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# REVIEWS

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*En route*. CD-ROM. London: Thomas Nelson, 1994.

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The *En route* software package takes full advantage of multimedia technology. Designed for beginning students of French, it grabs learners immediately, lighting up with graphics and music. The software begins with a catchy song and the appearance of the guide, a cartoon hitchhiker. The graphics strike the viewer with bright colors, images, and movement, demonstrating a concerted effort to connect with the visually savvy. The system requirements are within the standards of today's computers. To run the software, the developers recommend a minimum of a 386- or 486-based PC, a double speed CD-ROM drive, 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, MS-DOS 5.0, Microsoft Windows 3.1, a mouse, and a sound card. As a whole, the software has the rhythm and look of young students. The catchy theme song, the elaborate graphics, and the "Ouah, cool" used by the hitchhiker-guide all indicate an effort to tap into the verve of youth.

The product is divided into ten thematic sections, beginning with "Salut!" and including "Miam, miam!," "En ville," and "Bonnes vacances." Within these chapters, the designers utilize sound, drawings, pictures, video, games, and quizzes to promote language learning. Outcome-based objectives subdivide each section. For instance, section two, "Nous voilà," is composed of three sub-units: counting to twenty and saying how old you are, talking about your brothers and sisters, and talking about your family. In general, the sections flow through expected beginning-level topics and build upon each other. However, section three, entitled "Nos amis les animaux," feels awkward. This chapter on animals could easily be eliminated since it offers nothing but the vocabulary to discuss one's pets.

The menu-page for each section displays the choices of *vidéo*, *rappel*, *réviser*, *vocabulaire*, *feuille de contrôle*, as well as the section's subdivisions. *Vocabulaire* gives a useful list of section-specific words. *Vidéo* provides an opportunity at the end of the chapter for the student to check his or her global progress. The *rappel* selection concerns itself with grammar but avoids explanations, preferring to show without telling. The *feuille de contrôle* may help students reflect on their progress, but is nothing more than a list of the objectives he or she may check. The *réviser* part contains questions that provide an occasion for the student to check his or

her progress or for the instructor to verify successful completion of the chapter. Unfortunately, the questions are not contextualized and feel disjointed.

*En route* demonstrates sound pedagogical principles. The activities start off mechanically and gradually demand more active participation of the student. When used, the pictures and video clips depict authentic artifacts and settings. The section on money shows all French bills and coins, and the one on travel shows real tickets and timetables. These documents help the disk impart some cultural knowledge. While the software focuses on France there are mentions of other Francophone countries and even some video of African settings. Occasionally the order of the activities seems illogical. At one point, one reads a pen-pal letter and answers true-false questions. Following this, however, is the simpler rearrange-the-letters activity.

As expected for a beginning-level CD-ROM, this one stresses vocabulary and listening comprehension. The chapters begin by introducing vocabulary through sound and images. When the student clicks on the drawing or picture, a voice names the object. Often there will be drawings of the new words and the student must move the word to the appropriate drawing. Other times, the learner will hear someone speak one of the words and he or she must click on the right image. One innovative format for developing listening comprehension offers ambient sounds to which one must choose the setting. The sound of splashing indicates that the learner must click on the word *la piscine*. Sometimes the drawings are not particularly clear as in section four when one must decide which rectangular object with a door is *la gare* and which is *le centre commercial*. The software uses some pictures and video, but would benefit from more, especially when the drawings lack clarity. The *vidéo* part of each section demonstrates excellent use of camera footage. The CD-ROM plays a few minutes of a clip followed by listening comprehension questions. The video for each section recycles and reinforces the unit's structures, and all ten video segments combine to tell one long story. The authentic language and settings give learners a great opportunity to synthesize their listening skills.

While *En route* emphasizes the passive skills, listening in particular, its self-recording feature allows students to practice speaking. The descriptive icons make the recording process easy to use. Students record their answers to spoken questions and compare their responses to those of native speakers. The absence of voice-recognition software, however, means that students themselves must compare, evaluate, and correct their pronunciation.

The designers make an effort to incorporate reading and writing into the CD-ROM. Most sections contain a letter. Sometimes the student reads the note and

answers comprehension questions. The letter and its questions do a good job of targeting concepts from the unit. Understandably, the package has more trouble including written work. Sometimes the learner writes by filling in the blanks with the appropriate word from the choices in the margin. Usually the writing exercises amount to rearranging the jumbled letters of a word; this quickly grows into little more than a mouse-manipulation task.

Students can easily navigate through the clearly organized menu pages. The large icons make the software easy to use, but the proliferation of choices makes it hard to decide what to click. On the main page, for instance, students can gain access to the chapters either by clicking on *Sections* or *Objectifs*. The former offers the chapter's subdivisions in a graphics format while the latter presents them in text, but one still arrives at the same activities. The required selection of *Route touristique*, *Route directe*, and *Autoroute* before beginning a unit adds another distracting choice. Ostensibly, this feature permits students to adjust the difficulty of the chapter. Sadly, the difference between these three levels amounts to little more than longer words to rearrange and a few harder reading comprehension questions. The majority of the activities are the same.

This CD-ROM combines solid methods with multimedia technology. While it is primarily a listening module, the recording feature, the cultural elements, and the occasional reading and writing activities add extra dimensions. The multimedia technology gives the package punch. Mature students, however, may find it cloying. Nevertheless, the disk is well-conceived and offers a wide variety of activities and features. This software makes a great complement to the more staid offerings on the market. ✱