



FMV: just an excuse to use film stars in your favourite Amiga mag.

# THE FIRST FMV FILMS

Take a CD32, plug in an FMV module and movies on CD are yours. But are these movies as good as traditional

VHS, and how do they compare to LaserDisc? Andy Leaning grabs the popcorn, talks loudly and snogs in the back row as he seeks out new movie frontiers.

If you've got a CD32 you're probably thinking about upgrading it with the FMV module. But the question you'll want answered before you spend any money is: are the films, movies and pop videos you can watch on it actually any good? After all, what's the point in spending your money buying new technology if the results aren't as good as your existing video?

To answer this question we took four of the five films currently available and spent a day watching them (as far away from Lisa's ruler as possible). The films we chose, *Patriot Games*, *Top Gun*, *Star Trek VI* and *Black Rain*, cover a wide variety of tastes, including science

fiction, drama, and action. These CD films are all finished titles, and are available now in PAL format.

Video CDs come in normal size CD jewel cases, but are actually double albums, ie they contain two CDs. The reason for this is that each Video CD can only hold 72 minutes of film and sound, while the average length of a film is over 110 minutes – hence two CDs. And before anyone raises questions about it being inconvenient having two CDs, I'll point out that LaserDiscs (the numero uno format for home film buffs) have been using two discs for a long time and it has proved a popular system.

We studied the films on a state-of-the-art 29" Sony S29 TV with a Dennon AVC-3200 ProLogic amplifier. This allowed us to try out the sound and test the picture quality.

The various films were all similar, with good colour quality and stable picture reception. There weren't any of the tracking problems, saturated colour or noise often associated with videos.

One problem, however, was that in moments of intense activity on screen some of the fine detail of the picture was lost and the squares that make up the signal became visible. This happened in *Black Rain*. With MPEG encoding process this loss of picture quality is normally counteracted by softening the picture and taking the edge off the squares, making them less visible. However, the little squares were still there in some places in parts of *Black Rain*.

Also, occasionally, (in *Top Gun*)



Erk got fra gevam ek stad? ("Should I buy an FMV module?")

where there is a lot vertical movement there was a slight jerkiness in overall picture movement. Whether this is the result of the MPEG encoding (see CU Amiga March '94) or poor NTSC to PAL conversion remains to be seen.


## SWEET MUSIC

All of the four films feature not just stereo sound of CD quality, but also Dolby Surround Sound. So, linking your CD32 to a Hi-Fi when watching these films will give you an experience far beyond normal VHS. Whilst normal VHS will give you stereo sound, the clarity and depth of the sound from these discs leaves VHS sound for dead.

And if you happen to have a ProLogic amplifier and speakers you'll never need to go to the cinema again! Dolby ProLogic is a system of

encoding extra audio information into the normal stereo signal. When played back via a ProLogic amplifier, connected to four or five speakers, the information is decoded and the sound is distributed to the speakers (which are placed in front and behind you) giving the effect of the sound coming from all around you. In all four movies that we tested, the results are simply stunning. Now all we need is for Amiga games developers to get hold of this idea and start encoding Surround Sound in CD32 games!!!

## IT'S A KNOCKOUT

Films on CD – great concept, great implementation. For picture quality these CDs easily rival video, for sound there's simply no competition, they walk all over VHS. Whilst the occasional loss of fine picture detail means they aren't yet up to the standards of LaserDisc, VideoCD film is much better than normal VHS video. I'll certainly be switching to Video CD in future. 

## JARGON BUSTERS

- PAL: The definition of the TV signal for UK TV systems.
- NTSC: PAL for American TVs. Films in NTSC format cannot be played on UK hardware without conversion and vice-versa.
- MPEG: VideoCD/FMV films are normal films that have been converted and compressed to allow them to be stored on CD. This compression and storing was defined and created by a group of propeller heads on a committee called 'Motion Picture Experts Group' or MPEG. For further details on MPEG coding see CU AMIGA March '94.
- Laser Disc: A large version of compact discs used for storing films.
- Dolby Pro Logic: A specification for sound that's superior to normal stereo, created by Dolby Labs. ProLogic sound uses four and five speakers, rather than the normal two. Placing four or more speakers around the room ensures the sound 'surrounds' you, giving a more realistic audio experience.