The Right Connections
This month, Damian Walker takes a look at Four in a Line, by ZingMagic

Originally a Purple Software shareware release, this is one of the numerous Purple Software games which were taken over by ZingMagic, who have released it as freeware. It is also the most rich in features of all the programs in this review. As with 4Play, the program implements the standard game, with a grid of 7 columns by 6 rows.

Two features specific to Four In A Line are the Hint and "take back move" options available during a game. Purists will regard these as options for cheats, and while this is indeed a good use for them, they can also be a great help to beginners learning the game. Analysis paralysis, where a player simply cannot work out which move to take, calls for a hint feature. While the beginner's other main frustration—sudden death by silly mistake—is dealt with by the "take back move" feature. Perhaps these experiences ought to be part of the learning process, but in something that's supposed to be fun, like playing a game, excessive frustration can put people off playing altogether. For that reason I welcome these features; it's not as if one is forced to use them.

This is also the only game that offers a save game feature. Games of Connect 4 tend to be reasonably short, but it suits some people's lifestyle to be able to play for a few minutes at a time, and a save game feature is an obvious aid.

The other feature unique to this program is the timer, which acts as a chess clock. It's not particularly well implemented, though. The idea of the chess clock is to limit the amount of time one takes to play, but the program has no feature to set a limit on individual moves or entire games. It may be useful if two people want to play each other, though for such games I think a real board and chess clock would be a much better way to play than any computer program.

The overall quality of the game is very good. The graphics are simple and functional. The game works well on the Revo, Series 5 and Series 7. However, the graphics on the Series 7 show only half-hearted support. While the toolbar has more buttons, with colour icons, the board and pieces are still monochrome, and are no bigger than they would be on the Series 5. Sound is completely absent, though this is not crucial in a board game.

I can very much recommend this program. For Revo owners it's the only choice. Series 7 owners who really need colour might prefer 4Play, but personally I would prefer the features and reliability of Four In A Line.
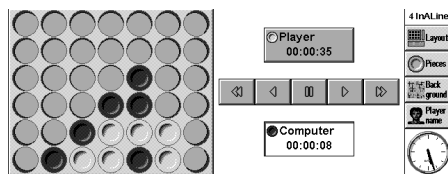
This month, I've managed to squeeze four articles in, although one of them is a short one. That's the first of an occasional series of Author Spotlight articles, each of which will take a brief look at the output of a particular author or publisher. Gilles Contastin's games have not had much exposure, in the English speaking world at least, so his output is a good place to start.

As the *Animating OPL* tutorial nears its end, it will start to take shape as the ball moves around its course. An interesting race game in the form of *Mike D. Rally* is reviewed in this issue, as is another game in the Connect 4 line-up.

As always, your feedback is welcome. I'm particularly interested to hear your opinions on the ongoing Connect 4 head to head series. Not just about the subject, but the format, too. Do you like the idea of similar games reviewed as part of a series? Or would you prefer to see the comparison distilled into a single article, leaving room for full individual reviews of the games at other times? Comments on this and any other aspect of the magazine can be send to the usual email address, given below.

I hope you enjoy this fifth issue of *EPOC Entertainer*.

entertainer@snigfarp.karoo.co.uk

In the Spotlight
Damian Walker highlights the games of Gilles Contastin in this, the first of our occasional Author & Publisher Spotlight series.

One of the most prolific software authors for EPOC32 is Gilles Contastin. M. Contastin's output specialises around board, dice and card games, with the odd puzzle game thrown in. The games are generally of high quality, though available mostly only in French and for the Series 5.

Some of the more interesting board games are *Agora5*, *Quads5* and *Quarto5*. These are all based on modern abstract board games and, like all M. Contastin's games, are very well presented. *Mancala* is a more traditional board game, from Africa, and *Carré5* is the well-known pen and paper game Squares. Card games are represented by *Blackjack5* and *Cruel*, and dice games by *Bangkok* and *Yam5*.

There are some interesting puzzles and puzzle-style games, too. *Crésus* is an interesting coin-collection game, while *Collector* is about the best version of Bejewelled available on EPOC32. *Cannibale5* is an implementation of a traditional logical puzzle. Finally, there are two number games: *Compte5*, taken from the TV show Countdown, and *Zabble5*, a numeric scrabble.

All of the games are free, and are available from M. Contastin's web site, which also hosts the games of Gérard Millet. Many of these will be subject to review in future issues of *EPOC Entertainer*, but meanwhile, why not download a few and form your own opinions?

Author	Gilles Contastin
URL	perso.wanadoo.fr/psions5-3495

Animating OPL
In this penultimate part of the tutorial by Damian Walker, our bouncing ball starts to move.

As of last month's tutorial, the ball isn't going anywhere. One of the advantages of sprites that I mentioned previously is that they're easy to move around. We'll adopt the simple technique from Psion's own animation example to set the ball in motion, on a diagonal path that will change direction as the ball comes into contact with the edge of the screen. Here's the procedure to do it:

```
PROC MoveBall:
  LOCAL movex%,movey%
  movex%=4
  movey%=4
  DO
    PAUSE 2
    IF spritex%+movex%<0 OR
     ⤢spritex%+movex%>gWIDTH-16
     movex%=-movex%
    ENDIF
    IF spritey%+movey%<0 OR
     ⤢spritey%+movey%>gHEIGHT-16
     movey%=-movey%
    ENDIF
    spritex%=spritex%+movex%
    spritey%=spritey%+movey%
    SPRITEPOS:
          ⤢(spritex%,spritey%)
  UNTIL KEY=27
ENDP
```

Remember, the ⤢ character indicates a continuation of the previous line. The movex% and movey% variables are the direction and speed in which the ball will move. In the beginning the ball will move, four pixels at a time, towards the bottom right of the screen. The DO UNTIL loop ensures movement will continue until the ESC key is pressed. There are two IFs inside this loop, to check that the ball is not about to run off the screen, and to reverse its direction if it is. This is the "rebound", and there is one check each for horizontal and vertical movement. After these checks, the direction is applied to the sprite's position (spritex%,spritey%), and it is the call to SPRITEPOS that actually updates the sprite's position on the screen. Note the PAUSE instruction; without it the ball would move too fast for us to see. Before translating and running this, you will need to amend the Bouncer procedure as shown here:

```
PROC Bouncer:
  GLOBAL ball&(3),mask&(3)
  GLOBAL sprite&,spritex%,
                  ⤢spritey%
  DrawFloor:
  LoadBall:
  PlaceBall:
  MoveBall:
  DO UNTIL GET=27
ENDP
```

Next month is the final part of this tutorial. I'll round up the series by adding proper, responsible clean up routines, and by looking at what uses sprites can be put to.

Downhill All the Way
A review by Damian Walker of the driving game Mike D. Rally, by Mike Dunn

Among the few driving games available for EPOC32 is the unusually-named Mike D. Rally, by Mike Dunn, otherwise known as MPD Soft. This is a shareware game, and is designed for the Series 5 and 5mx only,

The aim of the game is to drive your car down a hill, slalom style, passing left and right of flags on the course, while avoiding trees and rocks. There is a penalty for missing flags, and the trees and rocks can slow you down or event prove fatal to your car. At the end of the course, your time is added to a score board.

The game's presentation is good in some ways. The graphics are very attractive, for instance. The car and the trees are based on the Psion's own clip-art, while the rest of the graphics are of equally good quality. But sound is limited to system clicks and beeps. In general the user interface is straightforward, but has some down sides: the menu bar is not always available, and the control keys are neither standard nor configurable.

As for playability, the game may give some players enjoyment, but persevering as I did, I still found it a little uninspiring. While some simple games work well, I think this one needs a bit more variation on game play. There is a little of the "just one more go" factor with this game, but by the time I got the hang of the controls, I was getting bored of the game.

The registered version of the game has some options to customise the game. You can make the track longer, and you can make the game more difficult. With the simplicity of the game, I think the shortest track length is just about right; I don't think lengthening the track will add anything to the playability of the game. The limited help doesn't explain exactly how the difficulty levels work, so I'm unable to comment on how effective these are.

The overall quality of the game doesn't match up to the promise of its graphics. In one particular this game hits the mark: it appears to be 100% reliable. I couldn't identify any bugs as such, and everything seems to work exactly as intended. But the game doesn't respond to system events at all, so if it's left running, it will prevent backups being made.

Also on the down side, the speed of the game isn't regulated at all. The action is jerky on the 5 and smooth on the 5mx, as is reasonable, but the speed controls are not as fine on the 5mx: a little acceleration sends your car zooming down the hill. It seems that the game takes no account of the speed of the machine, which on an action game is a severe disadvantage.

As the game is shareware, and takes up very little space, I would recommend that fans of driving games—and skiing—give it a try. But I would be very surprised (though happy for Mr. Dunn) if players were flocking to his site to pay the registration fee to unlock the game after the 30-day trial is over.

By	Mike Dunn
URL	www.mpdunn.freeserve.co.uk
Licence	Shareware
Compatibility	Series 5/5mx
Rating	☆☆