

# Confessions of a Franklin Owner

How one man turned his back on the Apple for...  
the Other Machine.

by Gerry Souter

**L**ife is not easy for a Franklin owner, standing alone in the orchard. I thought of submitting this under a *nom de word processor*, but at the last moment I decided to let the chips fall where they may. You have to take a stand somewhere and what better place than in a publication devoted to the Apple.

Let me risk instant rejection by stating that this is not an apologia. The Franklin computer is an excellent machine and a real workhorse. Many, many hours have been spent hunched over its hot keyboard since it was uncrated in my home some months ago. This is no sleezoid compilation of bits and pieces imported from the Third World and cobbled into a tatty imitation. The Franklin is a stand-alone computer designed to take advantage of the widest selection of software and some of the better peripherals available. At the time I made my purchase (the waning months of 1982), the features it offered were very competitive.

I had shopped for two months before narrowing my purchase options down to the most computer I could get for the money I had to spend. Since I am a writer, word processing was paramount, and since my wife runs a graphic design business from our home, business management and even-

tual graphics packages were needed.

A friend of mine owned an Apple and touted it to the skies. He even let me fondle the keys and make the G beep. He ran mailing lists, word processing, spreadsheets, games, the whole gamut of software, churning it

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out through a huge Perkin Elmer letter quality printer he got in a horse trade. The amount of Apple software seemed limitless and the II Plus chugged away day and night without complaint. There were a few quirks to be noted, however.

He described how he had wandered around inside his Apple with a soldering iron and some bell wire to effect the legendary "shift key option." I blanched at the idea of drooling hot solder around those delicate-looking innards and poking wires into tiny holes. Sobered by the possibility of turning my investment into a ten pound paperweight, I decided I could

get along using the escape key if I had to.

Another problem was entering columns of numbers into his spreadsheets. The typewriter-style keyboard was inconvenient at best. Still, I persisted. I had spent years pecking away at the standard QWERTY keyboard. In the end, the vast amount of available software and peripherals swayed me. I sought out the best deal on an Apple.

Having found an amiable Apple dealer who would take my money a little at a time, I went to his shop with my car trunk empty. As he showed me his best package deal, I noticed an unfamiliar shape crouching on the counter top. The lump was brown and beige and sort of squarish. On top of its huge, aircraft-carrier-size lid, an NEC monitor continuously scrolled the words, "I am a Franklin Ace computer. . . Won't you please buy me for 'n' dollars. . .?"

I was moved. "What's that?" I asked.

"We used to be a Franklin dealer," the salesman answered. "That's the last model we have in stock."

A memory stirred, recalled from the tons of magazines and literature I had pored over. The light seemed to leave the salesman's eyes as I moved closer to the Franklin. In my mind's microfiche, the specs came together: 64K RAM, full keypad with a set of math operators, built-in fan, upper/lower-case letters—and Apple hardware and

software compatible! It was huge, half again as large as the Apple. It was brown with an orange stripe. It was last year's model—the Ace 100. It was the last puppy in the window, the runt of the litter.

"N dollars?" I asked. The salesman nodded numbly. "Then I could afford a second disk drive—that Apple Disk II—and an Apple dot matrix printer?"

"Yes... yes," he answered, the light returning beneath his shaggy brows.

"Done," I said, stroking the NEC monitor which accompanied the deal and was still scrolling its plaintive message. I switched off the screen.

That was months ago. Today, words fill my disk files, numbers virtually thunder across my VisiCalc. I have become a connoisseur of word processors, having tried AppleWriter II, Screenwriter II and finding simple pleasure in the one I am using to write this manuscript: Acewriter, of course. It needs no shift key modification to give full keyboard function and I have an 80-column screen with full-size letters—thanks to horizontal scrolling. All keys repeat their duties effortlessly, and the tab key is a joy, sitting as it does above both a break and a pause key. I use the latter convenience to page through my homework from the Applesoft basic programming course I'm taking at the local community college.

I heard that sneer! I've encountered it before—mostly in Apple showrooms when I buy disks and other supplies. I've seen Apple salesmen go pale at the mere mention of "Franklin." Some can barely control their rage. "No color!..." they stammer. "No serial interface!" "Screwed up ROMs!" "Big and stupid-looking!" "... programs won't run!" Sometimes, just a puff of dust comes out of their mouths and they faint away behind the counter.

Sure, there's no color, but I don't have a color monitor yet. When I'm ready for that big jump, Franklin has a hard-wired board that will do the trick. As far as screwed-up ROMs and programs that won't run? Well, I haven't found an Apple program that won't run on my old Ace 100 system. The Ace 1000 and the new 1200 must be at least as good. Yes, my beast could almost store an Apple inside it—for all intents and purposes, it does. But that's

okay. I like a sense of solidity. Besides, there's that orange racing stripe.

Being a Franklin owner, I've grown accustomed to that blank stare I receive at cocktail parties when someone asks me what kind of computer I own. I reassure them by saying, "It's sort of a

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great, big Apple." They nod with approval and I am admitted back into their circle.

The same thing happened with the computer club at work. Most members own either an Apple, or the TRS Color Computer. They are electronic engineers, so forgive them. By the time they finish marching around inside the Radio Shack products, weird hybrid machines are born. I joined and heads swiveled around when I announced my brand—but, surprisingly, I found I was not alone and those in the club who shared my eccentricity were normal-appearing human beings without scales or horns. I almost wept. In the meantime, all our software literature and hardware purchase lists have been amended to read "Apple/Franklin compatible."

And so, you Apple folk, while you ponder the Lisa, the Macintosh and the Ii, think about us, your brothers, playing with our keypads, buying tons of Apple software, buying crates of Apple peripherals, programming the same Applesoft FOR/NEXT loop. We just couldn't help making Aces out of ourselves. ■



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