



A.C.T. APPLE USERS GROUP INCORPORATED

NEWSLETTER

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REVIEWS

EPSON to IMAGEWRITER CONVERSION

Prior to the last meeting I got a call from Steve Hay of QCAL. He had a couple of products that he thought would be of interest to Apple owners. The first was the Automatic Ice Epson to Imagewriter converter, the ICECABLE. At the meeting he produced the ICECABLE and an Epson LQ-500 (24 pin printer) and a technicians toolkit, for evaluation.

I had a few tasks on my plate so I co-opted Peter Fenwick into providing a report on the ICECABLE for the magazine. Within a couple of days (less than it would take me to type the said report it was done). ... Read on.

RUNNING REPORT on the ICECABLE and FINGERPRINT GSi
by Glenn Thomas and Peter Fenwick

On the 11th of May I attended the A.G.M. of the users group (my first to this date) and at the end of the meeting while waiting for my lift home, got into the discussion about the Ice Cable. My lift, Peter Fenwick, had agreed to take the Ice Cable home with an Epson LQ-500 for a trial and report for the newsletter. For those who don't know what the Ice Cable is, it is a printer driver that emulates the Imagewriter, Imagewriter II, and/or the Imagewriter LQ. It plugs into the computer via the printer port, or the Super Serial Card (if you have one). It is available in different models for all the Apple range, so if you end up ordering one, please state which Apple you have, or it won't work. The ICECABLE comes with a brief, but very informative manual (about 6 A4 pages) that describes all the features, modi-

fications (the cut circuit tracks) and a little more information on software considerations.

Anyway, back to the story, I was sort of volunteered to do the testing as I was the one asking all the technical questions, and have a background in electronics.

On the following Friday after the meeting I packed up my system and transported it to Peter's shop and set it up with both the Fingerprint GSi and the ICECABLE at once and tried it out (first mistake), only to find, much to my displeasure, it did not work. After a bit of tinkering I finally decided to follow the rule of Allan's Axiom, which is "When all else fails read the instructions."

So after a bit of reading in the Fingerprint handbook and only finding that I had done it correctly in the first place, I decided to have a really good look at it all. It was then that I discovered that the ICECABLE would not fit properly in the connector as the clips designed to hold a standard connector on were, in fact, pushing the box off.

Box you say? Yes a box. The ICECABLE comes with a cable and connector designed to connect to the computer it was ordered for; namely a DB25 male for the Super Serial Card, 5 pin DIN for the //c, DB9 MALE for the Macintosh, or the MINI DIN 8 for the IIGS and Macintosh II, SE, etc. At the other end is a box 90 x 55 x 32 mm with the centronics parallel plug on one edge. Unlike the Orange Micro Grappler Cable, there is no power cable for the ICECABLE as it gets its power from the incoming signal. The problem is that the centronics plug does not project from the box far enough to insert correctly into printers with recessed sockets without

either bending or having the retaining clips on the printer removed. I recommend the use of an extension plug for those with recessed ports.

After overcoming this dilemma, it still didn't want to work. I decided to read the ICECABLE instructions which informed me that there were three versions of the box. It all depended on which circuit board tracks inside it were connected. We opened the box to discover which version we had. It was the version for LQ printers (appropriate for the Epson LQ-500 connected at the time. This combination required a baud rate of 19200. We then changed the baud rate in the IIGS control panel to 19200. Now the printer worked as it was supposed to with very nice print.

Now, would the ICECABLE handle colour? The book said it would, but we wanted to see it. After putting a jumper across the two circuit tracks to enable the cable to work on a nine pin printer and re-setting the control panel to 9600 baud. We connected a Star NX-1000 Colour printer to the ICECABLE. We found that the ICECABLE does not use the DSD handshaking facility because the system hangs if you try to use it. We tested the set up with an Appleworks WP file and it worked well.

Next we tried the Fingerprint GSi with the Star printer. This card is a graphic utility card for the IIGS and is completely transparent to the system, so it can be put in any slot. The manual recommends slot 3, which is reserved for use with the text display and because the control panel does not have to be told that the card is present. The card comes with a 5.25" disk with graphics and slide show program to demonstrate it's capabilities, a 73 page manual that is easy to read and un-

derstand, and a flat ribbon cable that has a 20 x 20mm red square on the end with a touch sensitive fingerprint printed on it.

To activate the Fingerprint GSi, you push the fingerprint when you have the screen you want. The screen disappears as the Fingerprint menu screen is overlaid. It is the standard pull down menu type text screen. You are then able to do amazing things to the screen you captured. It can be cropped to size, rotated, flipped, inverted, zoomed, or printed as a billboard up to 130 x 100 feet. It can be printed in colour if desired, headings added, converted to super hi-res. The card also has a full set of disk operations written in ProDOS and DOS 3.3, a basic calculator, typewriter mode, calendar, and can even over-ride the dip switch settings as to the type of printer connected, and output port used. You can return at will to the program in use. **IT EVEN PRINTS THE CAPTURED SCREEN**

We printed a super hi-res screen on the Star and an Imagerwriter II with the colour ribbon, and the results were exactly the same with regards to picture quality. I recommend the purchase of an ICECABLE as it makes printing from any application a breeze.

We had heard that the ICECABLE slowed-down printing. We found that this was not the case, in fact the Star NX-1000 with ICECABLE printed noticeably faster than the Imagerwriter II when printing colour graphics. The Imagerwriter II is still about 50% faster than the Star when printing text. When compared with the Epson LQ-500 with ICECABLE, the Imagerwriter II in Best Print mode is about 50% slower and gives inferior print quality. Although we didn't have an Imagerwriter LQ for direct comparison, we felt that the LQ-500's print quality is superior.

SUMMARY

If you are thinking of buying a printer for your Apple, the ICECABLE is definitely a cost effective quality option. With any Epson or compatible 9 pin printer, text and graphic output should be the equal of the Imagerwriter II. With a 24 pin Epson or compatible, output should be at least the equal of an Imagerwriter LQ. If you sold your Imagerwriter II or LQ, and bought an Epson compatible 24 pin colour, wide bodied printer and ICECABLE (RRP \$A130.00), you could easily afford a Fingerprint GSi with the change.

The Fingerprint GSi (RRP \$US120.00) is a brilliantly simple and effective graphics utility card which greatly enhances the capabilities of an Apple IIGS. If only it were available for a Macintosh.

Thanks to Peter and Glenn - Ed.

Steve Hay of QCAL is offering the ICECABLE and a choice of Epson printers at the following prices -

ICECABLE	\$100
Epson LX-800 (9 pin)	\$430
Epson LQ-500 (24 pin)	\$600
Epson 24 pin colour printer	POA
Epson LQ-1050 (24 pin 15" carriage).....	\$1200

TECHNICIANS TOOLKIT

The promo on the toolkit states "A unique selection of tools for advanced computer equipment service." The toolkit contains -

- Digital multimeter
3 1/2 digit LDC display

10 Meg Ohm input resistance at all ranges
DC current ranges 0.5% accuracy

polarity and over range indication

low battery indicator

fuse protected on all current ranges.

A rotary switch provides selection between the options and ranges with separate press button switches for ON/OFF and AC/DC.

Ranges

Resistance 200, 2K, 20K, 200K, 2M, 20M

Voltage 200mV, 2, 20, 200, 1000

Capacitance 2nf, 20nf, 200nf, 2mfd, 20mfd

Other facilities

Diode, continuity and transistor checking

- 25W pencil tip soldering iron
- Solder sucker
- Needle nose pliers
- Side cutters
- IC extractor
- IC inserters (16 pin and 20 pin)
- VLSI chip puller
- Wire strippers (very fancy)
- Screw driver set -
Handle
Extension
10 screw driver blades (phillips, slotted, torque, etc)
- Antistatic wrist strap
- Keycap puller and brush

The toolkit comes in a substantial vinyl zippered case 33 x 27 x 7 cm.

At the price of \$300, I found