

There are a number of digitizers available for the Amiga, but now Datal have decided to enter the fray with a machine that is clearly priced to challenge all comers. We decided to see how it stands up against Rombo's tried and tested work horse, Vidi Amiga.

The Video Digitizer II is a compact cream coloured unit that looks perfectly at home when plugged into the expansion port at the side of the Amiga. The Vidi Amiga, however, is squat and black and connects to the parallel (printer) port at the back of the Amiga. The VDII also features a through-port allowing the connection of other hardware, such as hard drives or, dare I say it, a CD Rom player. Both digitizers include contrast and brightness con-

trols which are situated at the back of the units.

The VDII and the Vidi Amiga are ideal for grabbing mono artwork from a video recorder (VCR) or camera. They both digitize in real time. In other words they can 'grab' a frame or frames from a moving video source. When digitising consecutive frames to create an animation, fifteen frames can be stored in memory on a standard 512k Amiga.

Both units require software

to control the digitising functions. When loaded, VDII presents you with an icon driven control screen. There are pull-down menus for Project, Options, Edit and Effects. The frame editor is accessed via the main control screen, and is divided into two small screens. The left-hand one is for Pause/Playback whilst the right-hand screen displays information and editing. The Vidi Amiga software features three pull-down menus for Projects, Options and Settings. A small panel at the bottom of the screen contains word icons that perform the main functions.

VDII does not offer colour digitising. However, it does give you two alternate palettes apart from the usual 16 shade grey scale. One of

the palette options, called Colour, gives you false colours that create an image similar to that produced by a thermal image camera. Images created using this option tend to consist of bright taints of colour which, although interesting, seem to serve very little useful purpose. Beza produces a nice sharp image made up of shades of brown/tan which gives it the appearance of an antique photograph.

However, despite the adjustable value of these palette options, they are rendered all but useless by the fact that images can only be saved in shades of grey anyway! The Vidi Amiga also produces grey scale digitising, but it allows you to tint the images in one of nine shades. You can also update

GRAB IT AND RUN



Vidi Amiga connects to the parallel (printer) port, but in so doing obscures the serial port.

You've often seen digitised pictures in demos or on title screens, but you may be pleasantly surprised at how cheap and easy it is to start producing your own digitised pictures. Martin Rayner looks at two budget-priced real time digitizers. The new Video Digitizer II (VDII) from Datal and the Vidi Amiga from Rombo are compared, contrasted and taken apart.

the software by purchasing Videochrome for £19.99. Videochrome allows you to produce full colour pictures from a static video source. VDI will save files in IFF, File or sequence (animation) formats, whilst Vidi Amiga-only offers IFF or sequence saves.

The Vidi Amiga Handbook fails to mention that when you want to save a sequence file you need to put an ID code after the file name, which designates the number of the starting frame. Both digitizers offer similar editing options, but use different names to identify each function. The Vidi Amiga allows you to view 15 frames on screen simultaneously, and this is not available on the VDI.

Ultimately, the quality of a digitizer is measured by its output and, in my opinion,



Vidi Amiga II plugs into the extension slot at the side of the Amiga. It also includes a through-port which allows you to connect additional peripherals such as a hard drive.

2

Vidi Amiga produces a much sharper image than VDI. Unfortunately, the quality of output from VDI seems to be slightly marred by the poor brightness and contrast controls. On the VDI there is also an annoying time delay between adjustment of the brightness/contrast controls and the on-screen image updating, which makes precise adjustment of the digitizer settings unnecessarily time-consuming.

A TIGHT SQUEEZE

Depending on the ease of access to the back of your Amiga, you may find the



FEATURES CHART

	Vidi Amiga II	Vidi Amiga
COLOUR	16 Grey shades	16 Grey Shades (6000 with Videochrome)
REAL TIME SCREEN MODES	Yes Low Res	Yes Low Res (Interface with Videochrome)
MANUAL PRICE	User Friendly £39.99	Adequate £29.95

RUN



The above picture is one of a series of frames grabbed in real time from a video recorder using real-time.



GRAB IT AND RUN

installation position of Vidi Amps is satisfactory. This problem is easily overcome by obtaining a suitable extension lead. But be warned, you must get the flat ribbon cable as the round type will cause some picture distortion. If your parallel port is already in use and, like myself, you detest having to unplug one device to use another, a data switch box is the answer. As the 'flick of a switch' this will allow you to bring the selected device online.

CONCLUSION

At under £100 both digitizers are good value for money. Vidi Amps is simple to use and cosmetically appealing. The manual is user friendly and there are two player programs included on the disk for producing stand-alone animations. On the minus side, I would like to see the contrast and brightness controls improved and repositioned to the front of the unit. There is also no colour upgrade available at present. The Vidi Amps may not be quite so eye-catching as the VDI, but it has a slight edge on features and there's a colour upgrade available. In the end it all comes down to one thing: money! If £200 is all you can afford, and there's no more in sight in the foreseeable future, VDI is the choice for you. On the other hand, if colour is important and, gosh, not such a problem, I would go for Vidi Amps with the VidiChrome upgrade.



To produce colour pictures on the Vidi Amps, Rombo produces a unit called the ROM which automatically handles colour separations from any video source.



2

Left: One of a series of shots captured using Video Digitizer II - the unit is slightly less handy when it comes to examining animation frames.



ROMBO COMBO

For users who wish to digitize in full colour, the colour solution pack from Rombo comprises the following items: ROM Amps, ROM-ESP and VidiChrome. VidiChrome is a software upgrade that allows ROM Amps to grab colour images. It includes low resolution and interface (used to reassemble) screen modes and supports RAM. To say the ROM-ESP is 'just a splitter' would do this amazing little device an injustice. Placed in between the video signal and the digitizer it replaces the need for optical filters. It takes only seconds to selectively send the red, green and blue parts of the video signal to the digitizer. This necessitates the need for your ROM to have an impressive parser or a digital picture freeze. An LED on the top changes colour to match the signal being transmitted, with the exception of blue which is displayed as yellow. (I am informed that blue LEDs are as rare as being offered a cup of tea at Mr. Brownfield's residence).

Vidi Digitizer II -

Available from Baker

Electronics Limited, Seven

Road, Penton Industrial

Estates, Penton, Slade on

Trent, ST4 9BT Tel: 0752

Tel757

Vidi Amps - Details from

Rombo Limited, 4 Fairbairn

Road, Kirkcaldy North,

Fife, Scotland, EH24

67D Tel: 0306 419621



With ROM-ESP connected, it's possible to grab full-colour pictures in about a second. Not quite real time, but a darn sight faster than using a video camera and colour release.