J.E.T.T. welcomes technical questions from its readers. Send your questions to Ask the Technician, *J.E.T.T.*, 304C Moore College, Language Laboratories, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, U.S.A. All questions become the property of *J.E.T.T.* and are subject to editing.

SUPER VHS

I recently purchased a Super VHS VCR. Are there any pre-recorded theatrical films out on the S-VHS format?

M.A. Tucson, AZ

JETTECH: Congratulations! You join the just under a million consumers who have purchased S-VHS VCRs. To my knowledge there is *no* domestic company that has released theatrical movies in this format. However, Paramount and Universal have joined a Japanese company, JVC, and have released—in partnership—*The Untouchables, Beverly Hills Cop II, Fatal Attraction,* and *Dragnet* in Japan. Once the number of S-VHS VCRs sold grows to more impressive proportions, undoubtedly you will see more films in this format.

STORING VIDEOCASSETTE TAPES

Is it true that videocassette tape life can be prolonged by storing them with the end out, that is, played through to the end and not rewound for storage?

S.L. Rome, GA

JETTECH: Yes. Playing a tape through once without stopping, puts the whole thing in the shell with a smooth, uniform wind under consistent and even tension. If you store the videocassette without rewinding it to the beginning first, when the tape is played again, it will have to be rewound—which will reset the tape tension. Don't forget to store the videocassette with the full reel on the shelf or bottom. Also, for longer tape life, keep your VCR tape transport *clean,* don't touch the tape itself with your fingertips (or let anyone else do it) which leaves oily residues that destroy tape, and avoid undue shuffling from start to stop, to fast-forward, to rewind—all shuffles achieve are golden opportunities for the tape to drag and jam up.

LARGE-SCREEN TV/MONITORS

We are equipping our language learning center with large-screen TV/monitors and must select the brand we want. Can you name some manufacturers that are making large-screen TVs, their approximate cost, and which ones, in your opinion, are the best?

S.M. Los Angeles, CA

JETTECH: Companies currently making large-screen TV/monitors include—but are not limited to—the following: RCA, JVC, Panasonic, Sony, Mitsubishi, and Pioneer. The Sony and Pioneer models cost about $1000.00 each; RCA's and JVC's are about $800-$900; Panasonic's and Mitsubishi's run about $1100-$1200.

As to which are the best...the question really is "Which are the best for you?" All the elements of picture and sound quality are really as much a part of human perception as they are a product of the technical specifications of the equipment. In other words, which set produces a picture you like best. For example, if you like an overall warm and rosy red look, the RCA may look good to you, since it tends to skew toward the red end of the color spectrum. If, on the other hand, you prefer an overall creamy or off-white look, Sony's large screen model may be the one for you. I suggest you visit all the dealers who sell large-screen TV/monitors, look at all of them (side by side if possible), manipulate their functions via their remote control units (some are easier to work than others), and pick the one that has a picture you like best.

THE PRICE OF THIS VIDEO IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

I paid $89.95 for a two-cassette version of a

theatrical film on video. My friend paid $29.95 for the same film on video. Not only does he have the convenience of one videocassette, but he saved over $50.00. How can this be?

JETTECH: It is my guess that the company that duplicated your friend's version of the film duplicated it using the slow-speed, long-play (LP) mode rather than the standard playmode (SP); hence, your version on (SP) takes twice as much tape as his version on (LP). If you can, get your friend to bring his version to your house, set up two TVs and VCRs, play them side by side, and compare picture and audio qualities. Not only will you notice visible picture quality degradation but the audio will also sound less sharp and clear. The rule is: *slower speed during recording equals lower or reduced video and audio at playback.* To my knowledge, very few duplicating companies mark the pre-recorded videocassettes they offer for sale in terms of recording speed; I think all of them should. We as consumers have a right to know what we are buying. My guess is that if the price of a video sounds too good to be true, it's been recorded at slow speed on inferior quality tape.

MAIL ORDER VIDEO/AUDIO HARDWARE VENDORS

Can you give me the names and phone numbers of some mail order video/audio hardware companies.

T.S. Mission Viejo, CA

JETTECH: I can, but before you call them up and buy that camcorder, or VCR, or video camera, go and find it at your local dealer, try it out, and make sure you have the name and model number of the one you want to buy via mail order. You cannot really determine how a particular piece of equipment performs and handles until you get your hands on it; a description, no matter how specific, is no substitute for hands on. Some mail order outfits are as follows: **Direct Camera Warehouse, 1-800-526-6633; Mibro Company, Inc., 1-800-223-0322; Wisconsin Discount Stereo, 1-800-356-9514; Le Baron, Inc. (305) 577-4469; Camera World, (503) 227-6008 for inquiries and 1-800-222-1557 for orders; and, Planet**

Video, 1-800-247-4663. Don't be fooled by the "camera" in the name of some companies; that's what they used to handle before they expanded into audio and video.

COLOR/BLACK-AND-WHITE SLIDES FROM MAC COMPUTERS

Is it true that conversion software makes it possible to get color and black-and-white slides from Mac Plus and Mac II computers?

J.L. Austin, TX

JETTECH: Yes. You simply send images in a Scrapbook file directly to the slide service bureau of Western Imaging, Inc. of Mountain View, CA. Once converted, images can be modified to include high-resolution vector fonts, backgrounds and airbrushing. From older Macs, images are processed in black-and-white, or you can request two colors to substitute the black and the white. Mac II images are processed in their true colors. Basic slides cost $9.50 and take 48 hours to process. If you are willing to wait—later this year—the conversion software will be available for purchase by endusers.

CARE AND FEEDING OF A PC

I just purchased an IBM PS/2 Model 80 personal computer. My friends are telling me all kinds of horror stories about lost data, computer breakdowns, etc. Is there anything I can do on a daily basis to keep my PS/2 up and running?

R.B. Spokane, WA

JETTECH: There is nothing you can do, even on a daily basis, that will **guarantee** that your computer won't ever fail; there are things you can do, however, that will **minimize** computer failure. On a personal note, I used my computer for 10 years without the need for service, and it is still running in another office; that was two years ago! Your friends notwithstanding, your IBM PS/2 Model 80 will, in all likelihood, last a dozen years. You can minimize its failure by heeding the following:

1) If you have not done so already, go to your friendly computer store and get a surge

protector (prices range from $20 to $120, depending upon how many sockets). The AC in your power lines fluctuates. If it spikes above 110, it can blow out circuits on your PS/2; if it drops below 110 (plugging in electricity-hungry appliances into sockets on the same circuit as your computer can cause AC to drop, or your friendly power company can reduce line voltage to conserve power), it won't blow any PC circuits but it can garble data on your screen and you can lose it. You can't do much about power voltage reduction by the power company; however, you can put your PC on its very own household circuit with its own circuit breaker or fuse or you can make sure no other appliances are plugged in when you are using your computer;

2) Keep your computer cool and well-ventilated. When temperatures reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the internal circuits tend to remain hot because the internal fan cannot cool them sufficiently. Keep those air vents unblocked (cabinets, walls, book shelves are good air blockers). Air must circulate freely around your computer.

3) Cleanliness is next to trouble-free PC operation. Keep your computer clean. Try not to wipe dust off your computer as you would off a table; instead, vacuum it off, preferably with a thin wand-type nozzle attachment. Dust and dirt (cookie crumbs are tops for this) foul up contacts. You would be amazed at how many such contacts a computer has. Fouled contacts do not translate impulses well or at all. Your keyboard is an ideal candidate for serving as a dust-and-dirt depository. Keep it clean, covered, or under wraps when not in use.

4) A computer by any other name still needs to be moved carefully. If you must move your computer, don't jolt it, bump it, or otherwise bang it, shove it, or jiggle it; above all, never move it with the machine **ON.** Late model computers such as yours automatically "park" the magnetic head so it won't get damaged; nevertheless, the memory devices of any computer are delicate and sensitive devices that do not

suffer fools—who jolt and jiggle their computers—gladly. By all means, move your PC if you must, but do it very carefully.

5) Finally, turning your computer **ON** and **OFF** is similar to jockeying your furnace thermostat up and down: Such behavior puts stress on the electronic circuits. In general, leave your computer **ON** if you are using it at certain periods of the day. If you need to "boot" in order to execute a start-up program, resist the urge to do it by flipping your PC **OFF** and **ON.** Use the RESET button or hold down CONTROL and ALTERNATE keys and then DELETE. Your IBM PS/2 Model 80 is an impressive machine. I hate to say it but in all likelihood, it will be obsolete before it dies of old age. For that matter, it may already be obsolete. Good luck.

DESK-TOP PUBLISHING IS NOT JUST FOR MAC ANYMORE

My friend says the capacity to combine words and pictures is something only his Macintosh can do; it can't be done with an IBM or IBM Compatible, even with a high-powered word processor like WORDPERFECT 5.0. I have an IBM AT with WORDPERFECT 5.0. Can I do what my friend thinks only he can do on his Mac? I say I can. Am I right?

B.H. Denver, CO

JETTECH: If by "right" you mean that you, your IBM AT, and a MS-DOS word processing program like WORDPERFECT 5.0 (or a Desk Top Publisher) can merge graphics and text to create attractive newsletters, invoices, technical drawings, etc., then, yes you are right. If, however, by "right" you mean that IBM or IBM Compatibles are more "right" for desktop publishing than Macintosh, then I would say that it isn't a question of "right" at all. Perhaps, the strongest appeal of the Macintosh has always been its rather elegant capacity to combine graphics and text. The way in which this combining of graphics and text is achieved on computers other than the Mac differs: Some people prefer (rather vehemently at times) the Macintosh way; others (equally vehement-prefer the IBM/Compatible

way. The process of unifying text and graphics, it seems to me, is just as easy—once one is used to the command sequence—on an MS-DOS machine as it is on Macintosh. Your friend, undoubtedly, would argue this assertion. Be that as it may, an IBM AT with WORDPERFECT 5.0 is extremely versatile when it comes to integrating graphics and text; the resulting documents have a truly professional look and "feel" about them. The difference between you and your friend is simply this: he prefers to **TRASH** while you prefer to **DELETE.**