Book Review

In The Know... SAS Tips & Techniques From Around the Globe, by Phil Mason. Published by SAS Institute, Cary NC 1996. ISBN: 1-55544-870-4; Order No.: ZG55513; $22.95

Reviewed by Peter Prause, The Hartford

When I first opened the package containing this book, I was happy to find that it was a small book that would be easy to carry around with me and read while I made my daily bus ride. The contents of the book also made for easy reading in bits and pieces. The book is a collection of 174 useful tips organized into 16 chapters. The "Around the Globe" is part of the title is because many of the tips originated from or were critiqued by international SAS users via the internet.

The style of presentation for each tip is reader-friendly. Each section is marked off in grid lines, and has a logo on the left of the section so you can quickly see what is being covered. Each tip usually has a Why? section, a Code section, and a Log section. Sometimes there is an Output or a Restrictions section.

The Why? section briefly states the purpose for the tip, or what problem it is designed to remedy. The Code section has a short piece of useable SAS code, with comments added as necessary to clarify what is happening. The Log section is the result of submitting the code, complete with SAS log notes, etc. The Output section is included if the author thinks it adds to the reader's understanding. The Restrictions section points out things like platform or release dependencies that may produce varying results, and in some cases the use of undocumented or unsupported coding techniques.

Most tips end with another useful section called "For More Information".. This is usually a reference to a standard SAS manual, or to a Technical Report manual. Sometimes it includes the actual pages that cover the material in greater depth. Each of the 16 chapters is organized so the most general/useful tips are presented first. To look for a tip in a specific area, there is also a helpful index in the back of the book. The 16 chapters are devoted to categories which cover the major areas of Base SAS, the languages used in SAS (macro, SQL, and SCL) some product based topics (like SAS Connect) and some major platforms (like MVS).

This book made for interesting reading, and I would recommend it for anyone's SAS library. I would not recommend it for someone just beginning to learn SAS, but after that first introductory manual, or first intro. course, or first successful error-free SAS program, it definitely has a use for everyone wanting to understand more about what is going on, and how to write better code.