

# M3 UNLOCK

A review by Neil Bennett

Type of Program : Utility      Author : Tony Summerfield

Distributor : TNYSOFT, 27 Baysdale Road, Ashby, Scunthorpe, South Humberside, DN16 2QE.

Price : £6.95 if you supply your own disk (Amsoft or Maxell only!)  
£9.95 if you don't supply the disc

What you get : The disc with 2 copies of the suite of programs - one copy per side of the disk and a 6 page A4 manual giving full instructions (and a guarantee).

## Discussion:

Have you ever loaded a disassembler, monitor or whatever into the M3's memory, loaded a program using the Multiface and wondered where your program went? I only did this once, because I should have realised that the Multiface uses it's 8K RAM for loaded/decompressing, overwriting anything you have loaded yourself. Although the manual isn't informative on the subject, any program in the M3 RAM can only be used when you load something without resorting to using the red button.

Also you must have noticed that the M3 BASIC loaded file which is put on disk for each snapshot is un-mergeable, and that the following file (the one with the 'C' added) cannot be loaded as a normal block of code for inspection. If either of these has ever annoyed you, or for lots of other reasons, M3 UNLOCK could be the program you have been waiting for.

The author claims that the utility converts 99% of M3 snapshots, such that they load and run independently of the Multiface. I have been using, and playing with the program for a few weeks, and have only failed to convert one snapshot - interestingly this was the middle third of an adventure trilogy (the first and last worked fine), so I am prepared to accept that even this failure can be overcome by loading the game again and saving in a different mode.

In use, the whole process is quick, painless and menu-driven. It can convert from both tape and disk, to disk. Because the utility is so easy to master, I do not intend to waste space here re-writing the manual. However, a quick resume of the four options on the main menu would be in order, and these are:

1. M3 UNLOCK. This should be used in all cases, unless you are confident that the snapshot is both a 128K version and that it uses BANK 7. After conversion using this choice a quick "CAT" will show if this is the case.

2. M3 UNLOCK (BANK 7 VERSION). This should be used if the "CAT" mentioned above shows that BANK 7 has more than 2K on it, i.e. has been used. However, before using this choice, the third choice should be used to reserve disk space for the conversion.

3. DIRECTORY. If BANK 7 has been used then this choice reserves, or locks out, space on the disk for the converted snapshot. You are warned that any data on the disk will be lost, and the program checks for data and gives you the opportunity of aborting it any is found. Although the disk therefore can only contain one of these "BANK 7" snapshots per side, the

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rest of the space on the disk is available for more normal saving.

4. BASIC LOADER. This puts boths the load/decompress files onto the disk, and the required basic loader program. This should be done lastly since you must know what type of loader you require - 48K, 128K or 128K with BANK 7 in use.

As with all things, reading the manual, or worse a revie of the program, is not the best way to learn it's use. If the above sounds complicated, then the fault is with the revie, not the program. I am no genius - on occasions positively thick - but this program worked first time for me. Should you get into difficulties the error-trapping and on-screen prompts are enough for anybody to succeed.

I can think of several very good reasons for buying this utility, for instance:

1. I have 2 Multiface 3's (a seperate story - anybody want one for a sensible offer ?), oth of which are increasingly doing nothing or crashing the machine when the magic red button is pressed (yes I have cleaned all connections). This utlity means that loading is independent of the M3, i.e. in my case more reliable. Remember Romantic Robot threatening to take the Multiface off the market 18 months ago? Any piece of software which allows loading without a thrid party's hardware will be seen by many as good news.

The piracy implications are obvious - 1 game plus 1 Multiface plus 1 "M3 UNLOCK" equals potentially infinite copies. However, a nich touch is that each time youse this program a warning notice appears which you have to sit through for 10 seconds. Talking of piracy, the distributor claims that each copy of the utility has a unique code embedded in the program somewhere, and judging by the "original" manual (not photocopied) and the same reference number on all correspondence to TNYSOFT, I have no doubt that the author could tell to whom, and when, an original was sold, should he ever come across an unauthorised copy.

2. Because the converted snapshots load independently of the Multiface, the 8K RAM of the M3 can bow be used for running whatever you have in it, at the press of the red button.

3. The converted files are saved as normal code blocks. At present you can COPY .... TO SPECTRUM FORMAT to convert the M3 files to normal code files for inspection, but this method is a bit long-winded and messy. Although the converted files are still compressed, ASCII strings and UDG's usually remain intact for the nosey amongst us to poke around in.

4. The BASIC loader is mergeable, and therefore alterable i.e. the border,

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paper and ink colours to be used during loading can be set from BASIC. Some programs do not refresh the border colour during play, for example, and you have to play an unconverted program with a blue border if you pressed the red button at the correct time, or worse, a white border if you didn't

Without this utility, I have only managed to change the border using a disk editor, and I know which method I prefer.

5. Perhaps the most significant aspect for some is that it allows true disc conversion of "Locked" 48K games. The M3 manual implies that this is possible via an intermediate save to tape, but some games only run in true 48K mode, i.e. can only be converted to tape. Using this utility I had no trouble converting golden oldies such as Imagine's JETPAC, LUNAR JETMAN and SABRE WULF, not to mention the best game of all time (boted by my family anyway) Codemasters' DIZZY.

For fun I even converted HiSoft's 48K BASIC Compiler, which ran perfectly. I stress this was for fun since any loading of BASIC and saving of code still had to be done via tape, since the computer is in "Locked" 48K mode.

## Limitations:

Because the program runs completely within the memory of the Spectrum, i.e. does not use the available external RAM of the Mutiface, I can understand why the top 8 scan lines of the screen display (which make up the first 32 character positions) are corrupted at the end of loading. When playing a game, you often go through a series of different screens - high score, choice of controls, etc. so the corrupted part gets overwritten. For the games that go straight to the first screen with the top line saying "SCORE", "LIVES" or similar which never gets overwritten, then the fact that you can't read the top line is going to have to be lived with.

I am unaware what makes the other 12 of programs unconvertible. If you have one, or more, then since the program does not claim to successfully convert all programs, this must be accepted as a limitation rather than fault, and again this must be lived with. Incidentally if you can convert no programs, there is a self-diagnostic program on the disk which will tell the author if the program is at fault or not.

If you get the general impression that this utility is impressive, good. The utility is well written, well presented, and performs effortlessly. The Mutiface was sold as being the "essential peripheral every Plus 3 owner should have". I would go so far as to say that M3 UNLOCK is the essential piece of software that every Mutiface 3 owner should have.