

# Particle Flow Tools: Box 1

Additional operators and tests for 3ds max's industry-proven particle system

BY PETE DRAPER

DEVELOPER ORBAZ TECHNOLOGIES

WEB WWW.ORBAZ.COM

RESELLER WWW.TURBOSQUID.COM

>> FOR 3DS MAX

Created by the same team behind the original *Particle Flow*, the first of the *Tools* boxes aims to make life easier for the particle artist. And it manages to fulfill this objective by plugging the holes in the native system and expanding the range of features available. Such features include a Birth operator, called Set Initial State, which takes snapshots of an existing particle distribution, so you don't need any massive lead-in precalculation – making tasks like distributing

particles to create a galaxy, for example, much easier. There are additional Birth operators which enable you to paint and distribute the particles exactly where you need them, and a new Mapping Object operator which takes the mapping of desired surfaces and applies them to particles.

Lock/Bond, the 'daddy' of the suite, is a constraint-based test which is used to adhere (or float) particles to a surface, and only releases them after a certain velocity. The effect it gives is a bit like what happens when you flick a paintbrush, and is worth the price of admission alone. The Group operators enable easy particle selection based on scene geometry, and perform better than using defectors. You can also generate presets, saved as external MAX files (which aren't backwards compatible). They can then

be introduced to a scene with minimum fuss. This automatically tidies up the flow, which makes for good housekeeping.

With 14 operators aimed at Painting, Groups and Utilities, *Box 1* is definitely worth the money. However, for that little bit extra, the subscription looks enticing; even more so since *Box 2* is geared towards fragmentation, assembly and disassembly. ■

3D VERDICT	9
RANGE OF FEATURES	8
VALUE FOR MONEY	9

**PROS** Works with existing system >> Removes need for particle wind-up >> Greater control over particle subsets >> Affordable

**CONS** Some features can be reproduced with scripting >> Must still wait for fragmentation >> Presets are not backwards compatible

## PRICE

>> £108\* (\$195)  
>> Subscription: £220\* (\$395) – includes access to advisory board and Boxes 2 and 3 when released)  
\*Currency conversion

## MINIMUM SPEC

>> Any system capable of running 3ds max 6

## FEATURE LIST

>> Easy particle selection  
>> Additional shapes  
>> Geometric particle mapping  
>> Particle painting on objects  
>> 'Sticky' particles with Lock/Bond  
>> Automatic cleanup



**Lock/Bond enables particles to 'float' on deformed surfaces, and detach if the surface geometry moves over a given threshold**

# hairfx

Re-styled, re-branded and re-packaged – instant toupees for 3ds max

BY PETE DRAPER

DEVELOPER DIMENSION DESIGN ANIMATION GROUP

WEB WWW.DDAG.ORG

CONTACT DDAG@DDAG.ORG

>> FOR 3DS MAX

Originally branded as two separate plug-ins – *Shag: Fur*, and *Shag: Hair*, *hairfx* has been around for an age and is tried and tested. But this latest version, re-branded under the Discreet Certified Plug-ins stamp of quality (so it works with other products such as *finalRender*), sees the two unite. Although they're essentially two plug-ins (due to being

split into two environment effects, namely *hairfx* and *furfx*), the great thing about this version is they can also be used in conjunction with one another.

Adding hair or fur to an object is pretty straightforward. But the real beauty of this product is the amount of control users have over designing the shape of the hair, its orientation and aesthetics. The hair and fur dynamics are equally impressive, with fast, almost real-time, previews direct in the Viewport (depending on the speed of your computer). The antialiasing is really effective, too, though it does affect rendering times. Designing the material of the hair or fur is made easy through the provision of its own dedicated shader within a standard material, so you can make use of *max*'s own maps. While the end results are pretty satisfying,

there are a couple of instability issues when using *3ds max*'s skylight light. Also, with a lot of fur or hair rendered, it can take a while even for a single frame. This can be resolved somewhat by tweaking the hair quality, antialiasing, changing strand amounts etc.

Although crowned the long-time king of the *3ds max* hair plug-ins, a crop of inferior – but much cheaper – rivals is gradually growing. ■

3D VERDICT	8
RANGE OF FEATURES	9
VALUE FOR MONEY	7

**PROS** Distribution curves allow infinite hair control >> Effective hair shader with standard *max* map support >> Fast dynamics and previews >> Feathered anti-aliasing

**CONS** Quite expensive for casual users >> Not yet compatible with *mental ray*

## PRICE

>> £330\* (\$595)  
\*Currency conversion

## MINIMUM SPEC

>> Any system capable of running 3ds max 5 onwards

## RANGE OF FEATURES

>> Bucket rendering support  
>> Compatible with most third-party renderers  
>> Fast dynamics calculations  
>> Distribution curves to control properties  
>> MAXScript support  
>> Improved antialiasing  
>> Image Motion Blur  
>> Dynamics interaction with *max*'s *clothfx* and



**Originally called *Shag:Fur* and *Shag:Hair*, *hairfx* continues to occupy the cutting edge in hair simulation for 3ds max despite the expense**