Is MediaPoint a serious rival to Scala's title as the leading Amiga multimedia package, or is it just an insolent young pup that deserves to be put in its place? Jolyon Ralph puts Activa's package to the test.

MEDIAPOINT IS A new multi-media package from Activa in Holland, the company responsible for the impressive *Real3D* ray–tracing software.

Now, there's one word you will find in every review of *MediaPoint* in every magazine, and that word is *Scala*. Whether they say 'Scala–like', 'Scala-clone', 'Scala-beater' or just 'Scala-ish' there is no denying that *MediaPoint* is a lot like the *Scala* multimedia package.

Even the *MediaPoint* logo (an 'i' in a box) is a sneaky reference to the *Scala* logo (an exclamation mark in a box).

Scala is the sort of package that is rare on the Amiga. It is universally loved, wins all the awards and makes people who have never heard of Commodore go out and want to buy an Amiga.

But do we need another *Scala*? Is *MediaPoint* really better? Read on...

MediaPoint is, at first glance, similar to *Scala* in that it enables the user to create complex interactive or non-interactive video and audio (multimedia) presentations, or it can even be used as an Amiga–based replacement for those old overhead projection slideshows.

However, first appearances can be deceptive, and *MediaPoint* is actually much closer in use to Commodore's *AmigaVision* than it is to *Scala*. It has far more powerful scripting and looping functions than *Scala*, which inevitably means that *MediaPoint* is more difficult to learn, although if you ignore some of the more complex features you can use *MediaPoint* almost without touching the manual.

Using *MediaPoint* is quite simple. You pick up an Effect Icon from the Effect Window and drop it into your script. You can build up your presentation in pages,
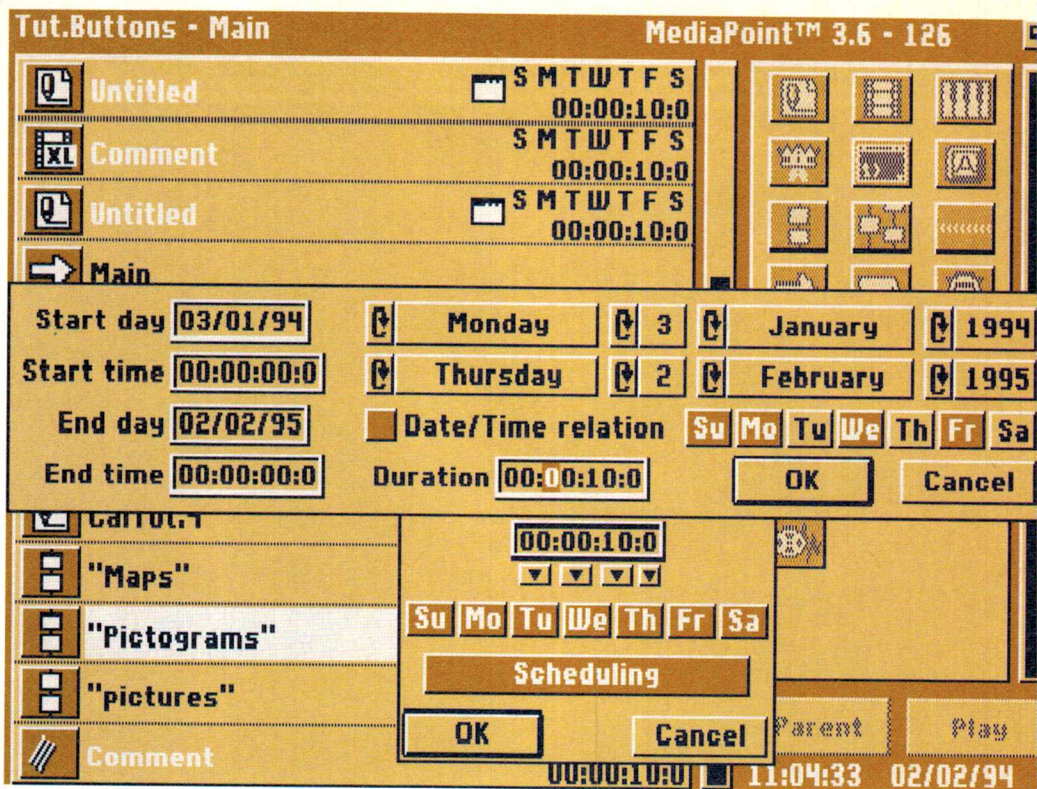
By scheduling your script, you can select certain pages to be displayed on certain days at specified times.

*Media*POINT

MediaPoint can use the PD sequencer and sampling programs *SoundTracker* *NoiseTracker* and *Protracker* as well as several other music file formats.

each containing many effects. These pages can then be saved individually, enabling you to create modules that can be merged into different scripts. This feature is ideal if you have, for example, an advert sequence that needs to be the same in several different presentations.
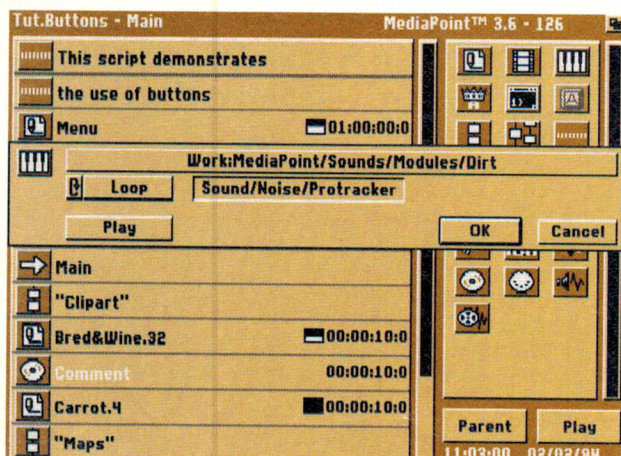
MediaPoint allows far more complex scripting than *Scala* does (at least without delving deep into the Scala Lingo script language) with Serial and Parallel Branching, Variables, Goto Statements, conditional branches and more Unfortunately the user-interface is rathe minimalistic – I kept on looking for men options I expected to be there, bu couldn't find them.

Many options, such as Record, whic enables you to record script timings fron the mouse or keyboard, are hidden i strange places or on key combinations tha take a thorough manual–browse to find.
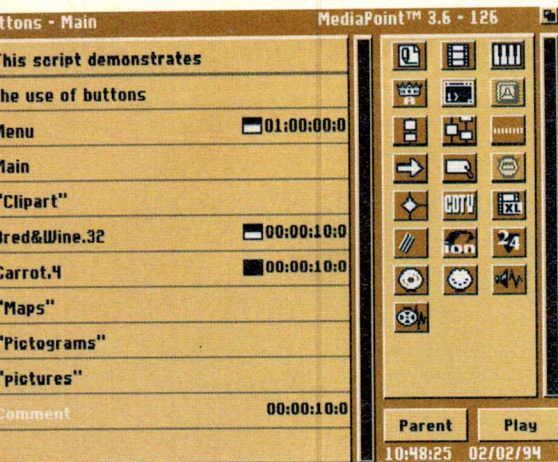
There is no on–screen help of an kind, which is a real omission. You can

One of *MediaPoint*'s strongest points is that screens or clips can be loaded by a thumbnail file requester. The only disadvantage to loading in this way is that is can be slow.

Because *MediaPoint* is icon-driven, you can just drag an icon from the icon list into your script to use it.

disk) but you can play most formats of music modules (including *ProTracker*), Midi files (if you have a midi interface), CD Audio (on an A570 or CDTV) or even 12 and 16-bit stereo audio via the *Sunrise AD1012* or *AD516* cards.

MediaPoint also includes a date and time scheduling feature that is only found on *Infochannel,* the very expensive big brother to *Scala.* This gives you the chance to set up scripts to do different actions on different times or on different days. So, for example, if you used it to create a display in a fast food restaurant, you could create different items in the script for breakfast, lunch and evenings.

All that is lacking that *Infochannel* has is a modem and network link–up for large networks of machines. This is available as a separate Remote Access module.

MediaPoint doesn't come with many backgrounds, example clips or fonts, and those that are supplied are generally not up to the superb *Scala* standard. However, there are three big points in *MediaPoint*'s

> 66 *MediaPoint* is capable of displaying IFF pictures in any resolution, music and sound are well–supported, and it can play CDXL animations directly from hard disk, giving full–screen motion video. 99

favour. Firstly, unlike *Scala,* the product is not protected. *Scala* comes with a Scala Key dongle which you have to plug into the joystick or mouse port. *MediaPoint* does not have any hardware or software protection.

This shows a great deal of trust which I hope *MediaPoint* users will not abuse, but dongles only inconvenience the honest purchaser, and pirates will always be able to get hold of a non-dongle version. It has never seemed fair to me that honest users should be inconvenienced because of pirates. Now I hope that Activa will also get rid of the dongle on their *Real 3D V2.*
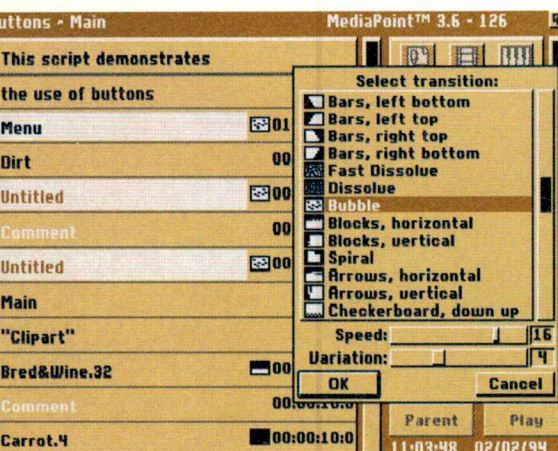
Secondly, *MediaPoint* has a freely-distributable player which enables you to create presentations and distribute them without paying a licence fee to Activa. Scala UK require a licence fee for every presentation you distribute, and you need a dongle on every machine it runs on.

Thirdly, Activa have published developer documentation on their Xapp module format. This means anyone can write Xapps to use with *MediaPoint,* either to support new file formats or effects, or new hardware.

This expandability is a major point in *MediaPoint*'s favour and I expect we will see many Public Domain add-ons for *MediaPoint* in the near future.

MediaPoint is certainly a more powerful product than *Scala Multimedia,* although it isn't quite as easy and simple to use. If you want simple presentations stick with *Scala,* but for anything more complex, you may be better off looking at *MediaPoint.* Scala UK better not become complacent, I suspect that Activa's *MediaPoint* may very soon steal their crown. ◢

find out what an icon is supposed to ...thout adding it into your script and ...g what the requester asks for.

...n terms of features *MediaPoint* has ... *Scala 2* as a starting point, I cannot ... of any effect that *Scala* can do that ...*Point* cannot. All of the fancy screen ...tions seem to be there, up to (but ...etter than) the quality of the *Scala* ...tions, and light years better than the ...al screen transitions in *AmigaVision.*

... can display IFF pictures in any reso- ... (including AGA), it can import ... IFF pictures and remap them to any ... screenmode, and it can support ... cycling, but there is no way of set- ...ycle ranges within the program, and, ...cala, cycling stops while screen transi- ...are running.

...iaPoint can also load and play ... Anim files, not only standard IFF ...-5 but also the newer and faster ...-7 and Anim-8 formats, although ... Scala no utilities are included with ...uPoint to create these faster anima- ... The manual suggests that you use ... of the various PD utilities or *Art ...tment Professional.*

...Unlike *Scala* it can play CDXL anima- ...directly from hard disk or CD–ROM. ... can give full–screen motion video, ... in a slightly blocky form, but again ...are no utilities provided to actually ... these files, and there are no exam- ...ncluded.

...Music and sound are well supported. ...only can you play IFF 8SVX sound ...les (from memory or direct from

Selecting transitions is easy, you can even chose multiple effects simultaneously.

VERDICT

66 **MediaPoint certainly has the potential to be a Scala-beater, but it's not quite there yet. Now that the Amiga has these two powerful packages, it is firmly established as being ahead of the rest in terms of multimedia presentations.** 99

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