

It's my dog I feel sorry for.'

First there was just me and her and everything was fine. Then I had to get a cat to get rid of a mouse, and the dog was a bit peeved.

Then came a girlfriend who soon turned into a wife, and we were three. Number one son came along and no sooner had we got used to this than number two son followed. My dog, Sally, she of those big sad eyes, had gone from having my complete attention to sharing me with four others, and did she not like that!

The final straw came when a man carrying some big parcels came to call. Oh sure, the brown paper and boxes were fun for a while, but what was this strange television and typewriter thingy which was holding my attention all day and most of the night? It was a Power Macintosh, and that was that. My dog was last seen heading off with a spotted hankie tied to a stick over her shoulder, the wife and kids not far behind her.

"Well", thought I after a few days, when I'd finally realised they'd gone, "there comes a time in every man's life when he needs a best friend who doesn't drink from the toilet!" It was no good, I couldn't really justify it. This wonderful machine had taken over my life, but what could I do about it? Ah well, I'll take a rest and go look for my family, but not yet - I'll just try doing this... ah yes, that's it... now what's this do?... (chapped lip; I must try to stop licking my top lip!) Now what was I going to do? I forget. It'll come to me in a minute. Back to the Mac.

You know, just as my dog has had to put up with this fast-growing catalogue of usurpers of my attention, so too I have seen my own obsession with my new best friend called Mac grow alarmingly. First, doctor, it all started with just a little IIsi, and it all gradually got out of control. As I sit here looking at my PowerMac 8600 with a monster 24-bit colour monitor, surrounded by a stack of external hard disks, syquest machine, CD-rom writer, scanner, laser printer, inkjet printers, PowerBook, loudspeakers, modem, plotter/cutter, embroidery sewing machine, digital camera, VCR, copystand, graphics tablet, and apantechnicon of software, I can but reflect on a dwindling bank balance, the space where my wife used to be, and that I'd give anything for a new

G3!

Okay, so I might have a problem. This thing has totally taken over my life. But I don't remember it happening. How did I get like this? Can I learn anything about my problem by backtracking to see where I went wrong? Maybe I can put things right and win my family back again.

[Wobbly lines dreamy music click of the red shoes "There's no place like home"]

Ah, yes. It all started quite innocently. A client suggested I might get left behind if I didn't get involved with these new machines. I'd be the only graphic designer still spending hours unblocking my rapidographs. I'd always be unable to walk due to being stuck to the spray glue-covered floor. And I'd be the one with a dozen bits of text pasted to my elbow in the pub every evening. I arranged a meeting with a salesman to discuss my plans. Sure, it sounded good. But would I be able to still work as accurately? After all, I only had to say to the typesetter the magical words "set to fit" and the text seemed to fit the available space exactly - but it was ME who knew just what to say! It was MY expertise. Why would I want people telling me that my job was easy and it was only the computer doing everything for me? And they'd want me to do things quicker, and therefore presumably cheaper! And no longer would I be a graphic designer. I'd heard these mysterious machines meant you weren't a graphic designer any more. They somehow turned you into a typesetter; a reprographic artist; a proofer; an illustrator; a visualiser; a paste-up artist; and all sorts of things - as well as a graphic designer.

But I had to do it, I had been tempted, and I was heading into unknown territory. Would I still have friends? Would I get addicted? Maybe I'd have to keep quiet and only do it behind closed curtains.

But nothing prepared me for what I was going to get into. What a wondrous thing it was, this "Apple Macintosh". But surely it was too big for me. How would I ever use up all that FORTY megabyte hard disk? What would little ol' me do with FOUR megs of RAM? After all, I never did fill my old 32K Spectrum right up. And that monitor! What a beautiful full colour picture you get on a 13-inch screen with 8-bit colour! And all those keys on the keyboard! And a mouse! Always wanted one of those. I was transfixed. That was for me. The dog would just have to walk itself from now on!

Peter Bell