funny little wheel thing on Tim Nott's new Microsoft Mouse. Many happy hours were spent when he finally sussed it out.

I was very excited this month to receive a sample of the new Microsoft Mouse. This is the one that looks very much like the last. It's vaguely kidney-shaped but with a third thingy to twiddle — part-button, part-wheel, it sits between the two existing buttons.

Somewhat perplexed that the far end of the lead terminated in a PS2 (I think that's what it's called) plug rather than the screw-on 9-pin job that we know and love, I dug an adaptor out of the pocket of an old anorak and fired up the PC.

When Windows got to the bit when its internal checking orders "All those with mice take one step forward", I got the error message "Where do you think you're going, Mr Nott?" or words to that effect. Several changes of adaptor later, it was the same old story. Maybe, I thought, if I install the software first… (and no, I didn't RTFM as there was no FM to R — we press wallahs don't get that kind of cosseting). But still no joy, so I carried on with my distinctly shabby-looking Mouse Mark 2 and explored all the new Intellimouse goodies on offer apart from the wheel.

This brightened up the day considerably (it was about one o'clock), because I discovered all the labour-saving devices I'd missed since Windows 3.1 days. "Which way is up" is a clear winner. I'm left-handed and although, paradoxically, the asymmetrical MS mouse fits nicely in my left hand and I'm now well accustomed to using my middle digit as the main clicking appendage, I do tend to hold the thing slightly (well, very) skew-whiff.

Likewise, it's great to have "snap-to" back again — the trick that automatically moves the pointer to the default button of a dialogue box. And let's not forget the thing that causes the mouse pointer to disappear from one side of the screen and reappear on the other. Not much of an aid to productivity, but a superb practical joke.

The next stop was the brand new automatic lightup, as I call it. Waft the pointer over an icon or title bar, and it automatically grabs the focus without having to click. Cool, but for some strange reason often much slower than clicking normally. If you wish, you can also slow the pointer

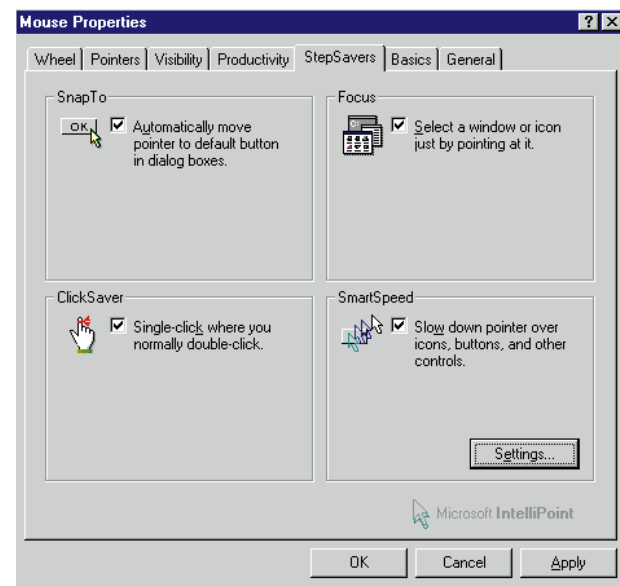**Fig 1** New Intellimouse goodies. All but the wheel work with older mice

down automatically over icons and buttons, so I whacked this into gear as well.

Now, having watched someone with motor neurone disease struggle bravely and patiently to position the pointer exactly on a button or icon, I can appreciate the value of this. But it does strike me that Microsoft has gone a little over the top in the degree of the effect. At the slowest speed, it's rather like running across a field and suddenly putting your foot into a deep pit of mud. There you are, mousing away, when suddenly you grind to an abrupt halt. After picking the mouse up and scrabbling it repeatedly across the desk, rather like launching a toy car, the pointer will suddenly take off and whizz across the screen.

There's a happy end to the story, because the proper adaptor arrived and I was at last able to use the new mouse, complete with wheel. This does all sorts of wonderful scrolling, panning and zooming things. And very lovely it is too. But it only works in Explorer, Internet Explorer, and Office 97. The latter was still in beta at the time of writing, and although exciting and fascinating in its own right, wasn't yet at the stage where I'd forsake my existing software to use it for daily work. So, human nature being what it is, I spent many happy hours wheeling around Internet Explorer, then switching to the word processor and twiddling away ineffectually before realising for the umpteenth time "Oh, silly me, it doesn't work here, does it?"

Got those old MSDOS compatibility blues again…
But enough of my problems; how about yours? The "compatibility mode" problem continues to maintain a high chart placing.

A handful of quickies

■ Notepad is fussy about extension names that haven't been registered as Notepad files. Save a file, say, as MYPROG.BAS and you'll find you've actually saved MYPROG.BAS.TXT. Using the "View/Options/File Types" dialogue to register, say, .BAS or .SCR as Notepad files is one way around this, but you might well want to preserve the existing association in order (in these examples) to run Basic listings or scripts. The way around this is to save the file as "MYPROG.BAS", with double quotes around it, which avoids the gratuitous .TXT on the end.
■ Tom Fitzgerald wants to know how to change the "Tips of the day". Start Regedit, search for "Tips" and keeping hitting F3 till you see the tips in the right-hand pane. Double-click on the number of the tip you wish to change and an edit box appears. Speaking of which, thanks also to Nicholas Metcalfe, who sent a complete set of tips culled from Twin Peaks, and Mark Harrop with a set of seventies aphorisms from Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt. Now, that's what I call obsession. But no more themed collections, please, be they Douglas Adams, Star Trek (especially not) or Coronation Street.
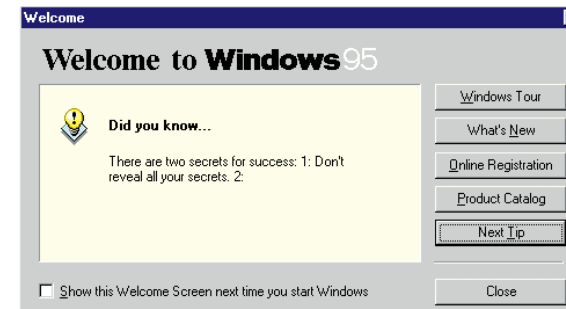

Fig 2 Thank you, Robert Winstanley, for this "Tip of the Day of the Month"

■Alternative tips are still trickling in, but I need more, so get your imagination and/or plagiarisation going. For a pointer to the sort of thing I'm after, see Fig 2 for a very fine "Tip of the Month", stolen from Robert Winstanley's email signature.
■ You can cheat at Hearts in Windows 95, too (see the Windows 3.1 column on page 273 for the full story). Open the Registry and go to Hkey_Current_User/ Software/ Microsoft/ Windows/ CurrentVersion/ Hearts. Right-click in the right pane and create a new string value with the name ZB and the value 42. As with 3.1, Ctrl+Alt+Shift+F12 will then reveal your opponents' hands. You

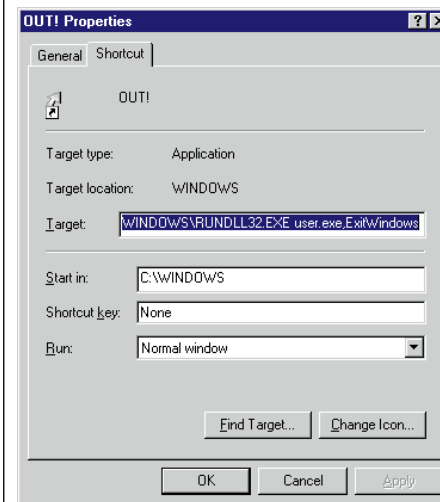**Fig 3** A quick getaway from Windows

can also change the default names by adding string values for p1name, p2name and p3name.
■ Are you sure you want to: shut down the computer?; restart the computer?; restart the computer in MSDOS mode?; close all programs and log on as a different user?; get rid of this annoying confirmation? If your wish is the lattermost, create the following shortcut on the Desktop, Start Menu or folder of your choice. The command line should read RUNDLL32.EXE user.exe,ExitWindows. Note there is no space after the comma or in ExitWindows. You'll get the usual prompts asking if you want to save any open, changed, files. If so, you can cancel the command, too. Apart from that, you're out. Finished. Shut down without further ado.

To briefly recap, this is the one where, seemingly out of the blue, your hard disk performance declines drastically and Control Panel/System/Device Manager shows that your disk controllers have been demoted to "MSDOS compatibility mode".

Mark Hewitt had this problem when installing Windows on an old-ish Elonex P90. Phil Kelly, of Elonex support, pinpointed the problem instantly and precisely. The Neptune motherboard does not support Plug and Play (P&P). But Win95 installs it anyway. Solution? Remove P&P from Device Manager, restart the PC, then manually "Add new hardware", select PCI Bus. Restart again and all should be well.

David Ingham had a similar problem after assembling his own PC. This time it was an unnamed hero at Microsoft tech support who stayed behind for 30 minutes after close of play to establish that the combination of Award BIOS and Windows 95 PCI-IDE drivers was the problem. New drivers from the motherboard supplier cured the problem. Robert Winstanley upgraded from 3.11, experienced the same

problem and tracked it to SYSTEM.INI. So look for DEVICE= lines that refer to files with the .386 extension. These are "legacy" devices from 16-bit days and can cause compatibility mode (and other) problems. Try commenting the line out by preceding it with a semicolon.

Order! Order!

Grahame Slope came up with an interesting challenge: "*How can I get the shortcuts in my StartUp folder to execute in a particular order?*" I really tried on this one. It seems to make no difference how, or in which order, the icons are displayed. Nor does the alphabetical order seem to matter. At one point, I thought I'd cracked it with the creation dates of the shortcuts but this, too, was a red herring. Stranger still, restarting the PC would sometimes load the applications in a different order. Then I remembered the other way: the load= and run= lines in WIN.INI. In conventional wisdom, the first runs a program minimised, the second in a normal window, and the trick is to leave a space between each item. For example:

```
run=notepad.exe charmap.exe
calc.exe
```

This actually worked, at least initially, but it must have been a fluke as re-ordering the same items or adding more didn't run them in the order specified.

Then of course, there's the other, other way, which is far more high-tech and involves editing the Registry to add new string values to:

```
HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\ SOFTWARE\
 Microsoft\ Windows\
 CurrentVersion\ Run
```

So I went there, did that, and needn't have bothered. Sure, the programs ran, but not in any perceivable or consistent order. So moving on to the other, other, other

Bugwatch

Remember the Windows 3.x Calculator bug? Well, you'll be delighted to learn that Windows 95 has one all of its own. Switch to scientific view, and multiply 0.57 by 100. If you don't get 57, that isn't a bug, that's you. Now press the INT key. What this should do is return the integer part of a number — that is, everything to the left of the decimal point. Whoops! Yes, I get 56 as well, with 0.58 and 0.28 giving similar results. There may well be others. In each case the Inverse INT function, which should return all to the right of the decimal point, gives 1. So at least there's some kind of method to the madness.

A glimpse of Christmas stocking

As I write this, the sun is shining and the window (strictly non-™) is wide open. The trees are turning gold and there's a faint smell of woodsmoke from the first log fires of the season. At the top of my page it says "January issue, 1997" so it must be Christmas. And you thought Windows 95 was confusing. Anyway, in accordance with the time-honoured tradition believed to date back to at least 1995, here is my Christmas wish-list.

But first, did last year's wishes come true? These all concerned various tedious aspects of the Windows 95 interface. One wish was that Microsoft Office would take a leaf out of Microsoft Windows' book and put the filename before the application. In fact, I've beefed about this at great length so I won't bore you further, except to say that the beta of Office 97 I saw still doesn't do this but adds the refinement (at least in Word) of putting your name between the application and file name. Just in case you forget it, I guess.

Tiled Windows in Office Binder didn't happen either, and nor did the ability to add files such as Notepad or Paint to a binder. Another wish was to reinstate the JPEG and GIF Quickviewers that appeared in the betas of Win95 but not in the final cut. A little progress here — you can get an enhanced Quickview (for money) or view them in Internet Explorer (free). My last wish was "Please give me the patience and understanding to get to grips with the way Windows 95 saves settings". A little progress here, too: the free Tweak UI gizmo has an option for globally enabling or disabling "save settings", so at least you can stop all the folders you left open from opening again. But it's far too little, too late: saving general and particular folder settings is still largely a matter of guesswork and pot luck whether a folder opens in list view, icon view, with or without the toolbar, and so on. So let's put that as this year's number one.

This year, I wish…
1. Let's have explicit folder menu options for "Save this folder settings" and "Save these settings for all folders below this one". And nipping the inherent contradictions in the bud, the latter will produce a confirmation dialogue if this includes a previously-saved "one-off". And while we're about it, a separate setting for re-opening (or not) folders, which were open when you quit.
2. Let's have a totally easy and effective way of securing a standalone PC. This, after all, is the age of the family computer. We need to be able to restrict access not just to applications and settings but to folders, too.
3. And can someone explain to me what I have to do to persuade the PCW cover-mounted CD that I already have the Acrobat viewer installed and working?
4. Returning almost to where I started; a patch to make the new mouse wheel work in all applications.

way, I remembered that you can start a Windows program from a DOS prompt. I must admit, I'd never appreciated why you might want to: even if you don't have a shortcut for the program, it's quicker to launch it from the "Run…" command. But it figures that if you can start a Windows program from the DOS prompt, then you should be able to do it from a batch file.

With trembling fingers I put together a batch file in Notepad, each line launching a different Windows application. I created a shortcut to this file in the StartUp folder, and, just to be flash, edited the properties of the shortcut to close the DOS window on exit. I restarted Windows for the umpteenth time that day. And guess what? It works. Certainly, it's slow and kludgy, but preliminary testing shows that the batch commands are processed in the order listed. Obviously the department of obfuscation and bloody-mindedness slipped up there.

While I'm winning, I'll pass on the following ancillary tips. If you want the batch

file to open a folder, or an associated file, use the "Start" command. And if long file or folder names are involved, enclose them in double quotes. Here's an example:

```
c:\windows\calc.exe
"c:\Paint Shop 4\psp.exe"
c:\windows\notepad.exe
c:\windows\charmap.exe
start "c:\Program Files"
start c:\bootlog.txt
```

This starts the Calculator, then Paintshop, Notepad and the Character Map, opens the Program Files folder and opens bootlog.txt in Notepad.

■ By the way, Chris Marriott's SkyMap, mentioned in my *Windows 3.1* column, is on this month's CD-ROM in 32-bit flavour as well, in the same Zipfile: Skymap.zip. Happy stargazing and a happy Christmas, to y'all!

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