

The LDraw system of tools

A short note about LDraw and some of its tools

By Jetro

As we have just seen, MLCad isn't the only tool related to LDraw, although it is probably the most popular one. It is only one of the available CAD programs for LDraw. There are also tools for rendering LDraw constructions, creating instructions, etc. (MLCad can do some of these things but only in a very limited way)

In order to get a more complete idea about LDraw, let's briefly consider some of its history. Although to some it may seem as if LDraw has 'always' been there, this tool first appeared in 1995, published by James Jessiman. It was a tool written for MS-DOS and created especially to design and reproduce constructions made with LEGO® bricks. Together with LDraw, LEdit was presented: a tool to create parts as well as an initial library of only three parts, brick 2x2, 2x3 and 2x4.

The program was (and is) freeware and James Jessiman allowed others to use it in order to create complementary programs for the system. In 1997 Steve Bliss presented LDraw Add-On which provided a graphical interface to make the use of the existing command line tools easier. Even before that LeoCAD was published, a multiplatform tool that allows building directly in 3D.

Unfortunately, James Jessiman passed away in 1997 at the age of 27. But his legacy continues and grows day by day. Since then many more programs have been added to what now should be called "the LDraw system of tools". Today, LDraw is no longer directly used, but the file format James Jessiman designed is still the basis which allows all these tools to work with the same system. Although the following list is far from complete, the following tools deserve to be highlighted:

Lugnet.cad is the forum around which the collaboration for the improvement and expansion of this system is articulated

MLCad is the most well known tool for creating LDraw files and allows access to a number of other applications through its interface

LDview is an easy to use rendering tool which allows creating 3D images of LDraw constructions.

BrickSmith is the first LDraw Cad application for the Macintosh platform.

LPub is a tool for publishing instructions based on an LDraw file

LSynth is a tool for synthesizing flexible parts

L3P translates the information contained in an LDraw file to a format that can be used by POV-Ray, a software tool that can render high quality images. ■