

# History of the Dogcow, Part 1

Photo Deleted

by **MARK ("THE RED") HARLAN**

I'm going to tell you a few things that have never been put in print before about the dogcow. If you don't know what or who the dogcow is, or you don't care for Apple cultural minutiae, you should just flip past this column.

This is only part 1 of the story, to be followed by more in a future issue of develop. We didn't want to hit you with it all at once, for fear of what the shock (or the boredom) might do.

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The dogcow was originally a character in the Cairo font that used to ship with the Macintosh; it was designed by Susan Kare. I had always been interested in this critter ever since I first saw it in the LaserWriter Page Setup Options dialog, sometime during my stint in Apple's Developer Technical Support (DTS) group in 1987. To me it showed perfection in human interface design. With one picture it was very easy to explain concepts like an inverted image or larger print area that otherwise would be nearly impossible to communicate.

Interest became an obsession when one day I was talking to Scott ("ZZ") Zimmerman about the dialog and suddenly thought, "Just what is that animal supposed to be, anyway?" Since ZZ was the Printing Guy in DTS (now in the Newton group), and my favorite pastime was to bother him endlessly anyway, I started pressing him on whether the animal was a dog or a cow.

In an act of desperation he said, "It's both, OK? It's called a 'dogcow.' Now will you get out of my office?" The date was October 15, 1987, and I consider this to be the first use of the term. It should be noted that since then a few people (including Ginger herself) have told me that actually the phrase was coined by Ginger Jernigan (ex-DTS, now ROM software) at a meeting of Apple's Print Shop sometime shortly before that, which very well could be the case. Nevertheless it was ZZ who pressed it into common usage, and he certainly was the first person I ever heard use the term.

ZZ's ploy to get me out of his office was futile, however, because then I stood around and postulated that the dogcow's genes would have a radical effect on its behavior, and it must not bark or moo, but rather utter a combination like "Boo-wool!" or "[Moof!](#)"

We both thought it was funny enough that we decided to press it into everyday usage, and I started circulating the dogcow with "[Moof!](#)" on internal memos. The idea caught on, and at the 1988 Worldwide Developers Conference we gave away dogcow buttons in the debugging lab. Louella Pizzuti (ex-DTS, ex-develop editor, now citizen of the world) came up with the great idea of making the background Mountain Dew green. Response to the buttons was huge, and no one was smiling more than the DTS folks when John Sculley wore one for his keynote speech. It was a major-league coup.

## THE ORIGIN OF TECH NOTE #31

Then things started to spin out of control. Various groups internally started picking up the dogcow logo and doing things that didn't seem, well, DTS-like. The final straw was when the dogcow pin appeared in a Microsoft advertisement. Mark Johnson (ex-DTS, now in Apple Europe) approached me and suggested that we throw down the gauntlet and write a Technical Note on the subject. I balked out of nothing more than sheer laziness.

Some time passed and we were getting ready to go with the April 1989 batch of Tech Notes when Mark approached me again, saying that he thought having an April Fool's edition describing the dogcow would be perfect. I said yes but then stalled and stalled, missing two deadlines, and I thought the Tech Note wasn't going to happen.

Mark marched in my office one day in March of 1989 at 11:30 a.m. announcing that Tech Notes were shipping at noon and implied that my manliness was in question if I didn't get that Note in the batch. My macho instincts just couldn't allow that to happen, so Tech Note #31, "The Dogcow," was written in literally 40 minutes in one pass. I'd been thinking about it for quite some time, so I knew pretty much how it would go; I just sat down and typed it out. Given more time I definitely would have churned out something a bit more polished, and part of its quirkiness, I'm sure, is due to the time pressure I was under.

One thing was certain: it had to be something original in concept. I've always had a deep disdain for people who rip off comedic stuff. You know, the same people who used to have to tell all their jokes with an English accent because of Monty Python are now those who say "Not!" behind phrases. Once is funny, but after a while it gets really old. I definitely wanted it out of the mainstream.

For numbering I wanted to use *e*, but Mark pointed out that there had been confusion early on in the Tech Note numbering scheme and that a few numbers had been left out for various reasons. He showed me some conversations from the net that went on and on about Tech Note #31 and people's guesses as to why it was missing. (People were really, really out

there with their guessing; anyone who's a believer in conspiracy theories would have enjoyed this blatant gibberish.) The number 31 had the right feel; it would blend into the regular batch better than e, and I've always had a soft spot for prime numbers, so we picked it.

Sports Illustrated had run a great fake story about a Zen baseball pitcher sometime earlier and we borrowed the idea of having the words "April Fool's" spelled out within the article from them -- in our case using the first letter of every line of the poem at the closing. No one has ever mentioned this to me, so few people must have caught it.

There's a picture of the wrong way to draw the dogcow that several people thought was a scanned image of ZZ. Actually, completely independently of the Tech Note, I'd been using a program called Mac-a-Mug, designed to make mug shots, and came across a set of hair that looked frighteningly like ZZ's. After fiddling around with the program a bit I was able to come up with a good rendition of ZZ's head, and I shoved it into the Tech Note without his ever knowing about it. The expression (and color) of his face when he learned about the picture is a memory I'll always cherish.

The Note also contains the expression "Aanal, Enacku Naiimadu, Kaanali!" People came up with very unusual anagrams or unusual explanations for what it meant, the best being that it was an obscure reference to a clip of The Day the Earth Stood Still that had been cut from the film. But the truth is that it's phoneticized Tamil that was supplied by Sriram Subramanian (Networking Guy, ex-DTS, ex-Taligent, now in Apple Japan) meaning "But I can't see the dogcow!"

Ironically, there's also a mistake in that the "correct" way to draw the dogcow is actually wrong. We ended up being so pressured for time in getting the Note out the door that we just jammed it into a weird PostScript file that ended up mutating the shape. Shortly after the release of that Note, Chris Derossi (ex-DTS, now at General Magic) convinced me that a better solution was to have the correct way to draw the dogcow be pixelated, to avoid these idiosyncracies in the future -- which is what's now done.

## NEXT TIME

There will be more history of the dogcow in a future issue of develop. Have you ever wondered if you have the entire set of dogcow pins? Is that dogcow T-shirt of your cubemate's bootlegged? Is there any way things can get more meaningless? Some, but not all, of these questions will be answered the next time we have a little extra space to fill.

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[Tech Note 31](#) is not on this issue's CD and hasn't been on the CD for quite some time now; it's no longer available. It used to be hidden in the Technical Notes Stack on the early versions of develop's CD. It appeared on paper only once, as part of the monthly mailing to Apple Partners and Associates in April of 1989. The continued secrecy has a little bit to do with history and a lot to do with tradition. For more on the distribution of the Tech Note, stay tuned for [History of the Dogcow: Part 2](#).

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Thanks to Gary Robinson, whose letter asking for the story of the dogcow inspired this column.

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