Doing the impossible

Some people find the phrase "it can't be done" too much of a challenge to resist. Tim Nott confesses there is always something you can learn from readers who accept mission impossible.

Although it's a pleasure to be able to answer "How do I?" questions on the subject of tweaking Windows, it's often equally satisfying to reply that "you can't". Should you think this perverse, then perhaps I should explain that I spent a long time in the building industry, much of which was spent queuing at builder's merchant's counters.

After the guy in front had been served, a piece at a time, with enough pipe fittings to plumb a major housing development it would finally be my turn, and I would explain to the lugubrious-looking man in the green overall exactly what I wanted. These people are specially trained for this sort of eventuality. Halfway through my speech he would start to shake his head sadly, following this by sucking in air through his teeth. This would normally be followed by a short coughing fit (his, not mine) which seemed to cheer him up, as after a further spell of teeth-sucking he would pronounce, with noticeable satisfaction, "No, mate. You won't get that. Not in metric. Not anywhere." So I'm just getting my own back.
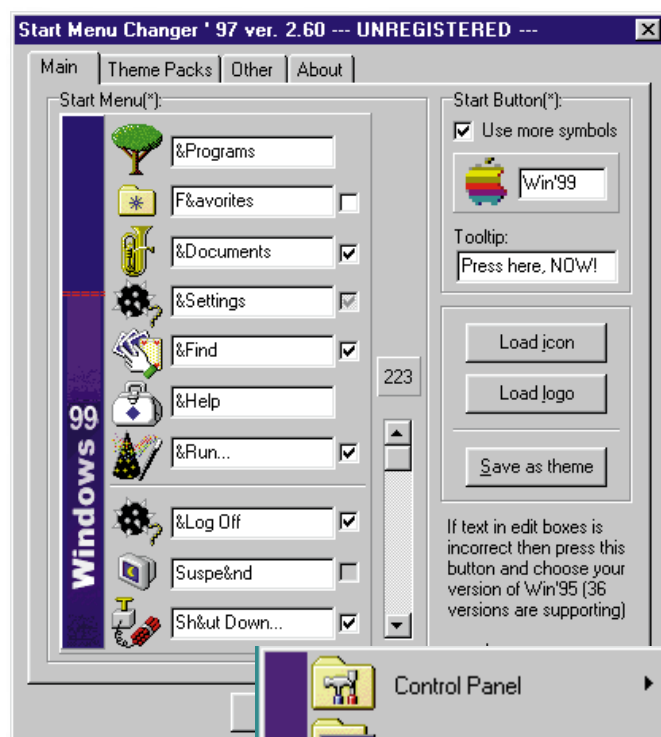
Sometimes, however, I get this urge to repent when I've stated categorically that you can't do something. This is usually because several readers have written in to say "Oh yes you can." So this month I'm going to tell you how to do three things that can't be done.

The first is that old chestnut "How do I change the Start Menu graphic?" by which I mean the vertical logo that says
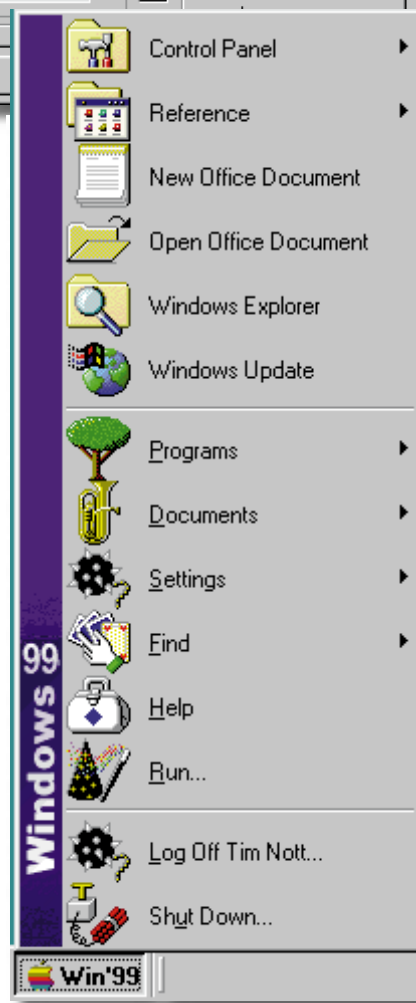
Windows 95 or 98 on the first level of the start menu. One solution, shamelessly lifted from another magazine by several readers, was to create a bitmap, cut it up into icon-sized chunks, then edit the registry so that each chunk replaced one of the regular icons, joining together to form a continuous image. Smart, I thought, yet dumb, as it takes a lot of effort and still doesn't replace the logo.

So, a big thank you to Graham Taylor, Paul Richards, Dan Jones and David Lancaster, who all informed me that there is a utility to do this called — surprise, surprise — Start Menu Changer. It's a shareware utility written by Alexey Vasilyev and does a lot more besides. You can change the Start Button text and logo, hide items on the start menu and change their icons. It does all this by altering the Windows files Explorer.exe and User.exe. Though it does make back-ups of these and you can restore the originals with a button-click, you might want to be doubly safe by making copies of these two files first [Figs 1 & 2].

I'm going to tell you how to do three things that can't be done

▲**Figs 1 & 2** ▶
Customise your start button and menu, courtesy of Alexey Vasilyev

sheets Databases
es & DTP
Word Processing
Windows 3.1
Visual Programmi
3/2 Unix Networks

Not to be outdone, Benjamin Kitt brings news of

▲ FIG 3 AUTOMATIC RESOLUTION CHANGE WITH QRES

TClock by Kazuto Sato. It's freeware, and the modest 118Kb download includes the source code for those that like that sort of thing.

This time you get two impossibles in one. You can change the start menu graphic, the start button text and icon, and even hide the start button. As far as I can tell it does all this without modifying the User.exe and Explorer.exe files. The other impossible thing it does is display the date and day alongside the time in the Taskbar tray. There's all sorts of other diversions, including alarms and customisation, but you might have to figure out some of the more esoteric options by trial and error as the help file is still under construction. It does, however, contain the succinct advice that "If you get any problems with TClock, quit using it."

The third thing you can't do, as regular readers will know, is start Windows with different screen resolutions and colour depths loading automatically. Oh no, no way, as I pointed out in September's

QUICK TIPS
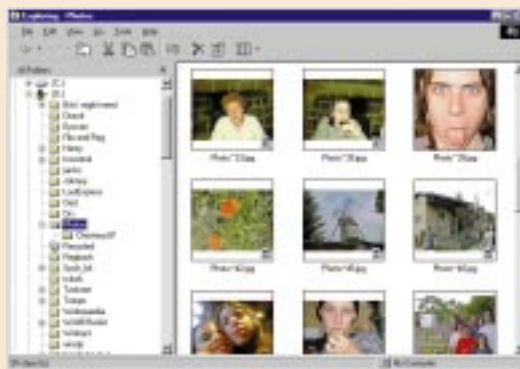
◄ FIG 4 PREVIEW THOSE PICS IN EXPLORER

☞ **Here's a neat trick**. You probably know that you can jump around folder contents (and many other Windows lists such as the File Types) by typing the first letter. If you then type another letter without pausing, this will select the first item starting with those two letters. So, if I open my Windows folder and type N it takes me straight to the NetHood folder. If I

then type O it skips to Offline Pages. But if I type the two letters in quick succession, it highlights Notepad.exe.

☞ **Windows 98** users who don't have a removable floppy drive (i.e. most desktop machines) can speed up booting by going to Control Panel, System, Performance, File System, Floppy Disk and unticking the "Search for new…" box.

☞ **Win 98/95 + IE4** users will probably all have found that if you view a folder "as web page" you get a thumbnail preview of a selected graphic file such as BMP, GIF and JPG files as well as locally-saved web pages. What I hadn't spotted, until Tim Dawe pointed it out, is that if you right-click on a folder and choose Properties, there's an option to enable thumbnails. Do this, open the folder, and you'll find a new Thumbnail option in the View menu and button. Choose this and all eligible files will be shown as thumbnails [Fig 4].

column, as this information is stored in the common part of the registry rather than on a per-user basis. Well, as Paul Brown points out, this isn't true in Windows 98. Display settings are saved with user profiles, so if you want to start up with a different resolution (say for

different family members or for games players) just create a new user from the Users icon in Control Panel [Fig 3].

Another solution is to use Berend Engelbrecht's QRES. This is an add-on for QuickRes, the resolution-changing utility that comes with the Microsoft Powertoys and is included with Windows 98 and later versions of 95. This adds another page to shortcuts, giving the new screen settings. It makes it rather more versatile, as you can effectively change the resolution for a single application, such as a game or children's title, and there's an option to restore the original settings when the program is closed. Astute readers will realise that on a multi-user machine, if QRES is applied to a shortcut in the user's StartUp folder, this will have the same effect as the Windows 98 method described above. Many thanks to Chris Elliott and Mapson for bringing this to my attention.

TECHNOLOGY IN ACTION

It's not strictly Windows, but I thought this story from reader Martin deLoughery was worth sharing. "About five months ago I was on the phone to my accountant. Towards the end of the chat I said 'By the way,

are you on email yet?' To which he said 'Sorry, it's a bit adventurous for us, and I'm not sure the partners would go for it'. About three months later I got a bill from them, and at the bottom of the page I see their new email address. "Super!"

I think. "That'll speed things up a bit." A day or so later I banged off an email reply and sent a cheque in the mail. SEVEN WEEKS LATER I got another letter in the post, saying only 'Thank you for your email message: it arrived safely'."

Questions
& *answers*

Q I like the extra toolbars you can have on the Taskbar with Windows 98, especially the Quick Launch bar, but it's annoying when icons get "squeezed off" and you have to click on the almost-invisible arrow to get at the rest of the icons.

TANYA RAYMOND

a *If you grab the faint grey bar at the left of each Taskbar section, you'll find you can move them around or even drag the Quick Launch bar out of the Taskbar area. Another tip is to drag the top edge of the Taskbar itself (assuming you have got it at the bottom) to give yourself extra rows of buttons.*

Q I've recently started getting crashes when logging on to AOL — something to do with WAOL causing an invalid page fault.

BRENDAN ABBOT

a *This seems to be a problem with the version of the AOL software supplied on the Windows 98 CD-ROM finding the wrong version of Msvcrt.dll. If you download the later version of AOL 4.0 from* http://aol.com *the problem should go away.*

Q I have downloaded some pictures and saved them to disk. If I try to open all of them I get a separate Internet Explorer window for each picture. How can I open all the pictures in one Internet Explorer?

AHMAD NORDIN

a *No, mate. You can't (shakes head sadly and*

slowly). Not unless the pictures are attached to a web page. Your best bet is to use a program such as Paint Shop Pro (in our CD-ROM software library) that will display more than one graphics file at a time. Alternatively, see this month's quick tips [p259].*

Q Recently my friend got Windows 98 and I wanted to copy some files to his PC. Because the files were too big to copy to floppy I used MS Backup. When I tried to restore the Backup files on to his PC they did not appear to be on the disk. I tried to restore the files on my Windows 95 PC and they worked. Is there any way I can get it to work with Windows 98?

IAN RONALD

a *No, mate. Not no how (sucks air in through teeth). You can't restore backups made with Windows 95 on to a Windows 98 machine. Of course, if you use WinZip to compress all the files to a single Zip file, you'll find it has an option to span multiple floppy disks.*

Q I would like to know how to disable and hide Run, Find and Settings in the Start menu without any new software. Is this possible?

RUPERT

a *Yes it is, but it's not for the faint of heart. You need to use the System Policy Editor which is on the Windows 95 CD. Go to the Admin\Apptools\Poledit folder and read the installation instructions in Poledit.txt. You'll find instructions in the*

▲ **FIG 5** RESTRICTING USERS WITH THE SYSTEM POLICY EDITOR

Resource kit helpfile, which is also on the CD in Admin\Reskit\Helpfiles. With Windows 98, go to the Tools\Reskit folder on the CD and open Readme.doc which gives full instructions for installing both the Resource Kit and the Policy Editor. System Policies is a complex subject and to cover it in depth would take several months of Hands On, so I'm not going to go into depth — it's all in the Resource Kit help file (Windows 95) or the online book (Windows 98).

But to answer the question, it's quite straightforward to disable these entries on a standalone PC set up for a single user — i.e. the "All users have the same settings" option is checked in Control Panel, Passwords, User Profiles.
Back up the registry and run Poledit. Go to the File menu and choose Open Registry. You'll see two icons appear, labelled Local Computer and Local User. Double-click the latter, and click on the book icons to expand the tree. Under System, Shell, Restrictions, you'll find the options you are looking for: note that you can't remove the entire Settings entry, but you can remove the folders (e.g. Control Panel and Printers)

and the Taskbar settings. Tick the restrictions you want enforced, OK out of the box, close Poledit and confirm the changes to the registry. When you restart the PC, you'll find the relevant commands hidden and disabled — the Control Panel and Printers folders will also be hidden in Explorer [Fig 5].

Q I have created a custom-made boot disk which will format my hard disk, copy CD-ROM drivers to it and then run Windows 98 setup using the msbatch.inf file created by Microsoft Batch 98. I would like to know if there is any way that I can format my hard disk without FORMAT.COM asking for me to press Y to start.

PETER GEDDES

a *Do I have this right? You want a boot disk that automatically formats a hard disk without confirmation? Just suppose the disk got left in a floppy drive by accident and the machine was switched off. Switch on again and it's goodbye data, goodbye applications, goodbye operating system.*