



Do it in Stylus

Ken McMahon looks for **low cost** PostScript printing with StylusRIP.

You might recall that last month, while on the hunt for a cheap alternative to a colour PostScript printer I happened upon Aladdin GhostScript 5 which proved better than I expected — mainly because it worked when I hadn't expected it to. In other respects, though, it was pretty limited. There had to be a better solution — which didn't involve spending the kind of money that would be put to better use on a month's holiday in the West Indies, a decent hi-fi, or a superbike — and Epson looked like it might have it.

Epson's level 2 PostScript rip, StylusRIP, in combination with the A3 Stylus Photo EX, seems to have it all. A proper implementation of genuine Adobe PostScript and larger-than-A3 output means you can create bleed proofs with trims and photo-quality reproduction. Combined with good quality paper and colour management, for less than £500 you have a workable alternative to Epson's Color Proofer 5000, so called to reflect the price. And if you already have an Epson colour printer, StylusRIP works with the Photo, Color 800, 850 and 1520, you only need £129 for the software.

► **COMPLEX POSTSCRIPT
BLEND AND GRADIENTS POSE
NO PROBLEM FOR STYLUSRIP**

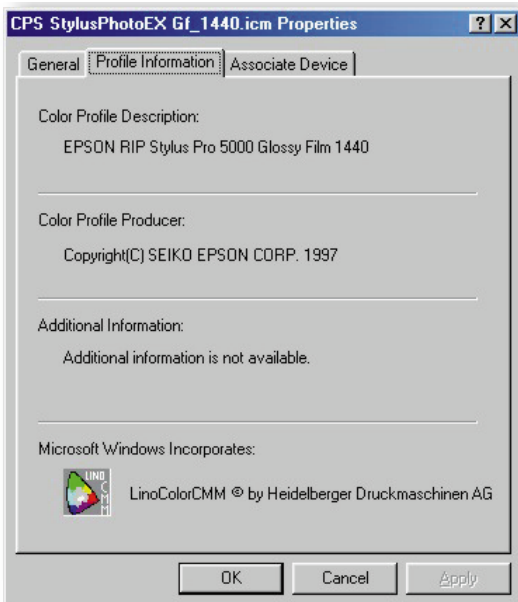
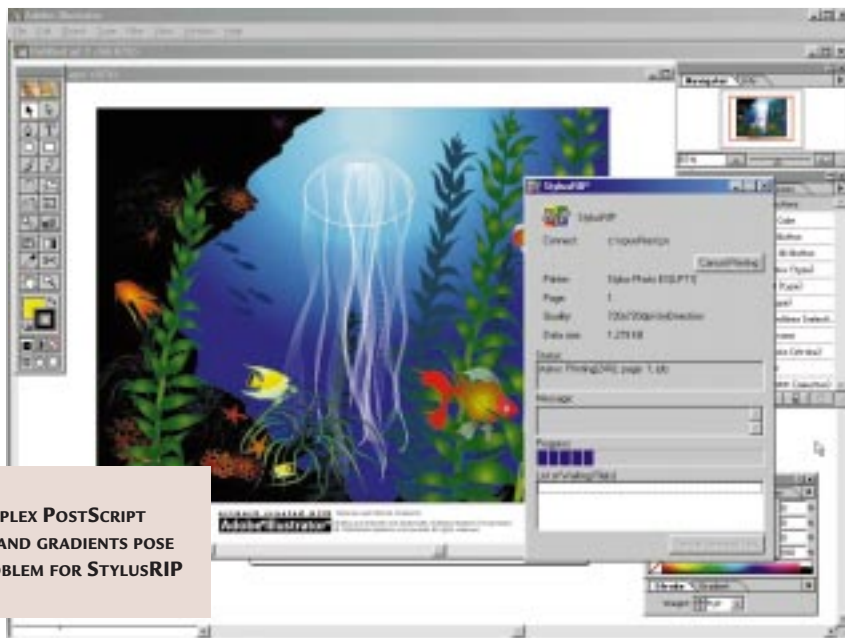
StylusRIP comes on a CD with an accompanying floppy disc. There is a once-only install process that downloads an 'updater' (software dongle) to an Eprom in the printer, and driver software is loaded onto your PC from the CD. My suspicions that this was not going to be trouble-free were initially aroused by the unclear and confusing documentation.

this problem many times before, so I wasn't all that surprised, but had a feeling that the two things were related.

Call number one to Epson's tech support failed to get to the route of the problem after going down all the obvious avenues. Eventually, somebody at Epson suggested it might be the cable. As I had been able to print this was the last thing that would have occurred to me — ah, but if it's an old cable it might not be bi-directional, came the reply.

I didn't have another cable around, so I had to go and buy one. The watchword when you're buying a parallel printer cable is 'IEEE1284'. If it's compliant with that standard then it's bi-directional and when your PC talks to your printer the printer can say 'hello' back. With my goodness-only-knows-how-ancient cable, there was nothing but a rude silence — roll on USB.

With the new cable fitted, Status Monitor worked fine, but unfortunately StylusRIP was still not co-operating: with this you do not print directly from your application but, as with GhostScript, you first have to 'print' the PostScript file to disk using the PostScript driver supplied. In practice, this doesn't make a lot of difference as you just 'print' the



My initial problem was that the PC wouldn't communicate with the printer, despite the fact that I could print a test page (and anything else come to that) using the Windows driver. Furthermore, Epson's printer control panel, which allows you to check print head alignment, clean the nozzles and informs you about the ink levels in the cartridges, wouldn't play ball. I've had

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PROFILES FOR THE STYLUS
PHOTO EX: THESE ARE THE
SAME AS FOR THE MORE
EXPENSIVE PRO 5000 MODEL**

Questions

& answers

Q I enjoy PCW very much and I especially like your new look. Could you tell me the name of the body typeface that the magazine now uses and

from where it can be sourced? Thank you in anticipation.

NICK MULCAHY

a You can find out for yourself from the PCW CD-ROM which contains all of the Hands On columns as Adobe Acrobat pdf files. For a list of all the fonts used in the

document just select file/document_info/fonts. The typeface in question is ITC Legacy Sans — a modern face designed by Ronald Arnholm in 1992 and based on Jensen. The serif version is used in our boxouts and as a body copy font throughout the rest of the magazine. According to Adobe 'this type has easy-to-read

character shapes and comfortable proportions which make it very legible for a sans serif typeface. It has open counters and a modestly-proportioned x-height which make it readable without being overpowering'. You can find out more about it at www.adobe.com/type/browser/F/P_362/F_LEGA-10004000.html

document to the StylusRIP spool folder and it takes over from there. Or rather, it sits there and does nothing.

I tried several approaches. The first was to print a simple bit of display type from CorelDraw 7. When the file is saved to disk in the spool folder, StylusRIP recognises it for what it is and begins to rip it through to the printer. The first time I tried this, a progress bar appeared and my simple document was printed in about a minute — except it wasn't. StylusRIP had gone through the motions and was happy it had printed my file yet the printer hadn't so much as flickered an LED throughout the entire process.

Further attempts to print with various applications and by a variety of routes produced even less success. Eventually, StylusRIP rightly decided it was a waste of time printing jobs that disappeared into thin air and simply queued them, while at the same time displaying a belligerent 'status - idle' message. What I did next, I know, will gain me no friends among readers of this column, but you have to understand, I was desperate. I phoned Epson and asked them to send me a Mac version of StylusRIP.

You're not going to like this, but installing StylusRIP on a Mac couldn't have been more different than on my first attempt: within ten minutes I had the software installed and was printing PostScript directly from any application that took my fancy. I wonder — has this anything to do with the Mac software

having reached the maturity of version 3.3 whereas the PC is a juvenile 1.10?

Buoyed up by my success I transferred the Stylus Photo EX back to PC, called Epson Technical support and began a new offensive. The first suggested line of attack was to delete everything from the original spool folder c:\stylusrip\tmp and create a new spool folder c:\spool. No joy. Next, it was suggested that the parallel printer port settings in the bios might be the problem and, sure enough, changing from ECP mode to bi-directional

did the trick. I'm sure the reason it was originally set that way was to get the Stylus Photo 700 working under Windows.

Initial teething troubles aside, I'm

impressed with StylusRIP. It is very quick, managing to print the troublesome Illustrator jellyfish picture on which both GhostScript and my Hewlett-Packard Laserjet 5000N choked.

Epson supplies ICC colour profiles for the Photo EX and other supported printers, as well as various paper options and Pantone colour charts in EPS and raw PostScript format, in addition to various application files. The only remaining problem is the cost of consumables. At around £12 each, the five-colour cartridges are more reasonably priced than they used to be and last a reasonable length of time. One problem though is that if you use a

predominance of one colour you have to replace the entire cartridge, even though four of the chambers may be

quite full, which is rather wasteful.

Another gripe is the cost of Epson's inkjet paper. The A3 stuff costs around £1 a sheet and I've tried other coated paper options without much success. Even if you did get a reasonable result and accurate colour is important to you, you'd still be stuck for ICC profiles.

All the same, with the Stylus Photo EX retailing at just over the £300 mark (ex VAT) and StylusRip at £129 (ex VAT) this becomes a very cost effective alternative to colour laser output from a bureau.

What I did next will gain me no friends...



◀ CALIBRATED PANTONE COLOUR LIBRARIES ARE SUPPLIED, SHOWN HERE IN DRAW 7'S COLOUR ROLL-UP

PCW CONTACTS

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