

# Tempo schedules with friendly interface

BY SCOTT WATKINS

In what optimistically may be construed as an effort to add a little flash to the HP 150's third-party software harem, Soft-Touch Systems Inc. has a new electronic desk calendar for sale. Committing itself solely to the HP 150 Touchscreen (perhaps to cash in on what everybody at one time thought would be a "Buy-a-Touch" bonanza), STSI closes the door on anyone not equipped with the Touch option, period — politely speaking, a rather curious decision, unless of course sales of Time Management software throughout the industry are rivaling the Cabbage Patch Kids craze of a year ago. Self-inflicted limitations notwithstanding, Tempo/150 is obviously the product of a creative and user-oriented mind and merits consideration by all who may find themselves in need of such a package.

As a fully touch-driven product, Tempo has tried to leave no stone unturned for the 150 enthusiast. Indeed, the package encompasses a much wider variety of options than the average appointment scheduler. It offers a report writer, for example, that can be customized to show pertinent information about particular appointments from any given day. Tempo also allows for the management of up to 20 different calendars at a time (per database) and can create an overlay of multiple calendars. The advantage here, as the manual points out, may be to show unscheduled timeslots that are shared by any number of people, facilitating more efficient scheduling of meetings, and so on.

Not enough good can be said of the documentation and online help facility. Instead of giving the appearance of a hastily thrown together, very wordy "memo-to-the-new-user," the user's guide proves very readable and succeeds in eliminating a lot of guesswork. It is formatted with the user, not the systems analyst, in mind, and even begins by explaining how the manual works. It then explains all that is required to run and use Tempo and briefly runs down the limitations of the package.

The rest of the manual is written in a simple yet direct fashion, with good, clear cross-referencing techniques. Whoever wrote this manual should take a bow. Indeed, take two. Then get back to writing more manuals.

As for the online help, it too accomplishes its goals and more. The user is left stranded in a screen without the option of further help, and when help is given, it is concise and meaningful. Hats off again.

Using Tempo/150 is not an altogether difficult task. However, as alluded to earlier, Tempo is somewhat eccentric. It has peculiar basic needs that must be fulfilled before making your first appointment. Some of these are the Touch option, at least one 3.5-inch floppy disk drive, at least two independent disk drives, and at least an extra 256K of memory.

With Tempo's basic needs fulfilled, it is just a matter of making a working copy of the master disk (Tempo won't run from PAM using the original master disk), keeping the internal clock of

your PC accurate (or risk destroying the calendar database), and remembering to "NEVER WRITE PROTECT" any of the Tempo disks, as well as disallowing any and all power problems while Tempo is running.

If all this seems a bit demanding for a package that allows you to keep appointments in bits and bytes rather than with pen and paper, it's because it is. In a nutshell, if you are not equipped with a 20Mb hard disk and at least one 3.5-inch, the useful concept of the package becomes hopelessly mired in a

nightmare of hardware, bootups, and limitations. The hard disk, which is recommended by Soft-Touch, is for the purpose of keeping Tempo at the ready, as opposed to using the 3.5-inch dual disk drive, and loading it each time it is needed.

But bear in mind, as you weigh all this, that Tempo is not trying to be, nor is it, your average appointment-maker software. Usually the more sophisticated an application, the higher the standards for making it run and perform at optimum levels.

**Tempo 150**  
**HP Touchscreen**  
**Soft-Touch Systems**  
**416-886-0082**  
**\$129/\$15 demo disk**

Along those lines, Tempo does live up to its promise of "unmatched ease of use and capabilities" once it is up and running. It uses the now-standard menu

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format and, as already stated, has excellent online help at the user's beck and call.

If there are any problems here, they are relatively minor ones. For instance, the function keys, for the most part, try to stay consistent with the HP PF keys (i.e., F8=EXIT). However, while F8 does indeed equal EXIT in nearly all screens, it is moved to F7 on the Master Calendar screen. Also, it is sometimes impossible to back out of certain functions at will, as the user is required to continue forward to certain points until an EXIT window is found. Again,

these are quirks that can be easily overlooked.

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the name suggests, allows the five years to be divided into almost any desired increment. This can also be reconfigured at any time.

Another handy item is the postscript

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Consider for example, the time window. This is a versatile, user-manipulatable, five-year "moving window," which, as

facility. It provides a 10-character field for the user to create any postscripts that may be prudent to add to the end of an appointment entry ("CANCELED, NO-SHOW," etc.).

## Review reviewed

To the Editor:

Thank you for the review of Tempo/150, our time-management software for the HP 150 (September 1986). Scott Watkins is to be congratulated for taking the time to thoroughly understand the workings of this sophisticated package and clearly present them to your readers. However, as is often the case, a few errors did creep in, which I would like to correct.

In discussing the system requirements for Tempo/150, Watkins states that "an extra 256K of memory" is needed. This is not the case. The package was carefully configured so that it would run on the "standard" Touchscreen (256K only), even with PAM loaded. Another statement to the effect that any power problems while Tempo is running could be dangerous can be attributed to a similar statement in the Tempo user's guide. The current ver-

sion of the package does not have this limitation, as it cleans up disk buffers after each operation.

Also, the review implies that a hard disk is required in order to use Tempo effectively. While it is true that a hard disk will make life easier for the user (as it does with any package), we do have users who run Tempo from floppies without difficulty.

A more obvious slip is the price of the package, quoted in the text of the review as \$249. The correct price is \$129, as displayed at the top of the review.

As to Watkins' comments about the "curious decision" of making Tempo/150 dependent on the HP 150 and the touch option, he is correct. The product was originally developed in early 1984, just after the introduction of the 150. At that time, touch was not an option, and the forecasts for the 150's future looked very bright. We chose to keep the touch requirement for the current release of the product both for technical reasons

and for the real beauty of Tempo — its ease of use, using touch as it should have been used by many applications.

Work is underway on a new release of this product, adding a number of the most requested features. While the new release will still require touch, look for future versions that will offer alternatives, as well as a version for the Vectra.

Finally, my response to Watkins' lamentations over the fate of the 150 is simply that there are probably more of them out there than many realize. While the computer did not do what HP hoped it would, it did find its way into many corporations, often in large numbers. What's more, HP 150 users still like the machine! Soft-Touch Systems is perhaps one of the only software companies still specializing in the HP 150 market. There are Touchscreen users out there who need software, and we will continue to support them as best we can.

Tempo/150 finally lets HP 150 users have a quality software package that is "not available on Big Blue." Thanks again to *The Chronicle* and Scott Watkins for the fine review that helps to point this out.

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Soft-Touch Systems

Overall, the integrity of the package seems to be quite sound, and it is very friendly, once all initial hurdles have been leaped. And for the true computer nerd, who must "disk" everything, Tempo/150 certainly holds its own as a time management tool. It is semiaffordable (providing the purchase is via company PO and not a personal check) at a price of only \$249.

Unfortunately, as alluded to at the beginning of this review, Tempo, as quality a package as it is, finds itself on a somewhat precarious bandwagon. When the HP 150 was introduced, only the most dedicated pessimists would have predicted the fate it has suffered: that of being impractical for any but the already established Hewlett-Packard customer. It didn't come within a light year of its more versatile, well-established competition, and wound up sitting atop CPUs and staying within the confines of Data Processing more than atop the desks of casual users.

Even fewer exist in homes (though I should point out that this review was done on the 150 that sits in my study). In essence, that means less software development, fewer sales for existing applications, and the frustration of quality, loyal third parties, like Soft-Touch.

More versatility in "qualifying" to use Tempo is definitely a topic that warrants serious discussion. A software driven version, as opposed to a touch-driven, would certainly expand the horizon of a difficult and cost-conscious market, while at the same time not sacrifice any of the fine features the folks at STSI have shrouded their product in.

As for the myriad hardware requirements, these probably are, at least for now, "untouchables." Schedulers do exist that don't require as much, but then, it all really depends on the preference and needs of the individual. You don't need as large a garage for a Honda Civic as for a Lincoln Towne Car either. But which would you rather take your boss to lunch in? ♦

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