

One Last Compile...

Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you, in the blue corner: Delphi 5!

Thus far the Delphi releases have been much like the Rocky films: odd numbers good, even numbers bad (or, if not bad, then at least missable). Delphi 2 didn't seem to have much to commend it other than the fact that it was 32 bit, and Delphi 4, to my mind, never seemed to recover from the bugginess of its initial version. Delphi 3 is the one where they seemed to combine some major, genuinely useful, innovations (WebBroker, decent OLE automation, a pretty logo) with stability.

And Delphi 1 is just a poppet. From time to time I still have to maintain programs in it, and it's a real joy to use, memory leaks and all. It's like a boisterous labrador puppy, a bit stupid, but full of life and eager to please. You forget that compilations really can be that quick (although the time you save is more than cancelled out by all the time you spend gazing quizzically at the code editor after you type a full stop, waiting for a list of appropriate function names to appear... how I wrote code before Code Insight I'll never know).

So, now we have Delphi 5. By the time you read this, the great and the good (or, failing that, Messrs Long and Jewell) will have decreed whether it's worth the upgrade price. And there'll be the usual mixed set of reactions when we start to play with our new toys.

Indifference. Anything to do with MIDAS comes under this category. I'm sure its time will come, and perhaps there are hundreds, nay thousands, of you out there who swear by it, but I've never used it. Mind you, that's at least in part because I've never understood the licensing arrangements, plus I get jittery when I hear the word 'scalable'. It looks expensive, and slightly difficult. Best to continue to ignore it, I reckon.

Despondency. This covers stuff that you've just spent six months trying to implement, badly, and which can now be done with a single component and a couple of clicks. The new components for automating Microsoft Office come under this category. Some people may never recover from the deep sense of worthlessness that this will induce.

Resignation. Anybody who's ever suffered *Index is out of date* messages with Paradox tables, or who tried to implement a web database in Delphi, will have known that the BDE was living on borrowed time. Now we'll have Active Data Objects, which at least means we won't have to explain to IT departments exactly what the extra 6 megabytes on each end-user's machine is there for. It probably won't work any better, it would surprise me not at all if it worked much worse, but at least we'll be able to blame Microsoft instead of Borland. And it's surprising just how satisfying that can be.

Irritation. This is stuff that managers are going to force you to use, even though you'd rather not. TeamSource, the tools for managing code across teams of developers, sounds like this. I don't want to check my code in and out. When my components break I like to quickly fix them and bung them back in the library without anybody noticing, thanks very much.

Fear. Here we have things that it would be nice to ignore, but customers and the jobs pages of *Computer Weekly* will dictate that we probably can't. XML is the big one here. If the hype is to be believed, the world is about to become a sea of XML-coded transactions and data. Information will finally be free to roam, cut loose from proprietary platforms and software. Ultimately this should mean a level playing field in which only the best software will flourish. Some might see this an opportunity, but I'm a realist and frankly, it scares me to death.