M COMPUTING

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To the Editor:

It is always a pleasure to see Winfried Gerum's *TIPS 'N' TRICKS* column appearing in *M Computing*. It is consistently entertaining and full of novel material on programming practice.

I was therefore even more saddened to read the December '96 installment, *Breaking the Bottleneck*. There are a number of statements concerning my *Handbook of Efficiency Techniques* that I find hard to reconcile with the actual text of the book.

"Most of the things he says about programming are obsolete."

All 125 of the techniques described in the body of the text utilize universal, timeless principles—such as the use of indexes in file design or multi-tasking in data entry routines. (Look at the cover!)

"It no longer makes sense to fine-tune software to the idiosyncrasies of a particular M implementation. ... e.g. the argumentless NEW gives you serious performance penalty if you switch implementations."

Only five of the 130 techniques (less than 4%) given in the entire text are implementation specific. These are all listed in the Appendix (as stated on page 123). Furthermore, these five are harmless techniques e.g. for choosing variable names or arranging subroutines within a routine in optimal order. (I purposely pruned my original list of 200 techniques down to 125 to remove anything controversial.)

[As far as programming decisions go, I would point out that, the future being unpredictable, if you must choose between two otherwise equivalent constructs, it only makes sense to choose the one that is (currently) more efficient.]

The NEW command is not mentioned anywhere in the book.

By my reckoning, "most" of 130 means 65 or more. Even if we count the five techniques in the Appendix, that leaves 60 others that are said to be obsolete. Can anyone point out even 5 of these 125 techniques and explain how they are now "obsolete"?

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