MorphOS

Last month I was fortunate enough to talk about the Deneb USB board for Amiga. This month, I downloaded and bought/registered the new 2.0 version of MorphOS for my Pegasos II. Also, there's been a recent announcement that Hyperion will be bringing out version 4.1 of the Amiga OS later this year for Amiga One systems. I guess Amiga (and Amiga-like) market news is like catching a bus — nothing shows for the longest time, then three come by at once.

Anyway, in what might best be described as a pleasant surprise, the MorphOS team kept their promise of a 2nd-quarter release of Morph 2.0, though putting it out there on June 30 was really cutting it close. 2.0 is available for Pegasos 1 & 2 and Efika. A version for PPC-based Mac Minis is supposed to be forthcoming as well. Personally, I would've hoped for PPC Mac laptop support, but the Mini apparently required the least extra hardware support work. I generally prefer to avoid bringing my desktop computers to meetings anymore, but I hope to bring my Pegasos with 2.0 in for a little showing off and Q&A (I probably wouldn't go so far as to call it a "demo") at the July meeting. Hope to see you all there.

Regarding MorphOS 2.0 itself, one can go to "http://morphos-team.net" to get information on the new release, as well as download the .iso for the OS itself. The .iso image can be burned to a CD or mounted and read directly (handy on systems like the Efika which may not have an optical drive.). MorphOS can be previewed and tried out from the disc (or .iso) or even installed to your system, though it will only run for approximately 30 minutes before becoming largely unusable. To bypass that you will need a keyfile, which you get by running a registration tool and sending payment (through Pay Pal in my case). The initial price is 111 Euros, which translated to roughly 175 dollars when I used some of my government economic stimulus check to help stimulate the German economy. After the 15th, the price jumps to 150 Euros. The price is fairly reasonable if you factor in the size of the target market, but it's hard to avoid the fact that it looks expensive compared to the more popular operating systems sold in boxes at stores. It's hard to say if it's worth the money exactly, as there's usually a different set of motivations to getting MorphOS than there is for Windows, OSX, or a commercial Linux package, such as helping support the platform and the programmers, hopefully keeping them going that little bit longer.

As I said earlier, the Morphos-team site contains a list of features in 2.0 added or improved from 1.4, but I'll mention a few notable ones here. One of the most anticipated for the longest time would have to be the internal TCP-IP stack, which thankfully appears to be pretty good. Similar to higher-profile OSes, it's pretty easy to set up and largely transparent to the user. Assuming it's configured properly, you can be automatically connected from the word go. The Sputnik web browser is included, but that's still much a work in progress, so you'll probably want to make sure you have your favorite Morph or Amiga browser handy. Compatibility with legacy Amiga software seems to be improved in some aspects, lessened in others. The 68K JIT emulation seems to be improved and sped up a bit, or at least 68K software appears a bit zippier and more responsive than it did under 1.4. Ambient, the included "Workbench" (window manager for the Linux folk) for MorphOS has undergone many enhancements as well. Many of those features will be familiar to those who use Windows or Mac, for better or worse. Ambient file/directory windows can open in a "browser mode," where filer windows have controls and behavior similar to that of a Web browser. Other aspects of Ambient can be made to look or behave like "other" operating systems as well, but thankfully the majority of these changes are optional, and you can easily choose a more Amiga-like mode of operation where you prefer. Getting a lot of press is the "3D mode," which basically gives Ambient partially transparent windows and some other available eye-candy effects, though it requires a fairly hefty video card (128 meg onboard memory or better) to make the best of it. My video card is too lightweight, so I was not able to try it out. I'm not a fan of effects for their own sake anyway. One thing I've found interesting is that Ambient now has a picture viewer built in — if you double click an image file, it will open in a window similar to a normal filer window, with controls for scaling and rotating the image, as well as poking around the rest of the directory. Handy.

I've had some growing pains with the new MorphOS 2, partially with me fitting my old software back into a clean install, and part due to a quirk or two which seem to be exclusive to my Pegasos alone. While I haven't enough experience with the new

system to say definitively whether it's worth the upgrade price, I can definitely see the power and potential behind it. The Morph team have said that not all planned features made in time, and not all bugs were squashed for the official release, so an update or two should be expected, hopefully not before too long. Even if you can't or won't afford the upgrade price, if you have a Pegasos or Efika system you owe it to yourself to download 2.0 and try it out, even if you don't end up buying a registration.

…by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech-Dayton Gazette
July 2008

Electronic Bermuda Triangles

Huh? Yes, they exist for real. I was trapped in one this week. No, I'm not talking aliens and tin foil hats. However, to my great surprise, tin foil does play a roll in this story. And no, I'm not smoking lunch either. To start off with, I will disclose here that I went to see a live Eddie Izzard show on Tuesday, which tells you something about my warped sense of humor.

The other thing you need to know is that about a year ago I ditched the Jag and I drive a Toyota Camry Hybrid. I live 4 miles from work, so I go to the gas station about once a month. I never took the Camry to downtown Tampa until this week. And that is where I got into a "dead zone."

I park the Camry, and press the ON/OFF button to shut down the engine. So far so good. Next, I get out and use the wireless key fob to lock the car. No luck. Get back in, try to get it started. Error message "Cannot Detect Key." Car sits in park and is totally dead. I can only lock it manually with the hidden little key in the fob. Call the Toyota Dealership for tech support (this vehicle is basically 30 computers on wheels).

They make me do a few things, but conclude that the battery in the key fob is probably dead. "Call your roadside assistance" was the advice. OK, I get the car towed to the dealership and after the show, I grab a taxi home. Cost? $150 plus the Izzard ticket so I'm over 200 bucks out of pocket. Great show by the way, the man is hi-la-rious.

Next day I call the dealership. They tell me, "Sir your car is fine, it worked when we started it here, and we tried 4 times. You can come pick it up any time." I'm asking customer service: "but, but, but…what caused this?" And then she said, "yeah, it's funny, I had the same problem with some one else this morning, identical car and identical spot in downtown Tampa."

And then the penny finally dropped! I remembered an article a few months back in the Saint Petersburg Times about cars not behaving in two spots in the USA: Around the Empire State Building in New York, and downtown Tampa. Focused electronic interference caused car alarms to go off, kill switches to kick in, cars not starting and similar problems. The suspected reason? Anything from GPS tracking systems to TV satellites to other cars' alarm systems could be responsible, said Robert Martin, who owns armtek Auto Alarm, a Tampa-based online auto security business. "It could be a combination of all those things downtown," he said. "If you're getting blanket radiation from another frequency, you could be in a field that nullifies the wavelengths used to operate your car's alarm."

Apparently, this also causes Toyotas to lose contact with the key fob and since there is no way to bypass that, you are up the creek without a paddle. But here comes the kicker. The Toyota Dealership Customer Service Rep calls me back and states: "If you hold some tin foil or even a tin can above the key fob, this should not happen." I swear, I'm not making this up! But I'm sure as heck not going to drive to Tampa and try that out. As the story unfolds, I'll keep you updated (I asked Toyota for a refund of my expenses). In the mean time, here is a link to the SP Times article of April 22 that proves I'm not entirely off my rocker. There are probably more of these "Electronic Bermuda Triangles," not yet identified!

http://www.wservernews.com/6VQGDU/080623-Tampa-Triangle

…WServerNews, Vol. 13, #25
Jun 23, 2008 - Issue #679:
http://www.wservernews.com/archives/wservernews-20080623.html

September Calendar

September 22 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — **Main** Grand Prairie Public Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

September 22 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

September 27 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am