

BullCharts Review

By Jason Mitchell



As many of my readers know I have been a very strong Metastock supporter for a number of years. Over time I have also become accustomed to Metastock and its features and have been somewhat resistant to switch charting programs (although I have bought and tried my share).

Recently I have been checking out BullCharts again as it became compatible with Tradesim and I have to say that this charting program is a very good alternative to Metastock – wait for it – it is possibly even better for some traders. It is a powerful program that is may be easier to use than Metastock and has many tools and features that I think many traders would find very handy.

I have prepared this review as a brief introduction to the program and have shown just a few of the many great features this charting package has. As readers can appreciate it is hard to cover these large programs and all their tools and programs in a single review. This problem is overcome as a trial version complete with live data can be trialled at <http://www.bullcharts.com.au>.

Easy Installation & Setup

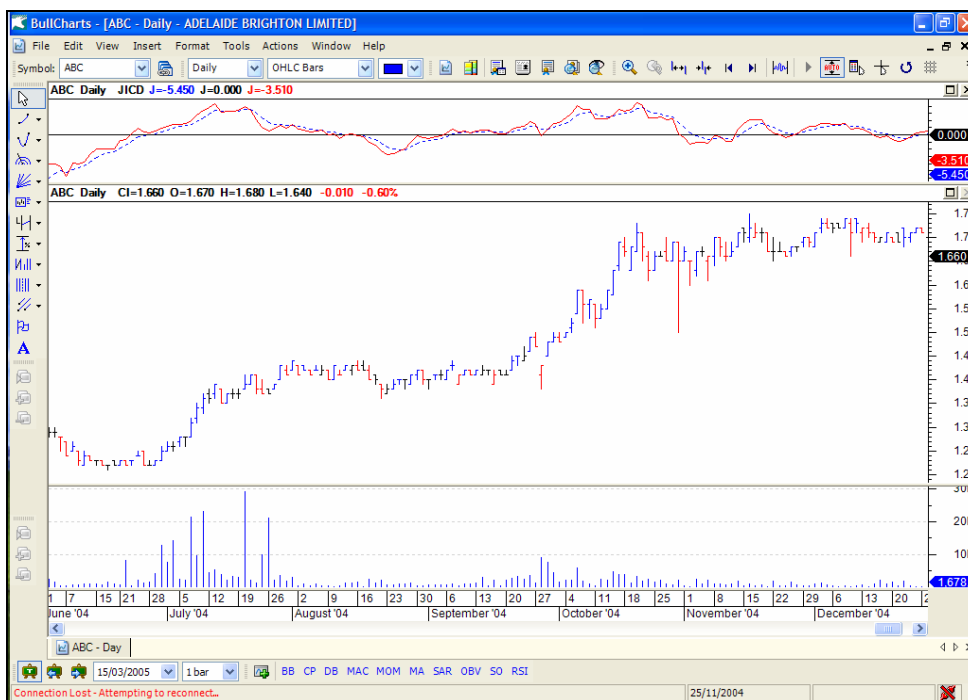
Installation of the product was a breeze. The instructions were easy to read and simple to follow. As with most windows based programs the installation wizard guides you through the process and there is instructions complete with screenshots to help anyone who is a little nervous about such endeavours.

Once installed, again it is just a matter of following the instructions to get hooked up to the live data and away you go. Of course you can just use end of day data and do not need to have the live data – this is just a benefit of the program

BullCharts Display.

We can see that the display is set up very similarly to Metastock in that it has all the windows menu's up the top (File, Edit, View etc.) and that the line studies and other hand placed tools are along the left hand side.

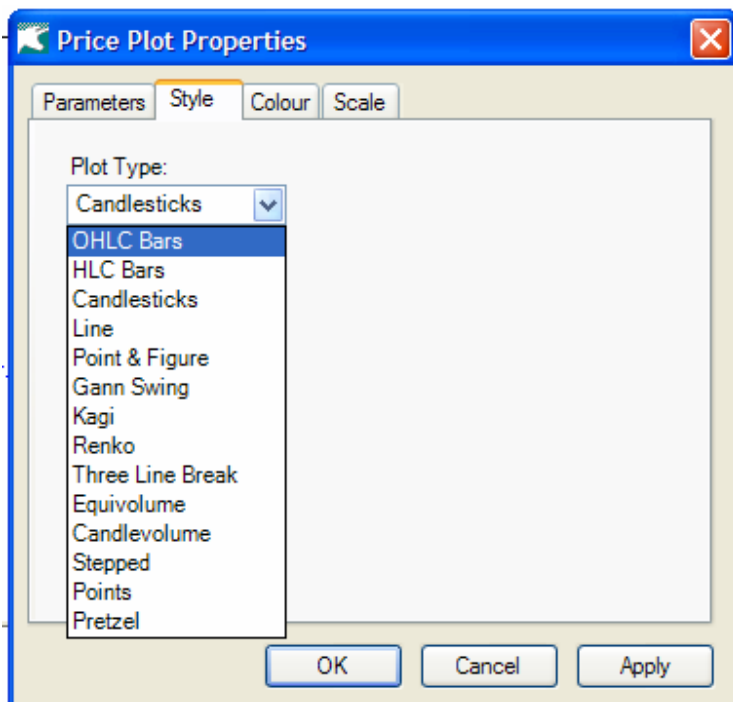
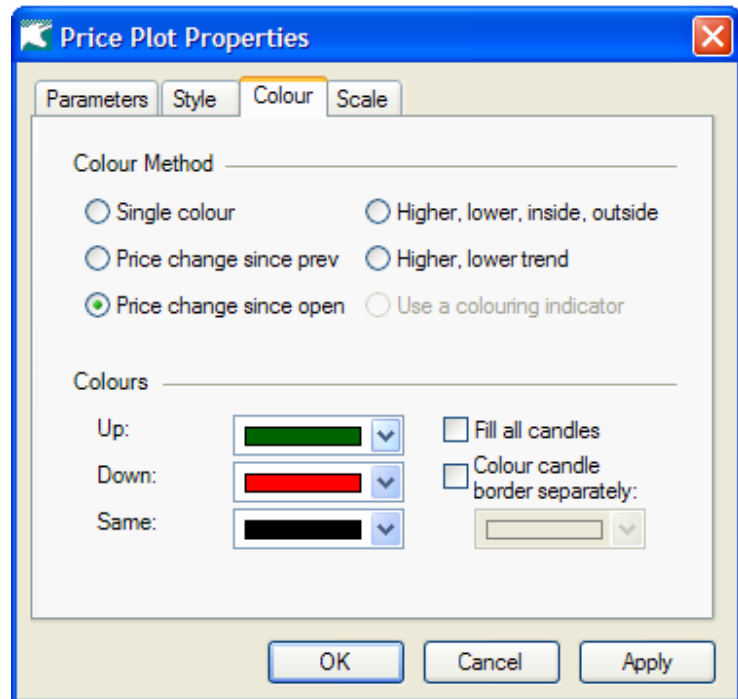
There are considerably more tools than Metastock and many of these are very handy, some of which I will review later.



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The chart area is nice and clear and the variables to which we can change and alter our preferences in regards to the display are excellent. The following shows the parameter box for changing the colours of the bars or candles.

The options are excellent and allow the user to best colour their chart to suit themselves at the click of a button. Notice the option to colour the inside and outside of candles and a number of other interesting options. This is the same with bar charts.



The types of charts that can be used are numerous and include the most popular and most heavily covered including the OHLC Bar and HLC Bar, Candlestick, Line Charts, Point & Figure, Renko, Kagi and Three Line Break as well as others.

This is usually more than enough for most traders and you'll know if the tools you are looking for are not mentioned.

As can be seen changing these displays is as simple as pointing the mouse and clicking.

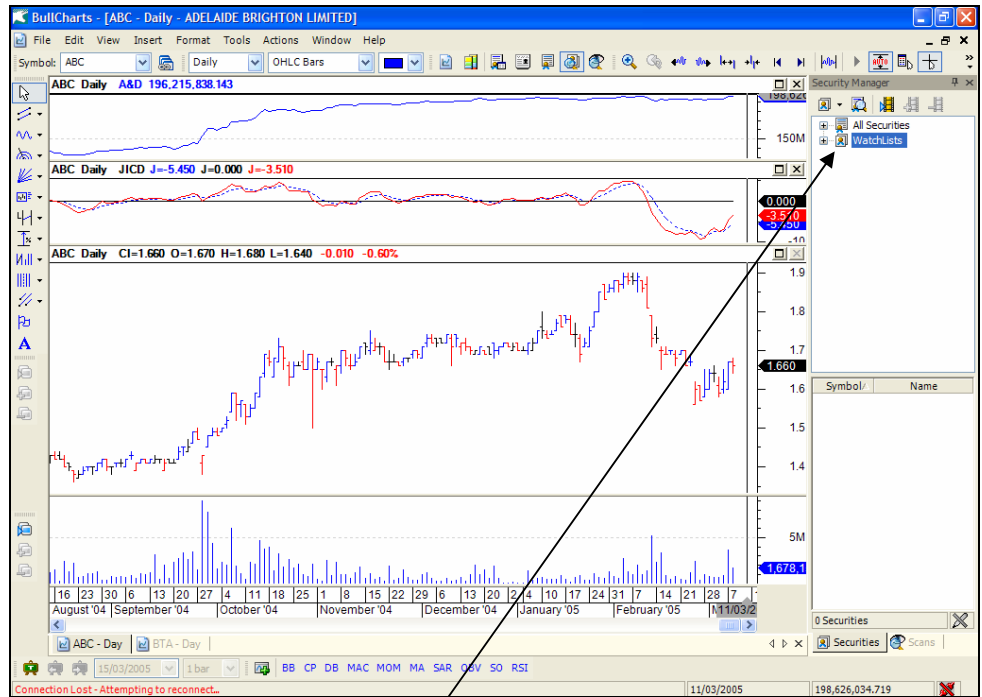
File Folders and Watchlists

Perhaps one of the most useful features of this program is the structure of the data folders (for charts) and the ease with which these can be manipulated. One of the biggest problems that many traders face is

setting up their data folders and watch list's – this program has them set up very well initially and altering and adding to these is exceptionally easy.

As with Metastock to open a new chart you could simply click on the open window and type in the code, alternatively you could go to the File menu and open a new chart from here. This is pretty straight forward but not what I want to share.

Straight out of the box we can look to the “Security Manager” by either pressing F6 or by going to the top of the screen and clicking on “Tools” and then “Security Manager”.

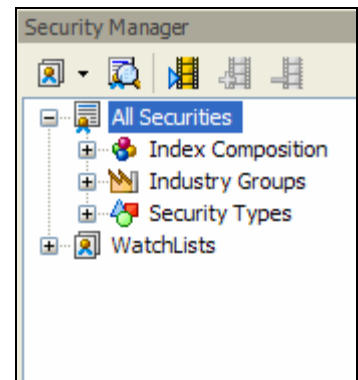


This brings up a new panel to the side of the screen as shown above and again below. It is setup in two simple folders on the first level which are:

- * All Securities
- * WatchLists

These two divisions allow us to keep things in order.

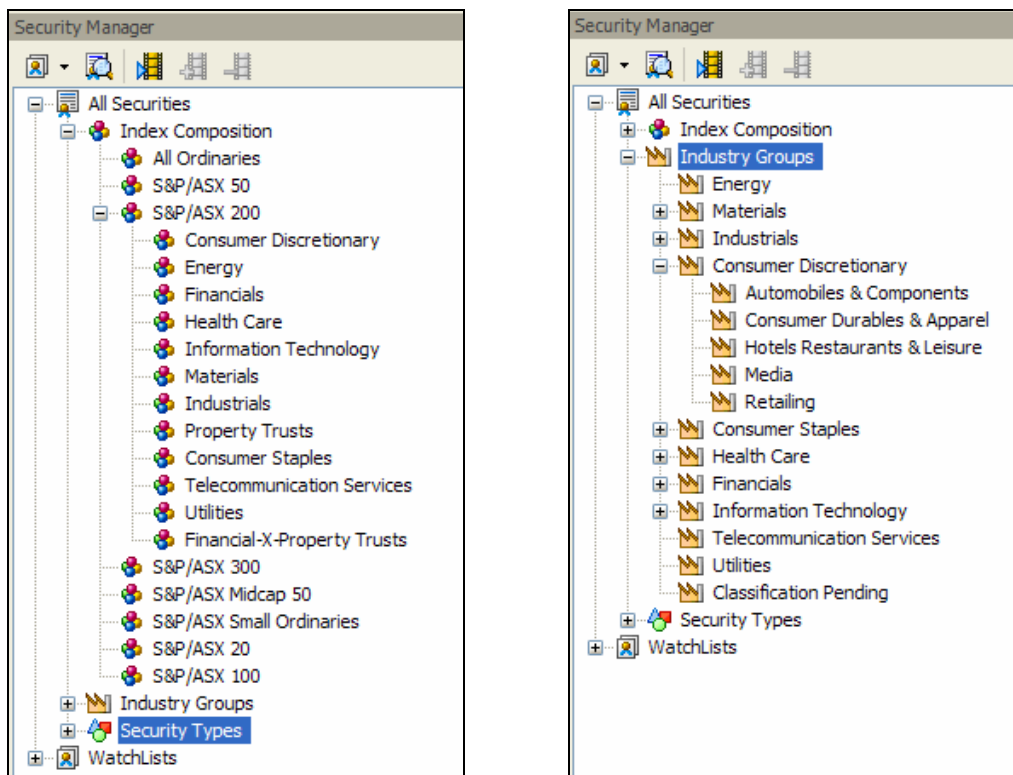
The folder that contains all securities is further broken down for quicker and easier access to things. The first category is the index composition. This divides the stocks up in to their index groups such as the ASX 50, ASX200 and All Ordinaries. This allows for quick searching and accessing of stocks if we wish to look at these sections of the market.



The next category is the industry groups which allow you to look by Industries and sectors and goes down to the second tier of sectors. Again you could look up all the stocks in a certain industry at the touch of a button or you could look deeper in to the second tier sectors. For example you may look at Consumer Discretionary stocks and then at the “Automobiles and Components” part of this sector. Again this allows for quick scanning and easy access.

“Security Types” which is the last subdivision of “All Securities” divides the stocks in to indices, ordinary shares and unit trusts again allowing for quick reference.

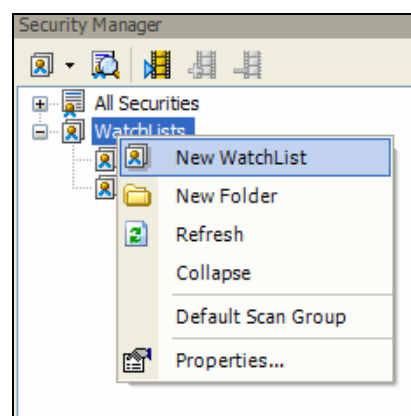
Once each section is chosen the list of shares for that section comes up in the box underneath the security manager folders. For example if I chose ASX200 then all of the stocks that made up the ASX200 would be listed below. It is simply a matter of scrolling through and double clicking on which one of the stocks we wish to look at.



Example of the Default Folders and Security Manager

The separate folder for watch lists is also very handy and fully customisable. It makes setting up watch lists very easy with everything done at the click of a button. In fact this is how easy it is to set up a watch list:

- 1) Press F6 to bring up the “Securities Manager”.
- 2) Right click the mouse on the “WatchList” folder and choose “New WatchList”
- 3) Select a name for the WatchList and press enter. The WatchList folder is created.
- 4) Now simply go to the section underneath the security manager and type the code of the stock you wish to add to the watch list - done

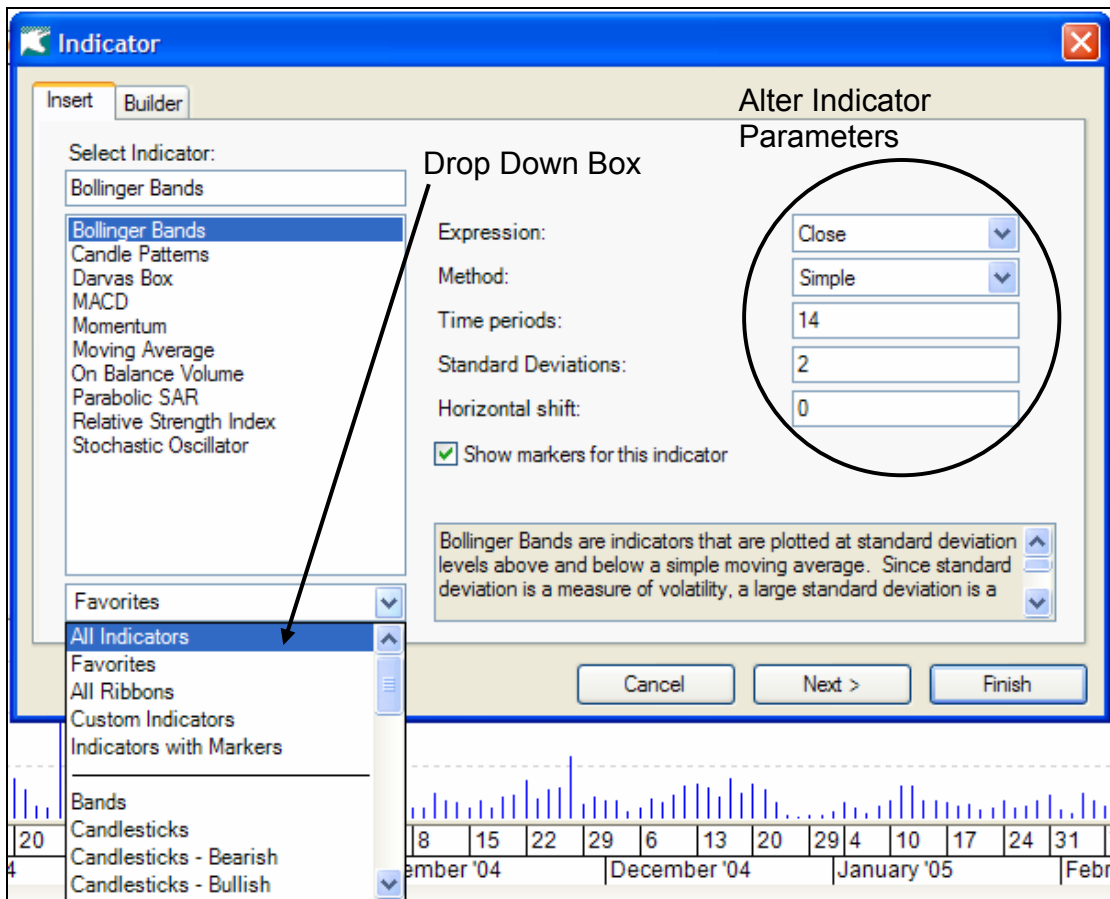


Indicator Plotting

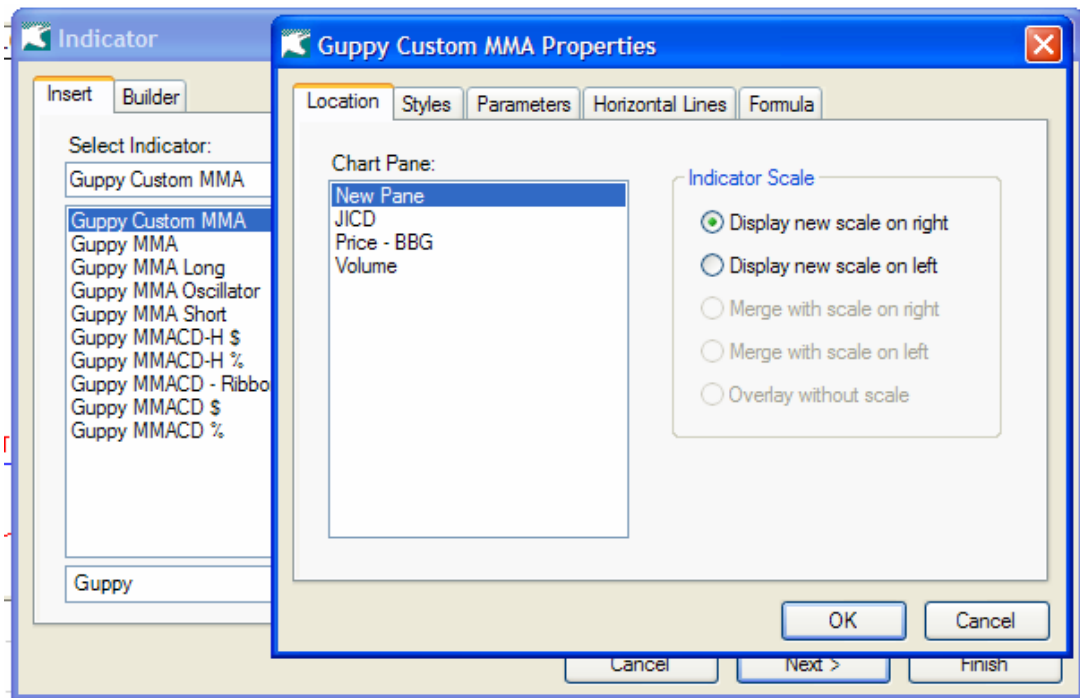
One of the useful features of the program is the indicator plotting method (i.e. placing an indicator on the chart).

Basically we can just choose from a list of favourites at the bottom of the screen (the list is customisable) or we can press [Ctrl] + [I] to bring up the indicator builder/plotter. From here we can quickly and easily access a large range of indicators.

The following diagram shows the way the plotter is presented when it first opens. The most interesting part of this screen is the Drop down box at the bottom. This drop down box controls what appears in the box above it and is broken down in to a number of categories. I have shown the default favourites list in the example however we can change what appears in this favourites list. We could also use the drop down box to only have certain indicators displayed. For example we could just have all the momentum indicators listed to choose from, or we could have Daryl Guppy or Leon Wilson's indicators displayed to choose from. Once we choose an indicator we can then choose to adjust the parameters of the display and then we simply press next or finish.



If we press next the following screen appears and allows us to choose a few more options regarding where and the way in which it is displayed. It asks which window we want to place the indicator in and then asks us about the scaling. Generally speaking the way these indicators were designed to be plotted tends to be the way they are set by default.



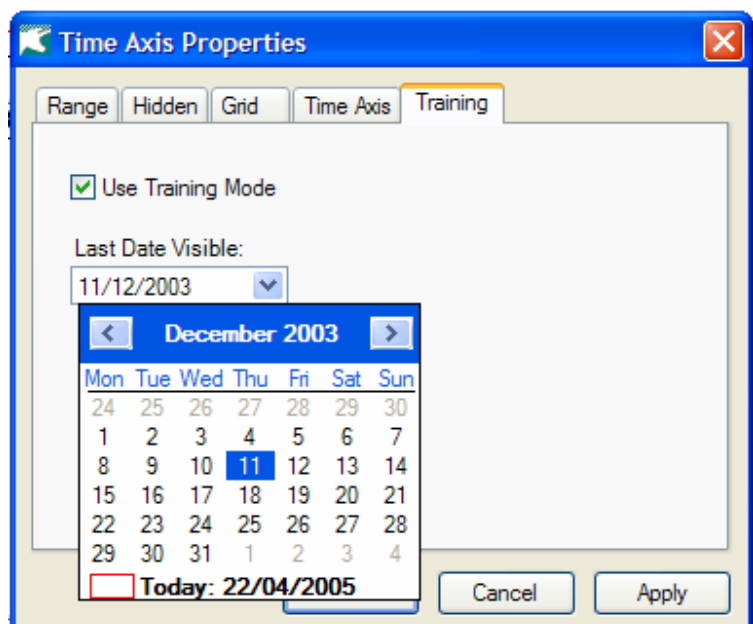
Once we have chosen the way we want it displayed simply press OK and the indicator will be plotted.

The number of ways the indicator list is subdivided means that it is easy to find the indicators we are looking for very quickly. We have noted some people found the division of the indicators in to families of momentum, volatility, trailing stop, moving averages etc. very helpful as they learned about each of the types.

Training Mode

No – no, your not going to be taught by the program – but you can use it with training exercises. I have seen this in a few programs now and it really can be a useful tool. I have done (and probably should keep doing) a similar thing in Metastock - but it is a pain in the neck compared to doing it in BullCharts. The BullCharts program allows you to switch on a “training mode” from the time axis properties (date) and then choose a date at which to start the training mode.

Basically all it does is it places a cover over price action past the date you have determined.



The above diagram illustrates how easy it is to choose the training mode and select a date at which to start.

The following diagram shows how the training mode appears. Notice how the bars are shown until the 11th December 2003 and then there is a green cover over the price action – essentially taking price away from the right hand side of the chart. We can then draw lines etc and begin to formulate plans to trade the right hand side.



Using the mouse we can then slowly reveal the right hand side of the chart and note where we may or may not have entered.

This is a similar concept to paper trading but much quicker. Of course if we are to learn anything we need to treat it seriously and we need to be trying to improve our trading. It is not to prove to ourselves we are good at trading.

Compound Candle Feature / Automatic Candle Addition

This is a good example of the many interesting features included in this program. Basically it is a tool that automates candle addition. It essentially shows you the way a certain period would appear as a single / compound candle (i.e. a certain number of periods reduced to 1 candle). The following charts show what I mean. Let's say we wanted to work out how the days within the following box would appear as one candle – we simply grab the tool and place it over the area.



Doing this the candle is drawn over the area – we can see in this case it has a black body and a small lower shadow. This can be done on 2, 3 or as many candles as you like. Many candlestick enthusiasts including Louise Bedford discuss the use of candle addition in analysis and this tool allows this to be done quickly and easily. Refer to Louise's book on Candlestick Charting for more information on this concept.



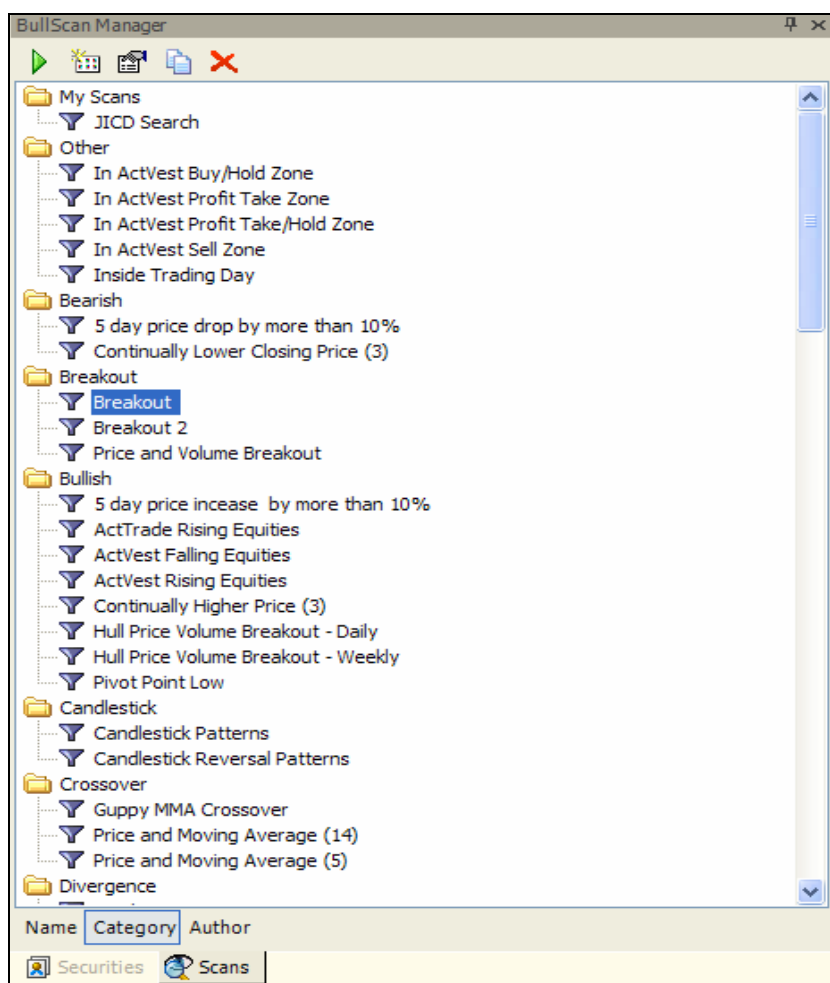
There are many other interesting features of BullCharts which I do not have room to cover however this serves as an example of some of the different tools.

Bull Scan

The BullScan feature is essentially a similar feature to the Metastock explorer. While I am very comfortable with Metastocks format I did find that there were some excellent qualities in the BullCharts version of this especially for those not comfortable writing formulas.

There are a huge number of pre-made explorations and these can be sorted by their name, the category or the trader that came up with the scans and ideas. When these are sorted by their name all the pre-loaded scans are listed in a single list.

When you press the category tab it divides the list into the type of searches, for example breakout, divergence, bullish, bearish etc. Some of the many choices can be seen on the screen shot to the right.

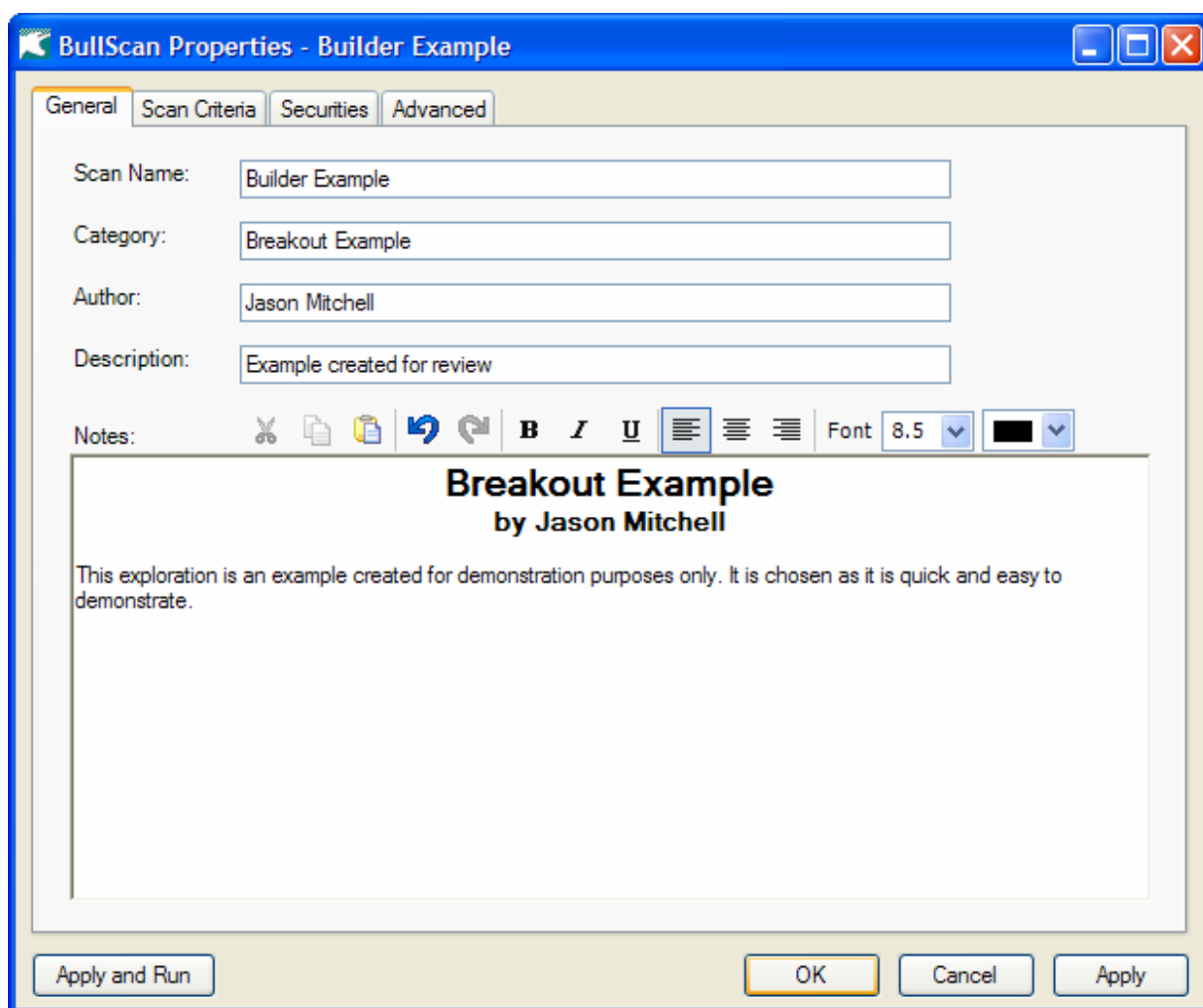


The last tab “Authors” allows you to choose scans created by a number of well known Australian traders and authors including Daryl Guppy, Alan Hull and Leon Wilson.

If you like to be able to create your own searches then you're in luck – even if you're not so great at the programming language (called BullScript in this programme). This programme offers an easy way to develop your own searches. I'll run through a quick example just for the purpose of demonstrating the program.

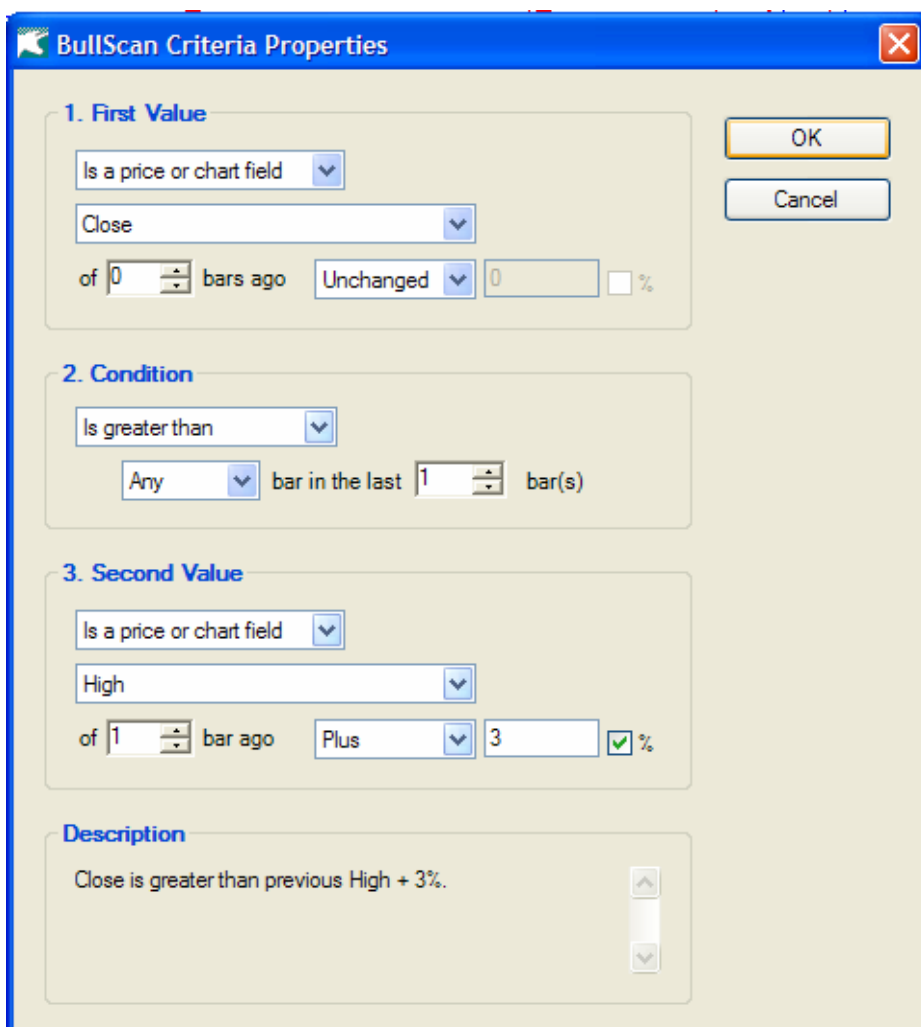
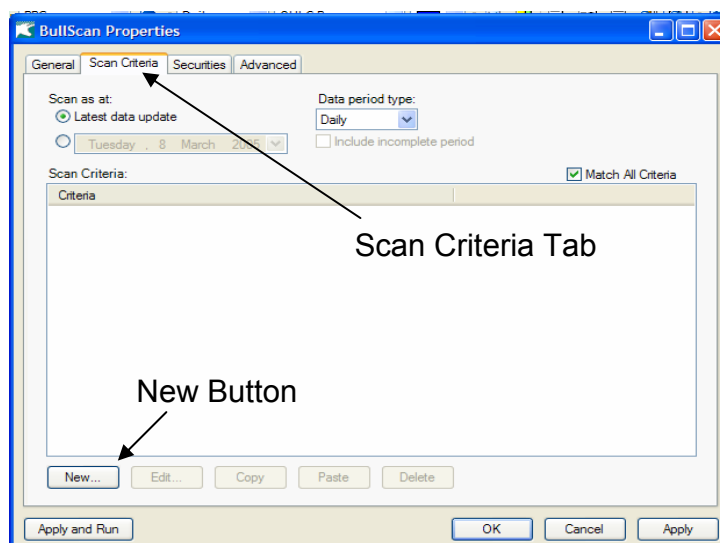
Let's say we wanted to look for stocks that have risen by more than 3% above the previous days high but less than 10% and the volume was greater than 80% of yesterday's volume. You may want to add different or more criteria but this is just used as a very quick example. Simply press on the "Create a New Scan" button and the following dialog box appears.

Name the scan and if you want to choose a category eg. Breakout, Divergence then do so. Add the name of the person where the idea came from in Author and type a brief description and any notes you wish to include. This can be handy for future reference.



The next step is to click on the Scan Criteria Tab. This will bring up the scan criteria box which allows us to alter the dates we wish to scan, the periodicity of the scan (eg. Daily, Weekly, Monthly etc) and then we can begin to include our own criteria. To do this we click on the button that says “New”.

A new dialog box (shown below) will appear.



Using this dialog box we can simply choose the values we wish to compare at the click of a button. Note how I have chosen that I want:

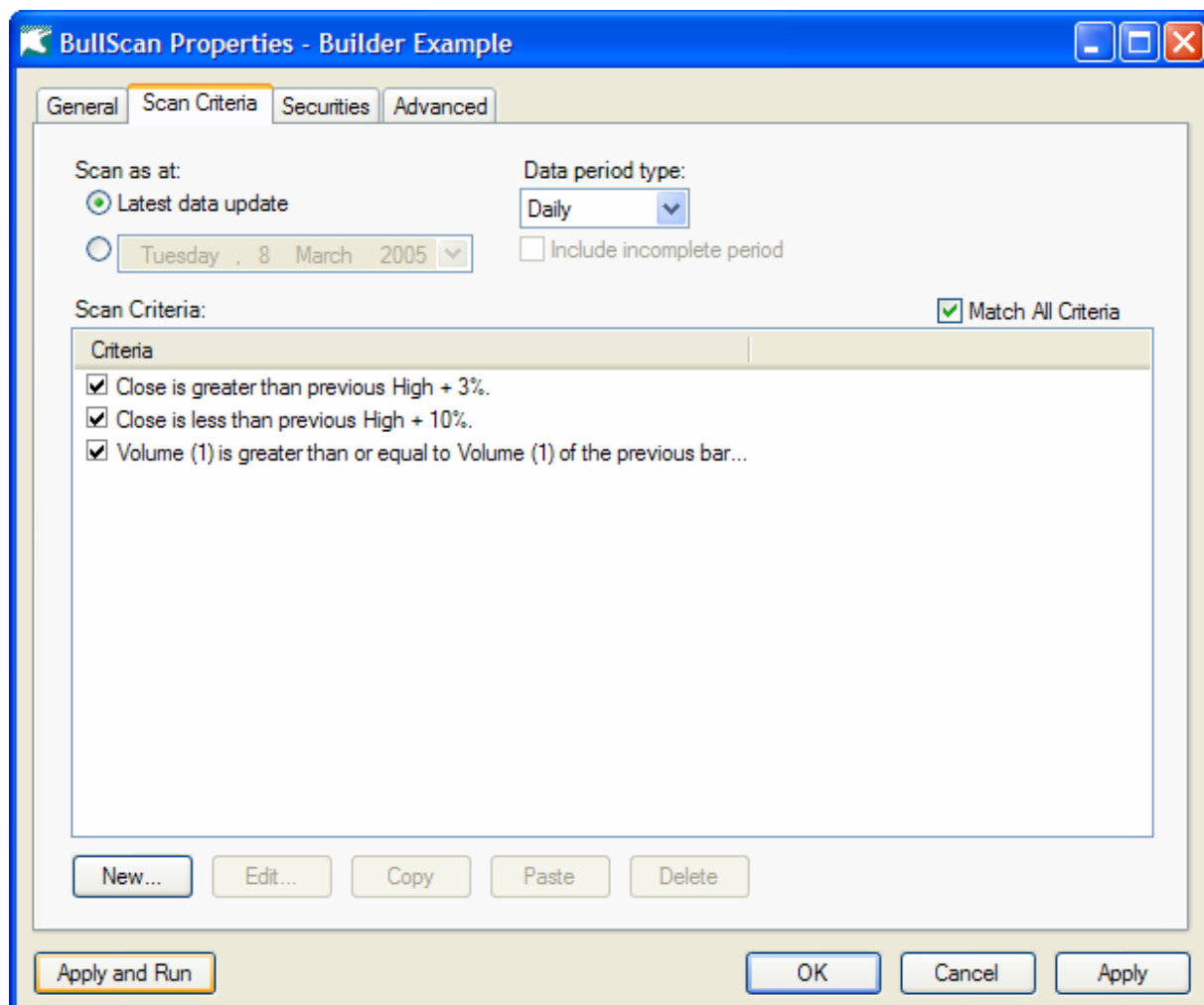
First Value
The Close of Today

Condition
Greater than the high of yesterday (or greater than the close of every bar since 1 bar ago)

Second Value
By more than 3%

These options (as you can see by the drop down arrows) are fully customisable and allow for a range of indicators and values to be compared or filtered without the need for any “BullScript” language.

Once we have chosen our first parameter simply click on OK and do the same for each condition. Once finished the dialog box shows us our criteria in simple language.



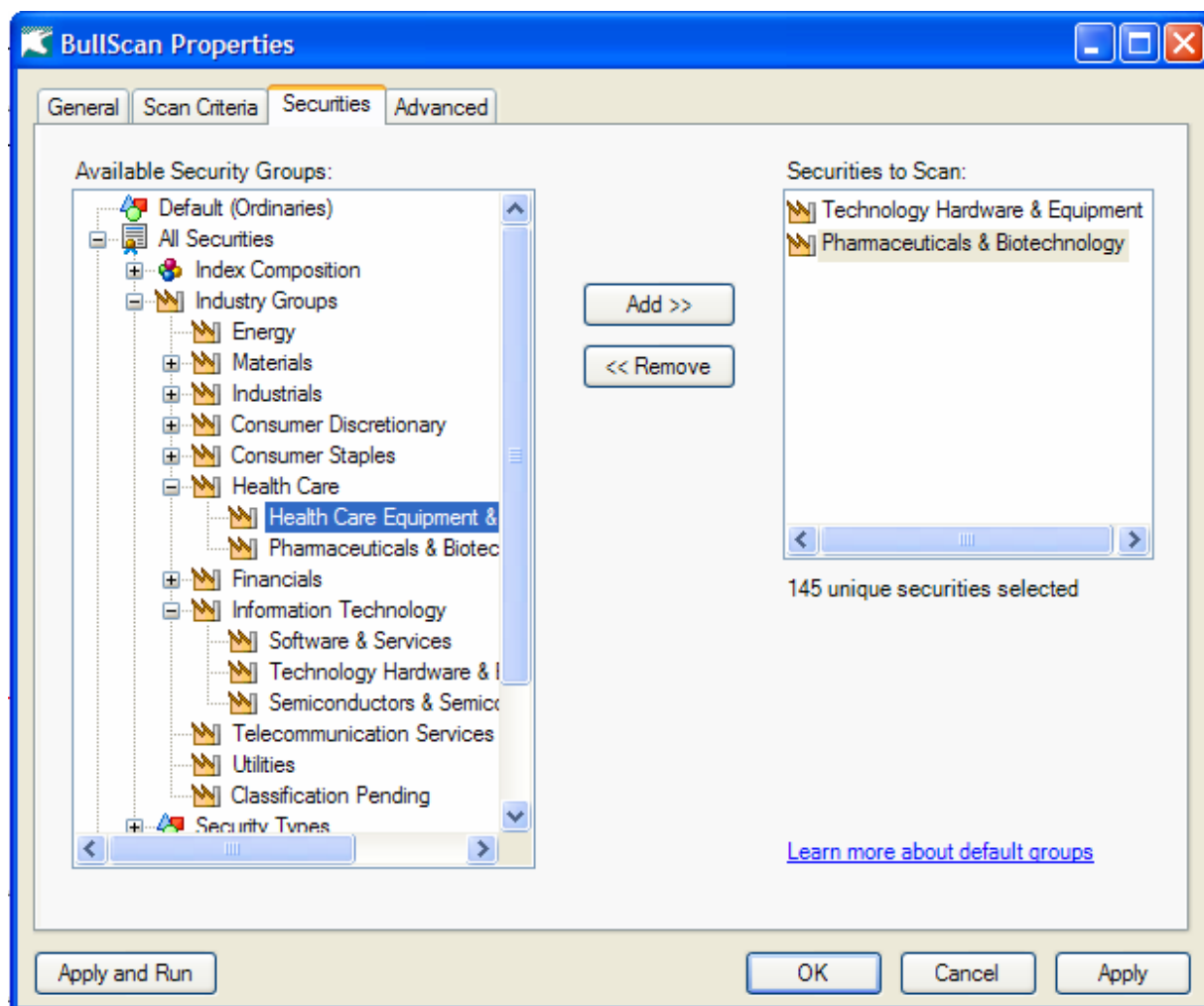
I should mention there a huge range of conditions to choose from in the drop down box which makes creating simple formulas very easy. Some of the conditions you can search for at the touch of the mouse are:

- Cross Above
- Cross Below
- Greater than, less than, Greater than or equal to, Not equal to etc.
- Is the highest it has been since / is the lowest it has been since
- Has increased / Has decreased
- Different by at least
- Is between / is not between
- Turned up / turned down

And there's more

From here (if we are happy with the date of the search – in the above it is at the most recent date) and happy with the periodicity then we can go to securities to choose which stocks we will scan.

The way this is set out is the same as I have shown earlier in the section on the “Securities Manager”. This means at the click of the button we can add or remove whole lists or individual stocks. We could choose to run it over the ASX200, ASX300, the energy sector, the Food & Staples Retailing group or any favourites or saved folders and charts we may have. This is an easy feature to use and in the following screen shot I have singled out the 2nd Tier GICS groups of “Technology, Hardware and Equipment” and “Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology”.

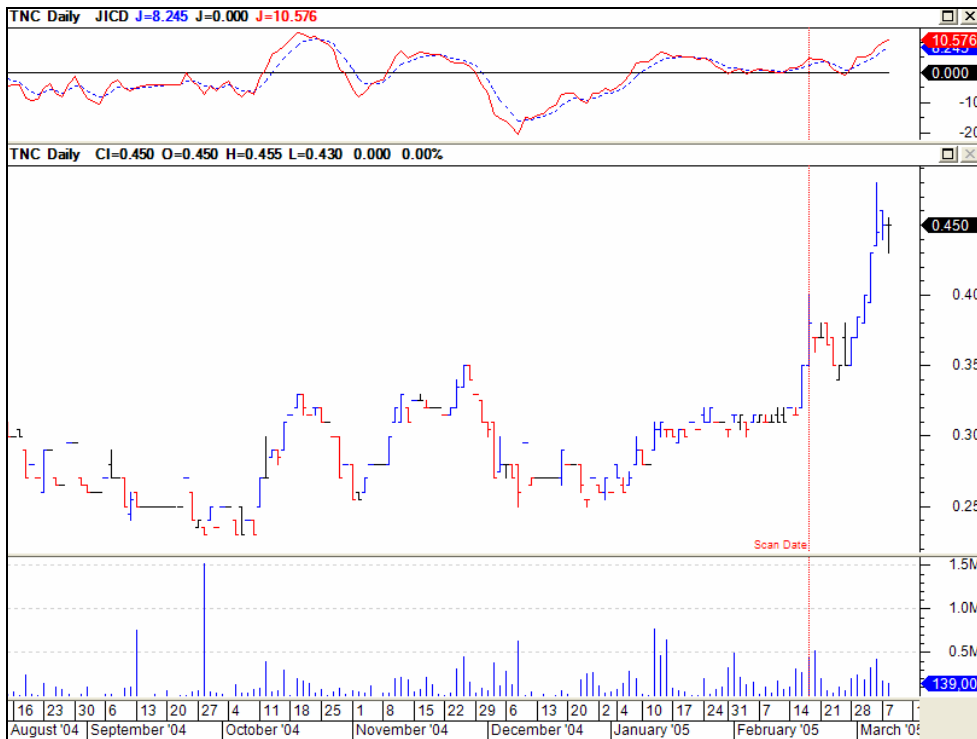
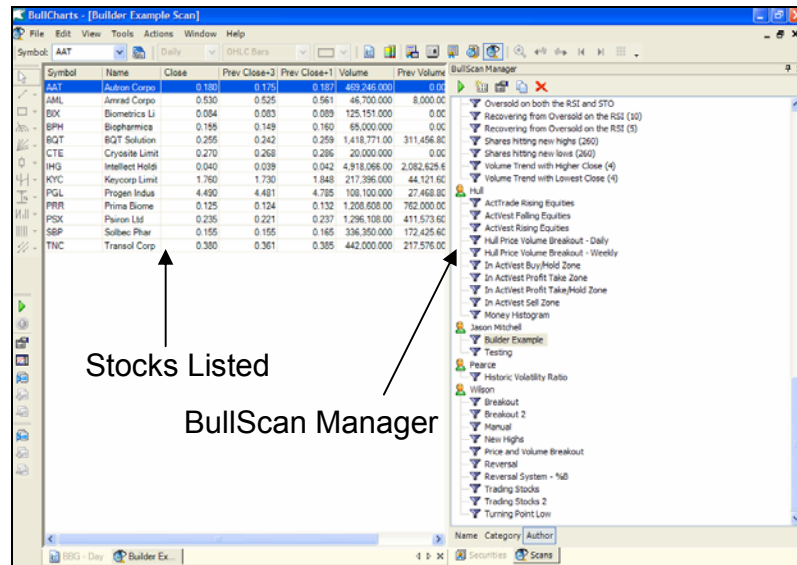


From this point we can just choose OK to save it or Apply & Run to actually run the exploration as we have set it up. Alternatively we can go to the “Advanced” tab and add even more criteria – this time however it is in relation to the sorting of results and the number of bars loaded. These criteria may or may not need to be changed but the option is there.

You can choose to rank the scores by the conditions that we put in to the explorer or by the closing price or a number of different ways. We have chosen “score” in this example. At this stage we simply press on “Apply & Run” and the exploration will be run and sort the stocks as we have selected.

The stocks that it finds are listed in the window and we can now rank these stocks by each column or by the symbol etc.

By double clicking on the entry the chart will be opened and the date of the scan will be shown by a small line on the chart (see following)



Of course if you like to be able to write your own formulas (copy Metastock explorations etc) and include things that are too complex for the helpful Indicator Manager then you can use "BullScript" to code Scans.

See the section further in the review on BullScript for more information on this.

Whether you want to use the pre-designed explorations as covered by Authors in their books or create your own BullCharts does offer an excellent set of options.

Working with Templates

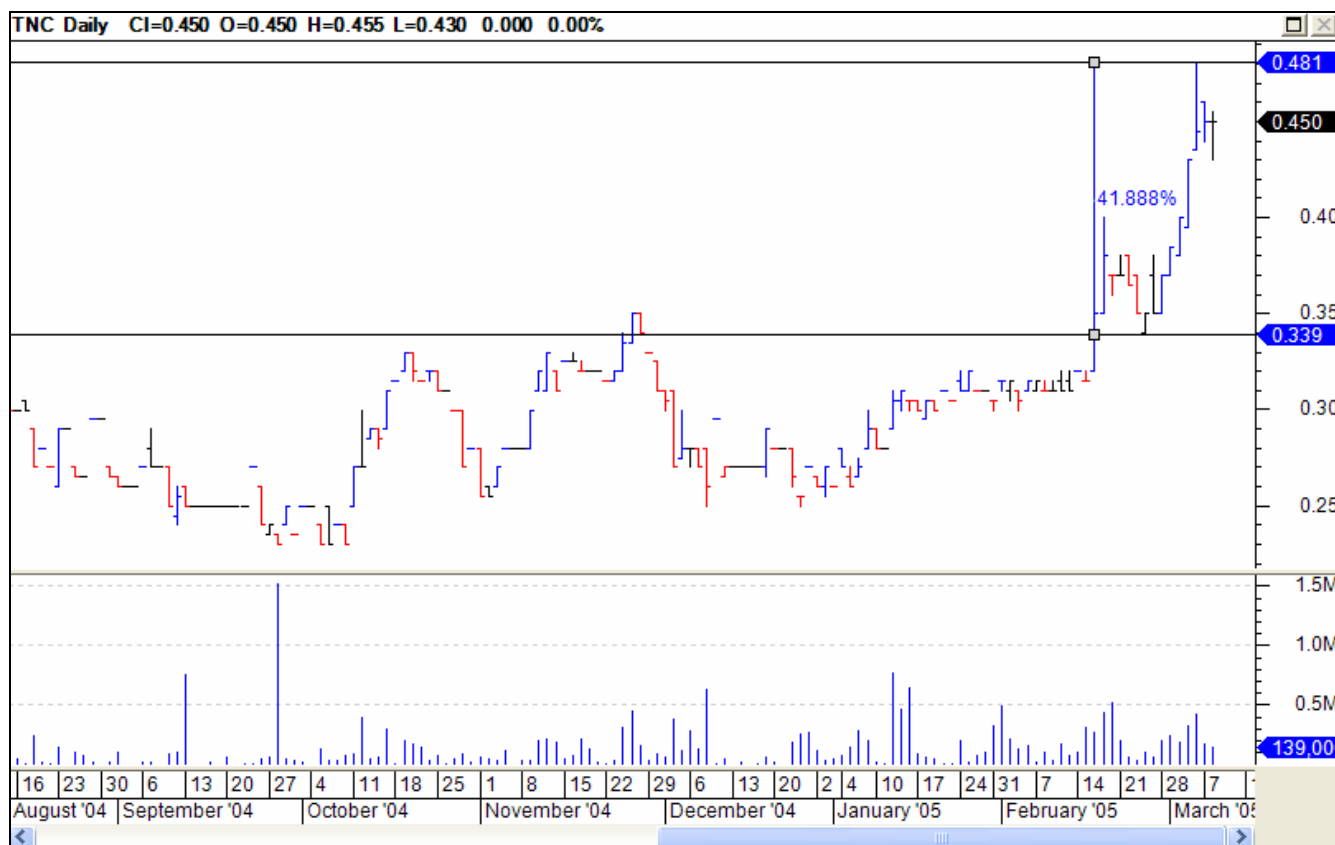
Just as Metastock has the function to use and create templates on our charts BullCharts also offers this option. Simply set up any chart the way you would like your template to be created, therefore place indicators in appropriate areas with the your preferred colours and then choose “Save as Template”.

You will now be able to set up any chart with this layout quickly and easily.

The Percentage Ruler – another Handy Tool

How often have you taken out the calculator or punched some numbers in to a spreadsheet to calculate how far two points are away from each other – either in value or in percentage terms. In Metastock I am required to grab the mouse and click on each date I wish to compare, and then use each value to work out the difference.

A simple tool in this program allows you to grab the mouse click on the first point, drag the mouse to the point you wish to compare and the value is automatically calculated. I have shown this in the percentage terms. This can be a useful tool for projection of targets based on the percentage rule. The diagram shows I have calculated a 41.89% movement.



Intraday and End of Day Charting On One Programme.

The benefit of being able to use all these tools on intraday and end of day data (and choose a range of time frames to display the live data on) in the one package is a huge benefit of this program and allows users of all levels to find use or grow in to the program. Obviously the live data feed needs to be payed for but we can use all our favourite indicators and tools on 1 minute, 5 minute, 30 minute bars or candles etc.

The way the data is handled makes it easy to use. Accessing and changing charts when the live data is displayed is no different to choosing a different end of day chart.

Access to Market Depth, News & Fundamental Data for Live Data Clients.

The program is set up to allow users to choose and access a range of information on the stock that is being displayed including fundamental information, market depth, upcoming dividends, company reports, news articles and a range of data to help traders in their decisions.

Just because it is there does not mean we need to use it, but some of these features are a handy tool when making decisions about buying and selling.

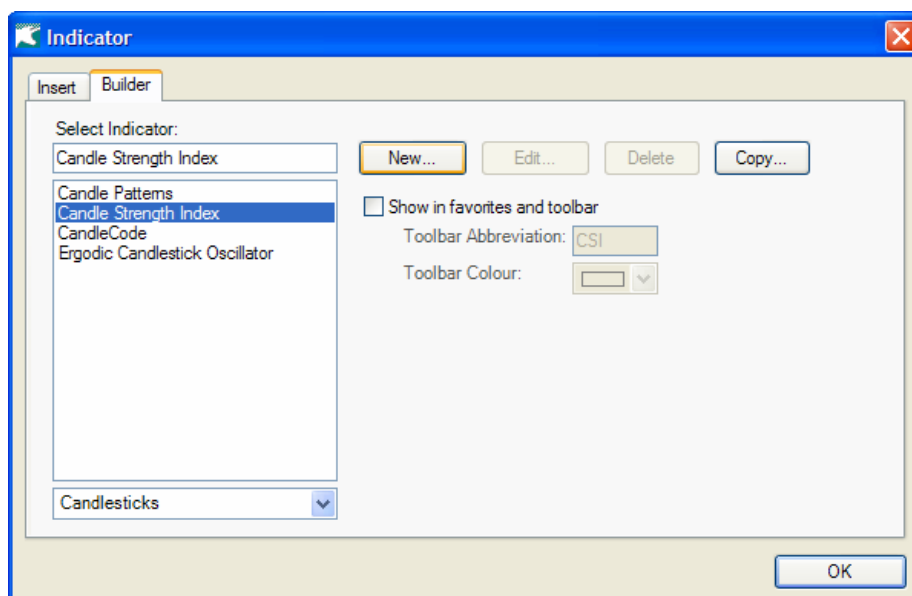
Tradesim Compatibility - NEW.

Recently this product has become compatible with Tradesim – our preferred Trading Simulator and Back testing software. This new compatibility has been a powerful addition to the program and has been the final touch we were looking for in the program to make it fully compatible with our trading.

BullScript Language

For those who like the ability to write their own formulas for indicators, BullCharts offers their own formula language known as “BullScript”. This offers people a simple to use but powerful programming language that is somewhat similar to Metastock. The similarities make BullCharts easy to transition to but there are some differences. Generally speaking I found “BullScript” quite easy to use.

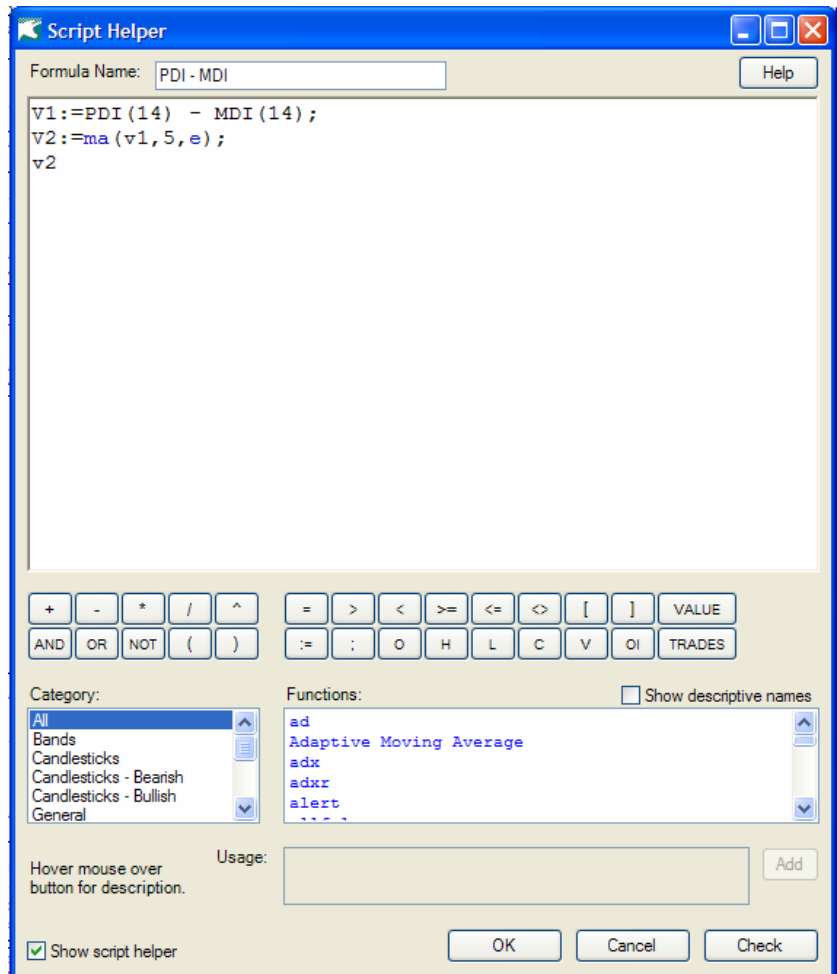
To create a new indicator, simply open the indicator builder and click on “New”



The “BullScript” helper for anyone unfamiliar with the programming Language is also very helpful. When you click new the following dialog box will appear. From here click on “Show Script Helper” and the “helper” is displayed making it easier to code items.

This is similar but a little different to the Metastock version. Some will find it easier to use, I felt that while it took a little getting used to (years of Metastock) generally speaking the formulas were easy to write.

Basically the helper allows you to insert pieces of coding by choosing what you want from a list. These are somewhat explained but do make the “Indicator Builder” very easy to use even with little or no knowledge of BullScript or Metastock language.



You can see that I have put a simple formula almost identical to Metastock – this is somewhat useful but is mainly just shown as an example formula. One of the best features is the “Check” button. This allows users to check their formula’s as they go and often errors are fixed. I entered this formula in Metastock format and then pressed the check button. It checked the document and then altered any problems for me.

This brings me to one of the most useful features of this builder. As there are already many Metastock indicator formula’s the Indicator Builder’s check feature allows many of these (or most of the ones I have tried) to be used by BullCharts. Just simply put the formula in the box as a Metastock formula and then press check. The check button will go through and check whether it is a valid “BullScript” formula and if not will ask if you want it to automatically correct it. Press yes and the formula is corrected and becomes a BullCharts formula. Done. This makes transferring indicators from Metastock to BullCharts quick and easy and allows BullCharts users to make use of the information available for some of the other charting programs.

In using the scripting it was easy to use and the indicator helper tended to help me out of any situations where I started to fumble with the new language. This really is a well thought out indicator builder that brings the power of Metastock to an interface that is even easier to use and understand.

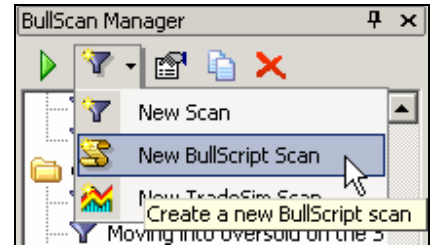
The best section for newcomers to building indicators is the help menu contained in the builder. This has a whole instruction guide on “BullScript” which can be printed out and will help to get you started with

“BullScript” and beyond. This help section is easy to read and follow and reasonably comprehensive. Beginners especially will love it.

BullScript In Scans

BullScript can now also be used to write formulas for the BullScan feature bringing even more power to this easy to use program. In fact the way this is set up is so similar to Metastock that I am a bit amazed. In fact it would seem to be even better than Metastock for a few reasons.

The picture to the right shows how easy it is to access the BullScript Scan.

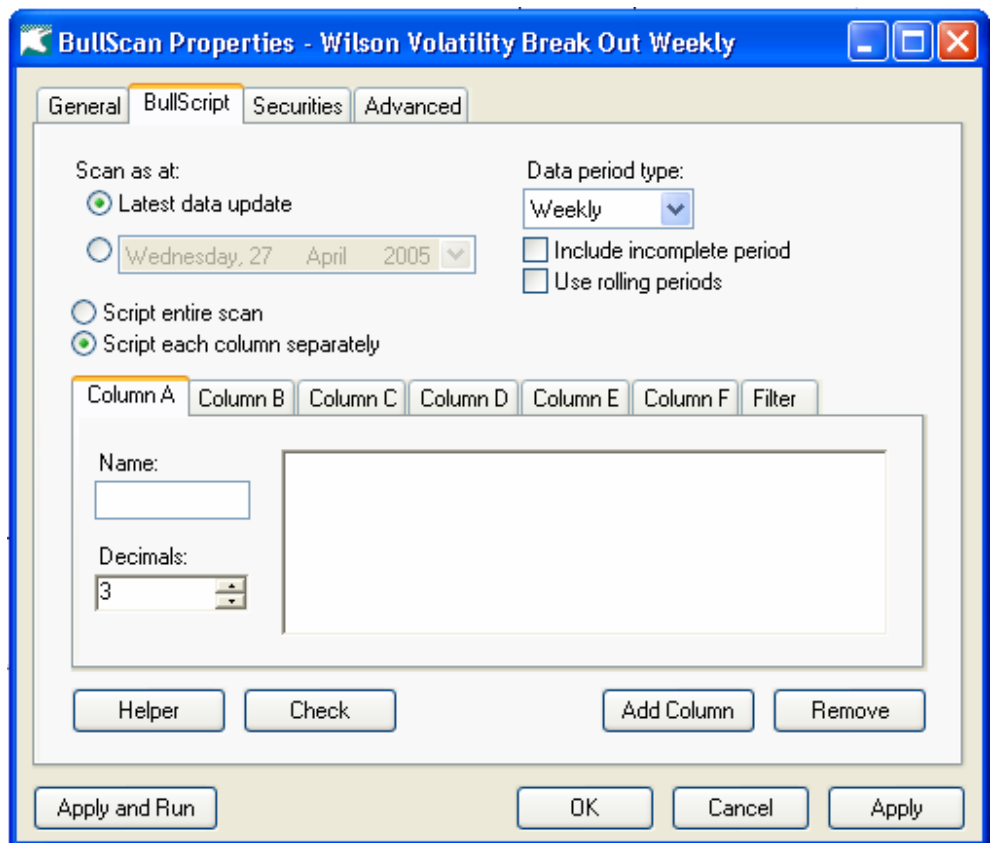


Once opened the feature appears very similar to Metastock and allows us to conduct the same explorations and more.

We can see that the columns that are used in Metastock are available here in BullCharts. The benefit here is we can add and remove columns in the search to expand the application of the Scan tool.

There are also some extra options for dealing with Data and the format in which it will be explored.

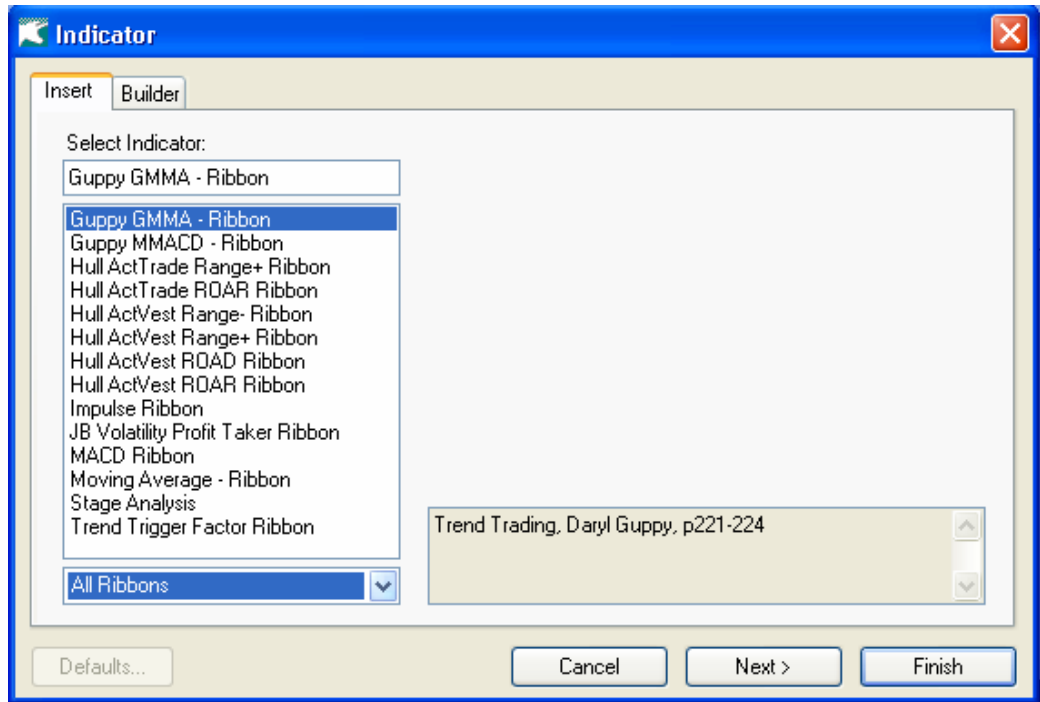
Of course the checker is included to help with the writing of Scans with “BullScript”.



The BullCharts Ribbon Feature.

I tend to use the Metastocks expert feature occasionally and while I do not think it is necessary for successful trading it can be a handy tool and a time saver as we flick through charts. The BullCharts program has a similar feature to the expert which are called “Ribbons”.

One of the handy features of the BullCharts Program is that the methods of many of the well known Australian authors and publishers are included and this carries on to this Ribbon feature. The following screen shot shows some of the “Ribbons” that are available in BullCharts.



There is a bit of difference between the way this feature is displayed to the Metastock expert’s and there are less options at this stage – although I imagine BullCharts will catch up pretty quickly. The following chart shows how the display appears in BullCharts.



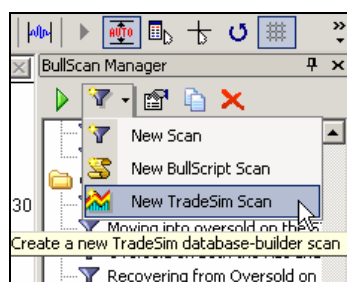
In the above chart I have shown the “Guppy GMMA – Ribbon” and used my preferred colours of Red and Green. The colours and the way this is displayed is fully customisable. Basically the Green ribbon shows the areas where the Guppy MMA has the short term group above the long term group. Using these Ribbons can help us to see the situations of certain indicators or systems quite easily.

One advantage of BullCharts over Metastock is that there can be more than one Ribbon placed on the chart as the following illustrates. This chart has the Guppy MMA ribbon but also has the Trend Trigger Factor Ribbon shown as well. I have chosen to show the Trend Trigger Factor in the bottom window as a ribbon and in the price chart as a background. This shows the different methods that can be used with the Ribbon feature.



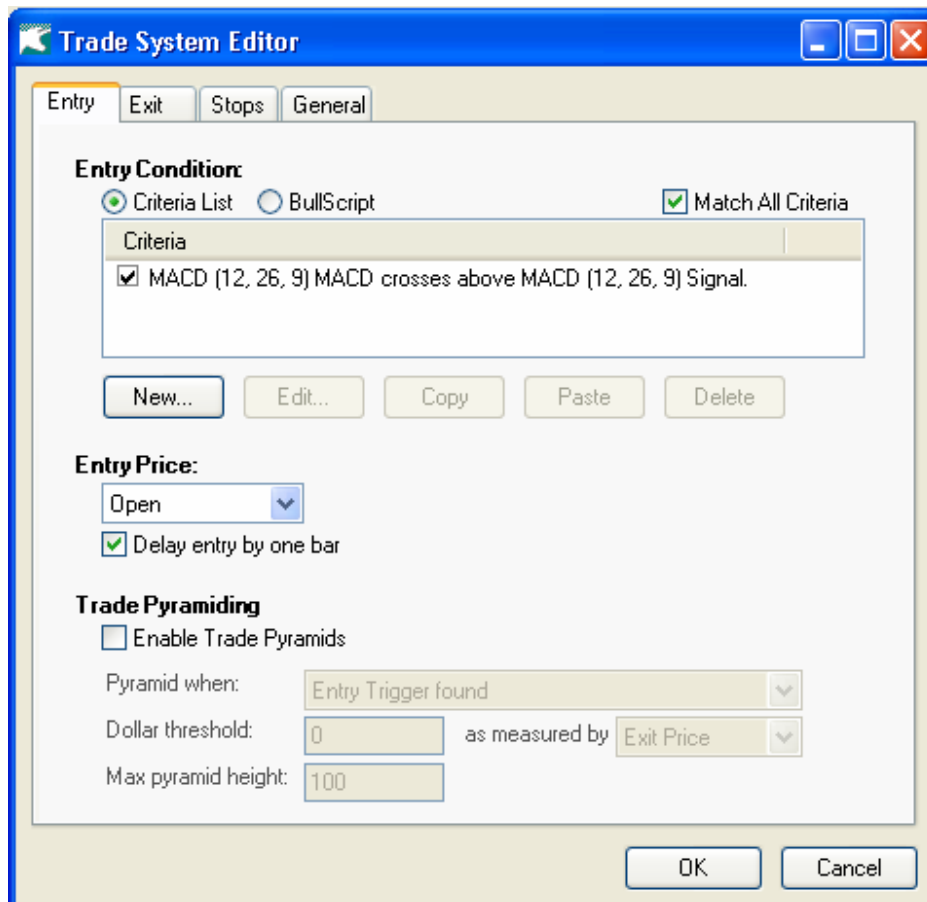
The only drawback to the Ribbon as opposed to Metastock’s Expert Feature is that Alerts and Commentaries are not yet available and the Bars/Candles themselves are not coloured by the expert. I would imagine that at some stage this feature will be included but either way they are not needed in order to trade profitably. As a long time Metastock user I have become accustomed to some of it’s features over time.

Easy to Use Tradesim Interface



When I first heard about the compatibility of Tradesim and BullCharts I was somewhat concerned about the capability that would be afforded after hearing that there was an easy to use interface – but I was wrong. BullCharts has succeeded in making the Tradesim program even easier to use with the interface and allows traders to concentrate on trading and not programming. Of course the power of “BullScript” is still available however we do not need to use the scripting language if we are not comfortable with it.

The following diagram shows the BullCharts /Tradesim interface.



This interface is a huge advantage over Metastock. In Metastock we have to tell Tradesim exactly what we want it to do with coding which is a laborious process. In BullCharts each part of the system is nicely separated so that we can code our entry, exit and initial stop methods individually and have the computer join it up as a system for us. This allows for changing of testing parameters much more quickly and easily.

The second huge advantage of the interface was that with Metastock we have to know how to write the coding. In BullCharts if we only want to test the common tools and create systems from these common tools then we can use the step by step guide as shown in the "BullScan" Manager.

Continual Development

One thing I am very impressed with is the speed with which BullCharts updates there program to include the latest tools and features and incorporate general improvements. I sent BullCharts some information on my thoughts including some details on things I did not like about the program. Every issue I had mentioned to them had been addressed. When I was given details as to how the issue had been addressed in the latest versions I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that these were usually improvements on what I had expected. An example of this is the Tradesim interface I mention above. I expected something simple that allowed "Bullscript" only. Instead the interface also makes use of their easy to follow Scan builder and as such offers a better solution than other charting programs.

Summary

All in all “BullCharts” is a very impressive package.

It seems to me to be an excellent charting program that has all the tools (and much more) that I feel are necessary to succeed in the market over the long term.

The powerful scripting language combined with the easy to use step by step dialog boxes allows users with little or no scripting knowledge to access and create practical explorations and indicators that relate to their beliefs and trading style.

The features are easy to use and the advantage of being able to access and manipulate both live and end of day data in the same charting package is a huge bonus. Add to this the compatibility with Tradesim and the similarity and ability to use Metastock formula's and this really is a charting package that should be considered for any one serious about their trading.

The “StarTraderReport” and Jason Mitchell are happy to recommend “BullCharts” as a high quality product suitable for beginners to experts.