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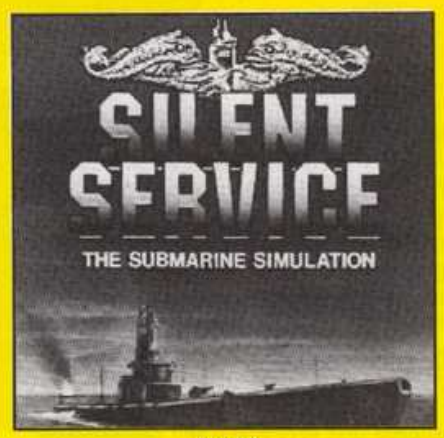


XIV
LOAD'N'GO BUDGET DISK PROGS

Although overshadowed by the news of the Amstrad takeover of Sinclair, the story of Commodore's marketplace struggle continues. With new products such as the astonishing Amiga on the way, and recent releases such as the 128 now settling into a steady sales pattern, there has never been more activity from the US giant.

This week's supplement covers some of the hottest topics in the Commodore world. We give you a preview of the 7th official Commodore Show, which will mark the UK launch of the Amiga; look at the Microprose simulation programs which stretch the 64 to its limits; tell you how to get an 80-column display on the 128 without spending £300 on an RGBI monitor; and look at the range of word-processors from Batteries Included, distributed here by the increasingly influential Ariolasoft. Something for every Commodore micro user! ◄

CBM Show is go

The seventh official Commodore show looks like having plenty to offer, besides the UK launch of the long-awaited Amiga PC.

The show, at the Novotel in London's Hammersmith on May the 9-11th, has, according to organisers Database Exhibitions, attracted unusually high numbers of advance ticket sales.

For many visitors the main attraction will be the Amiga Village, where the impressive new 68000-based machine will be given its first extensive public airing. Software from both US and UK developers will be on show, including TDI's Pascal-based compiler which is priced at £99, and Precision's redesigned Amiga version of the top-selling 64/128 program Superbase. Precision will also be demonstrating packages from Californian company Aegis, including the Animator graphics program.

Although the major focus of interest may be the Amiga, the 128 and 64 will not be forgotten. Already there are promises of sixty new products on show.

- Timeworks will be showing three new products; an eighty-column word processing package for the 128, Word Writer; an enhanced version of Swiftcalc 2, a spreadsheet, and the 128 version of Personal Financial Planner.
- Evesham Micros plans to show three new products. **Freeze Frame Mark 2** is an improved version of the popular disk transfer cartridge, offering improved disk filing efficiency and tape save speed. Like the original Freeze Frame, backups produced with the cartridge can be run without the cartridge in place, and Evesham claim that it is totally transparent to all software. The **Quickdisk + Upgrade** is another new product, offering a speed improvement for the 1541 disk drive of 10x on loading, 6-8x on saving.

The final new product is the **Dolphin DOS**, a German parallel interface which improves the loading speed of the 1541 by up to 25 times. Saving times are improved by up to 12x, sequential file speed by 10x and relative files by 3x. The disk format routine leaves a massive 749 blocks free for data storage, and there's a machine code monitor and other features included.

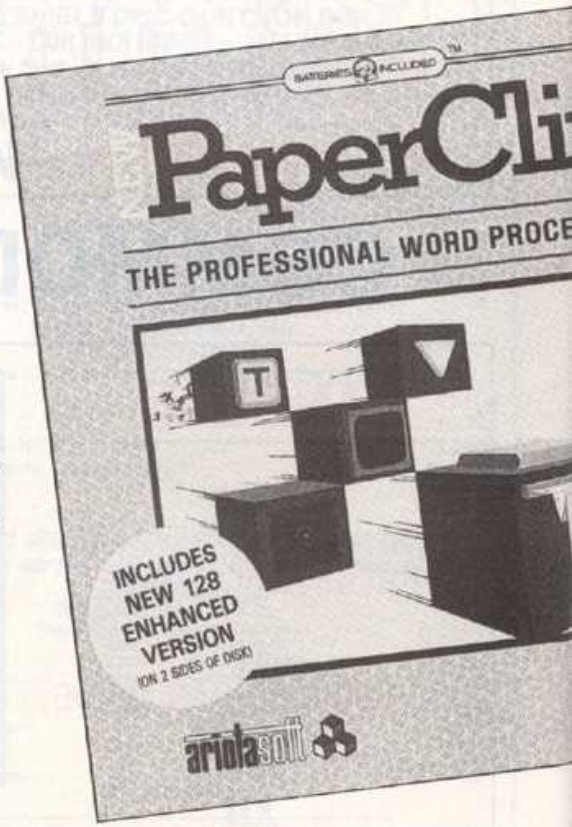
- Vanguard will be showing the Starblazer joystick, costing £11.95, and the space game Ciphoid.
- Wigmore House is to release The Artist, a hi-res art package for the 64/128.
- CA Distribution from France has three new products, including an emergency power supply, a printer power pack and a "power cartridge" for the 64.
- Sagesoft's entire range of accounts packages will be on show, featuring the new versions for the 128.
- Anirog has two new games, Thai Boxing for the 64 and Winter Events for the C16 and Plus/4.
- Supersoft's digital drum machine for the 64, priced at under £40, will be on show for the first time, along with an update for the Microvox digital sampler, and an assembler for the C16-Plus/4.

In addition, a 120-seat theatre is being built within the hall, to provide non-stop events throughout the show. These will include music performances by keyboard whizz Rick Wakeman and backing band Duel, a film show featuring The Commodore Story, and special events organised by individual exhibitors.

The £20,000 theatre will be situated on the lower floor of the Novotel, and will be used to stage the launch of the Amiga on the first morning.

Advance tickets are available from Database Exhibition. Contact them for details on 061-456 8835. We'll carry a full report of the show after the event. ◄

COMMODORE'S BATTLE OF THE WORDS



The development of more powerful home computers, many with built-in or bundled disk drives, has encouraged the development of better and better utility software packages. However, this has meant that the top-line packages have become so complex as to discourage the casual user. The obvious solution for wide-based software companies is to deal with range of software covering all levels of interest and ability. This is Ariolasoft's aim with the wordprocessing packages from the American company Batteries Included.

The first package, **New Paperclip**, is a complete professional word processor for the C64 or C128. The package comes with a double sided disk with C64 programs on one side and C128 programs on the other. Also included is a security key (dongle) which plugs into one joystick port, and a user manual.

The manual is a spiral bound, 128 page book with very small but clear text, and is very well laid out and readable. It includes a tutorial session at the start of the book to show how to use Paperclip quickly and easily.

Backup

The disk supplied with Paperclip is not protected, so a backup should be made as soon as possible. It is not necessary to backup both sides as each side has all the necessary programs for each version. The C128 version allows the use of an 80 column monitor. I must admit that I had great problems with the 80 column mode, as the 1st column kept disappearing off the edge of my Ferguson TV/Monitor. I will give Ariolasoft the benefit of the doubt and assume that it is my lead/monitor that is causing the trouble. Changing from 40 to 80 column has been made a lot easier as the program has been written to detect if the 40/80 switch has been pressed. If it has, the output is automatically changed. This eliminates the need to restart the system every time you wish to change the video output. All the editing functions are the same between the two versions.

Paperclip is one of the most powerful word processors that I have come across on the Commodore so far. It will perform all the usual functions of entering text and amending text very easily and quickly. The power of Paperclip becomes apparent when you start looking at the additional features. Text can be saved to either tape or disk and in 'screen format' characters (standard) or CBM ASCII for transferring to other programs.

For ease of use, Paperclip allows up to 52 common phrases to be assigned to memory, and with just two key presses the phrase can be entered into your text. Text can also be moved from file to file very easily, as well as appending, from disk, onto your current file.

When using columns of data in Paperclip there are several special commands which allow easy use. The columns can be moved, added, deleted or sorted from within the text editing mode.

To aid the laying out of a document which is larger than the monitor that you are using, Paperclip has unique method of showing how the finished document will look. When the text is ready to view, select video output and the page appears on the screen. The unusual feature is that all the words have been changed to small boxes. As the boxes are different lengths to represent the word length, this gives a very clear idea on what the page will look like. On the C64 version this method of display will only work on 80 column text. On the C128, Video mode will display 40, 80 or 160 columns on a composite type monitor. On an RGBI type monitor widths of 80, 160 or 320 can be viewed, though only document widths of up to 250 columns can be created on Paperclip.

The other main feature of this package is the ability to create and print out standard form letters, mailing list and labels. Paperclip can store data as a sequential file. It can then read data into a document that has been prepared with spaces left for the additional data to be entered automatically on printing. Paperclip can also use data prepared by other programs, provided that it is in the correct format.

Printer

When it is time to printout the text Paperclip will allow headers, footers, page numbering indentation and many other formatting commands found on the more expensive word processors. Most printers are supported by Paperclip, but if you have a really obscure printer then a facility is provided to allow you to set up your own printer definition file.

This is a very powerful and professional package, very popular in the States, and should satisfy the most exacting micro user.

The second package is **HomePak**. This is a reasonable word processor with the addition of a 'database' and a communications program. This package is designed for the user who does not need a full word processor, just something which is quick and easy to use. The program is written for the C64 mode.

The word processor is in the medium range between a professional package, such as 'Paperclip', and a text editor like 'Cut & Paste'. All the necessary edit and save text functions are included but the number of

CHOOSING A WORD-PROCESSOR CAN BE A DAUNTING TASK – HOW DO YOU AVOID GETTING STUCK WITH AN UNSUITABLE PACKAGE? TONY HARRISON-SMITH LOOKS AT ARIOLASOFT'S OPTIONS

extra functions is reduced. All the commands are displayed in a number of menus, which makes learning how to use the package very quick. Some of the more frequently used commands are available direct from the keyboard to save time and effort. All the commands are in easy to remember words, rather than the more sophisticated commands on some other packages. Text can be moved around in blocks and copied to other sections if required. a search and replace function is also included for finding and correcting a string of text. HomePak also has a preview option similar to Paperclip. The main difference is that this mode only works on 80 column documents.

The printing of the text allows heads and footers on the pages as well as the positioning of margins. If your printer is capable of it, enhanced, underlined and bold printing is supported. HomePak Will allow data from the built in 'Database' to be included into the current text being edited. The main criticism is that the manual is of the bound book type rather than the spiral bound type as in Paperclip. This is a problem because while you are trying to use the package, the manual keeps closing!

Editor

HomePak also includes a very simple database which allows three pieces of information to be stored on each record. The format for a record is Subject/Tag/Object. The maximum record length is only 80 characters. The good thing about the database is the enquiry language that is used to control it. For example it you enter "Who's Mike?", it will display all the information stored under the subject Mike. This can be done on any of the three fields in the record.

The third part of HomePak is a communications package. I did not try this, but it states in the manual that it is for modems using the RS232 port on the back of the Commodore. This section is very American and is always talking about Compuserve. As this is an American database, I do not think many of you will be using it; TOO EXPENSIVE!

The third Ariolasoft package in this trio is **Cut & Paste**. This is a really good text editor. It is designed for people who will only want to write a letter occasionally, and cannot see the need in buying an expensive word processor. The package is for the new and occasional user and should be an example to all others who think that their software & manuals are user friendly. The manual is clearly written, simple and a delight to read. This is the only package that came with a data disk ready for sue, so that if you bought this package, you could take it home and load it up ready for sue without buying anything else.

Duckshoot

The text editing is limited to edit, save and load. Blocks of test can be moved by 'Cutting' the text out and storing it in a buffer and then 'Pasting' it back onto the document in its new position. This makes it very simple but very effective. All the commands needed to use this package are on a scrolling menu at the bottom of the screen, (very much like the duck shoot menu of **Compunet**). This method of menu helps in making this package very easy to sue, because you do not need to switch between text and the menu. Some new users get very worried when their text disappears and a menu appears!

Cut & Paste will allow blocks of text to be indented and tabs to be set. Forced pages are supported as well as automatic page numbering. In keeping with the user friendly nature of the package, disk housekeeping commands allow the formatting of a disk as well as deleting and cataloguing programs on the disk. The one thing that highlights the friendliness of this program is that when it comes across an error it starts the message with "Sorry, . . .". The only thing I found missing in the manual, is that but nowhere does it tell you to go into C64 mode in order to use Cut & Paste on the 128.

In conclusion, if your applications require a lot of text and editing, then Paperclip is the package to use. There is a spelling checker available for it, Spellpack, which is due to be released in a package with Paperclip in May.

For average use of text and editing facilities, HomePak is acceptable. The manual was the only disappointing thing in an otherwise reasonable package.

Last but by no means least, if you only have occasional need for a word processor then I would recommend Cut & Paste to anybody. This is a really great package, though the casual user might have second thoughts about the price. ◄

PRODUCT	MICRO	PRICE
New Paperclip	64, 128	£44.95
HomePak	64, 128 in 64 mode	£34.95
Cut & Paste	64, 128 in 64 mode	£24.95

Supplier: Ariolasoft, 68 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London WC2. 01-836 3411

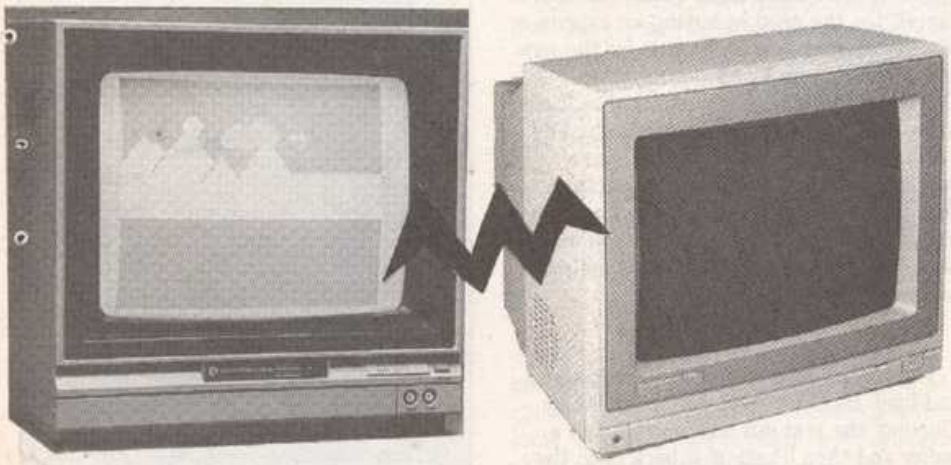
THE 80-COLUMN PROBLEM

HAVING SPLASHED OUT ON A C128, HOW DO YOU AVOID PAYING £300 FOR AN 80-COLUMN MONITOR? TONY HARRISON-SMITH ON INTERFACES, ERIC DEGHAYE ON DIY

There are many different types of video monitors available for home and office computers. The main types are RGB, RGBI and Composite Video. Unfortunately up to now 80 column mode on the C128 has been limited to RGBI only, since the 80 column signal is routed out only through the RGBI port. To solve this problem, three companies have come up with various leads and interfaces to remedy this situation.

Before I go into more detail about these devices, I will try and explain in layman's terms what the difference is between each type of monitor. All the above terms describe how the picture is transmitted from the computer to the monitor. Composite Video sends the picture and the colour down as one signal, and the signal is then decoded in the monitor.

RGB on the other hand sends the picture



down to the monitor in three parts, its three colour elements of Red, Green and Blue. RGB also sends two other signals which synchronize the three colour signals. RGBI is similar to RGB, but it has an additional signal, intensity. Needless to say, generally, none of the above methods of picture transmission are compatible with each other.

Interface

There are now several different interfaces to allow 80 column mode on different types of monitors.

If you use a Commodore 1701 or 1702 monitor, then Trilogic can provide two different interfaces to allow 80 column display.

The first, and most expensive of all the interfaces reviewed, is the **Vidcon 2** at £49.95. This is a mains operated unit which converts the RGBI signal to separate video and colour signals. On the unit itself is a switch for 40 or 80 column mode. This unit allows the full 16 colours to be used.

The second lead from Trilogic is the **TML30**, which is a more reasonable price of £9.95. The catch is that it only gives a monochrome display. The TML30 is not mains powered; it's just a cable that connects to the front video input socket on the monitor.

Display

For RGB monitor users there are a lot leads available. Robtek supply a lead called the **Magic Monitor Interface** which is priced at £14.95. This lead plugs into the video outlet and the RGBI outlet on the C128. At the other end of two very short leads, only about 2 feet long, there are two phono plugs for connecting to the monitor. If your monitor uses a different connection, a DIN plug for example, then Robtek tell me that a new plug can be fitted. If you send the lead, £2.50, and a pin layout of your monitor to Ram Electronics, Unit 8, Redfield Industrial Park, Redfield Lane, Church Crookham, Aldershot, Hampshire, GU13 ORC, they will fit a plug for you.

Trilogic supply 3 leads for RGB monitors. The first is for the Ferguson MC01 TV/Monitor. This lead is the **TML34**, which costs £19.95. It also includes a colour interface which is powered from the cassette port. The cassette can still be used with the leads plugged in. The interface allows 8 colours to be displayed on the monitor.

The other two leads from Trilogic are the **TML35** for Hitachi TV/Monitors, and the **TML35** for the Fidelity CTM1400 TV/Monitor. Both these leads retail at £14.95.

As the above review has shown, most types of monitors can now be used with the C128 in 80 column mode. If your TV/Monitor is not mentioned above, then Trilogic say that special leads can be made to order. If you supply them with the make and model of your TV/Monitor, input socket connections and input signal requirements, they will gladly quote a price to you.

For owners of Microvitec monitors, which have an RGB TTL input, hope is offered by Cascade, better known for their games compilation packages.

Despite assurances from Commodore and Microvitec that RGBI and RGB TTL (Transistor/Transistor Logic) are totally incompatible, Cascade claim to have come up with a suitable interface lead, providing an eighty column display in full colour, at the cost of £19.95.

Also available are a series of adaptors, costing £5, which allow the interface to be used with any RGB monitor. Cascade would like potential purchasers to contact them with details of what adaptors are required, and the company also plans to bring out an interface incorporating a sound amplifirer (since many RGB monitors have no sound output) if there is sufficient interest. Again, contact Cascade if you would like more details of this and other plans.

Standard

The standard cable is recommended for use with the Microvitec 1431 dual standard monitor, which would then be able to display 40 column and 80 column at the flick of a switch.

Although we have not had the opportunity to test the lead – and Cascade aren't giving away the details of how it's done – this would seem the ideal choice for users who have already splashed out on the high-quality Microvitec monitor and are reluctant to part with it. ◄

Contacts

Cascade, Suite 4, 1-3 Haywra Crescent, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 5BG, Tel. 0423-504526

Robtek, 36 Market Place, Falloden Way, London, NW11 6JP, Tel. 01-209 0118

Trilogic, 29 Holme Lane, Bradford, BD4 0QA; (shop) 392 Tong Street, Bradford

COMMODORE 128
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The Commodore 128 can be used in three separate modes, the 128K mode is particularly attractive to the serious computer user. This book is intended for the owner who already knows the elements of programming in BASIC, and who wants to make the Commodore 128 work for its living. Because the BASIC of the 128 is so much superior to that of the older C64 model, much more can be accomplished without knowledge of machine-code, and this book fully stretches the abilities of the new BASIC. The focal point of each chapter is the application of BASIC subroutines to data processing, and to that end many very useful and original subroutines are included. You will learn, for example, how to work with pointers in BASIC, and how to speed up a string sort by the use of pointers to array members.

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The software contains a complete 8502 assembler/disassembler using Unified mnemonics, with Symbolic labels, Macros, Hard Copy, Memory Labels, and Save/load.

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C128–£14.95 (disc only)
ISBN 1-85181-029-3

WATSON'S NOTES FOR THE C128 + C64

Authors: D. Kedem & I. Kalisky

The concept of the Watson's Notes books is of a series of easy to follow units, each covering a specific area of BASIC programming. The books are aimed at younger readers, but any newcomer to computing will find that the style lends itself to clear and rapid progress through the various subject areas.

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C64:
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. . . OR THE DIY SOLUTION

Anyone who has bought a Commodore 128 and expected to run the display in 80 columns with a TV or 1701 monitor must have had a bit of a disappointment, as Commodore implies that if you want 80 cols, you have to fork out the necessary £300 for one of their new 1901 RGBI monitors. However, Commodore doesn't tell you the full story. You can actually implement 80 columns quite easily, though only in monochrome, on any display system which possesses a video signal input.

There are two monitor output sockets on the back of the C128: ● – Composite video signal (the round DIN plug, description on page C-5 of the manual) which gives only 40 columns ● – RGBI output, (wrongly labelled 'user port' in page C-6 of the manual) which gives only 80 columns.

The selection of the type of display used is done either at power up, or by doing a run/stop-restore while the 40-80 key is depressed (or not). But how do you make good use of these sockets without buying a dedicated monitor?

If we look at the pinout description of the RGBI socket (see fig. 1) we see that pin 7 is labelled 'monochrome'. The signal coming from this pin is actually standard video output, but monochrome only. This signal can be used to drive ANY monitor which has a video input, like the Commodore 1701, where the 'video in' socket is at the front.

To have a truly versatile system, you will also need another connection in the 40 col. socket, in order to have sound and 40 column. (Note that the sound output will only come through the 40 col. socket, the RGBI does have sound output). Fig. 2 shows the pinouts of that socket, and we see that there is a video out pin, giving a colour output. All we need to do now is to make a suitable collection of leads.

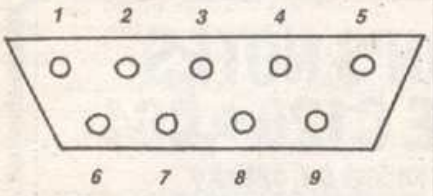
Take about 1 metre of braided cable and solder the braid at one end on pin 1 of the RGBI 'D' connector, then solder the core to pin 7 (see fig. 3). Close the plug case and solder the core of the cable at the other end on the centre pin of the video in plug, then solder the braid on the outer pin. This will be the 80 column output.

The other plug needs two length of cable, one for the video signal, the other for the audio. Solder both braids on pin 2 of the din plug, and the core of the first cable on pin 3 of the din plug. At the other end of this cable, solder a plug to match the audio in socket of your monitor in the same fashion as described above. (see fig. 4). Solder the core of the other cable to pin 4 of your plug, and again solder a matching plug for the video in socket of your monitor. Close the plug cases and there you go, you have an 80 column adaptor.

To use, select the type of display you require, and plug the corresponding plug into your monitor; you do not need to remove the audio plug.

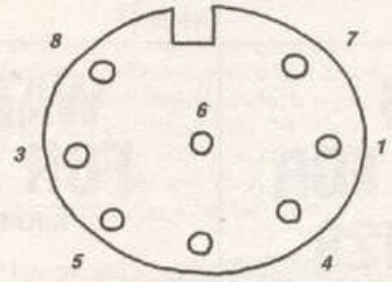
Alternatively, you can put a single pole double throw switch for easy selection.

This cable will work on any monitor which has video and audio in sockets (Note that on the 1701 monitor, you must change the position of the switch at the back). If you use the family's tv and have a video recorder, plug this cable into the video in the VCR and you will have 80 columns on a standard TV. ◄



1-2 Ground
7 Monochrome

Fig 1. RGBI socket pinouts



3 Audio out
4 Video out 2 Ground

Fig 2. Video output pinout

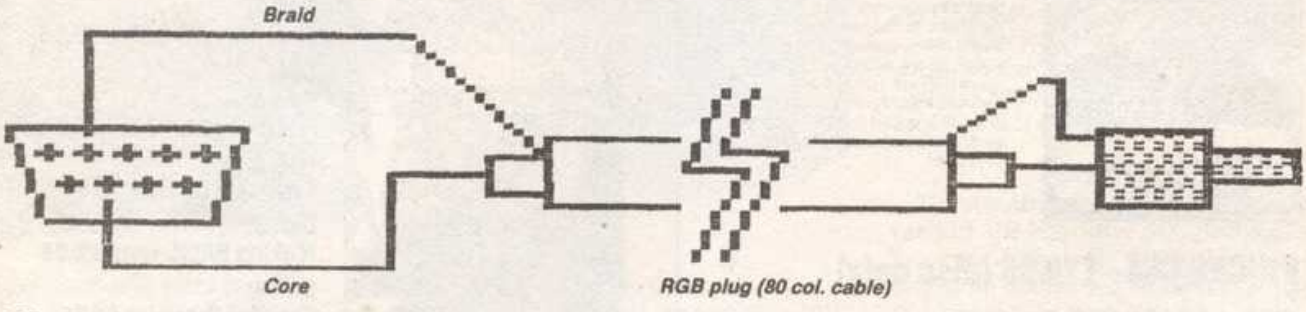


Fig 3. The 80-column cable

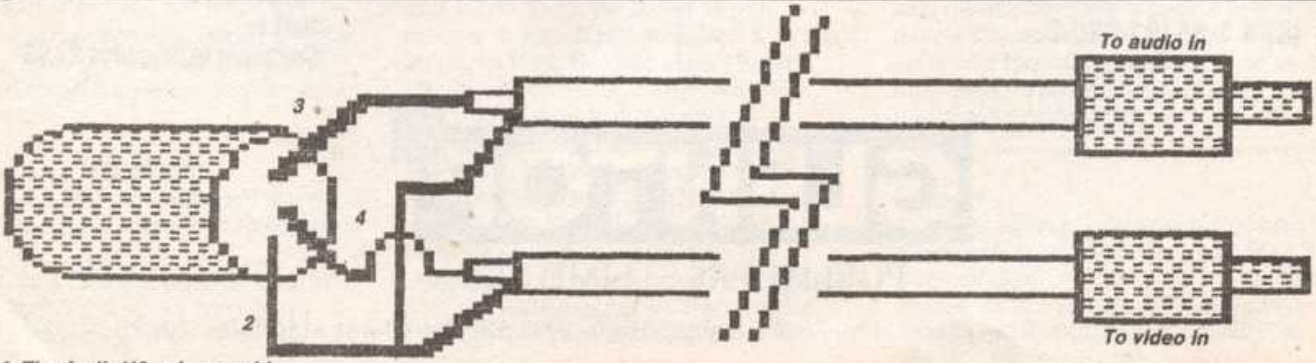
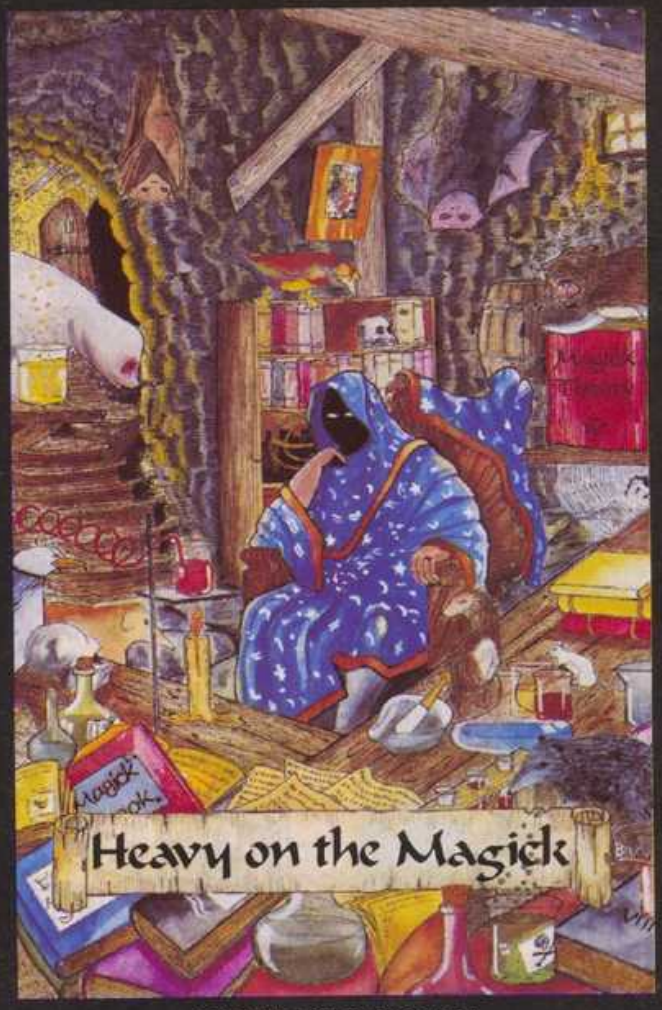


Fig 4. The Audio/40-column cable

Heavy on the Magick

CONVERSATIONS WITH APEX

THE DOUBT OF RABAK



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GAME KILLER

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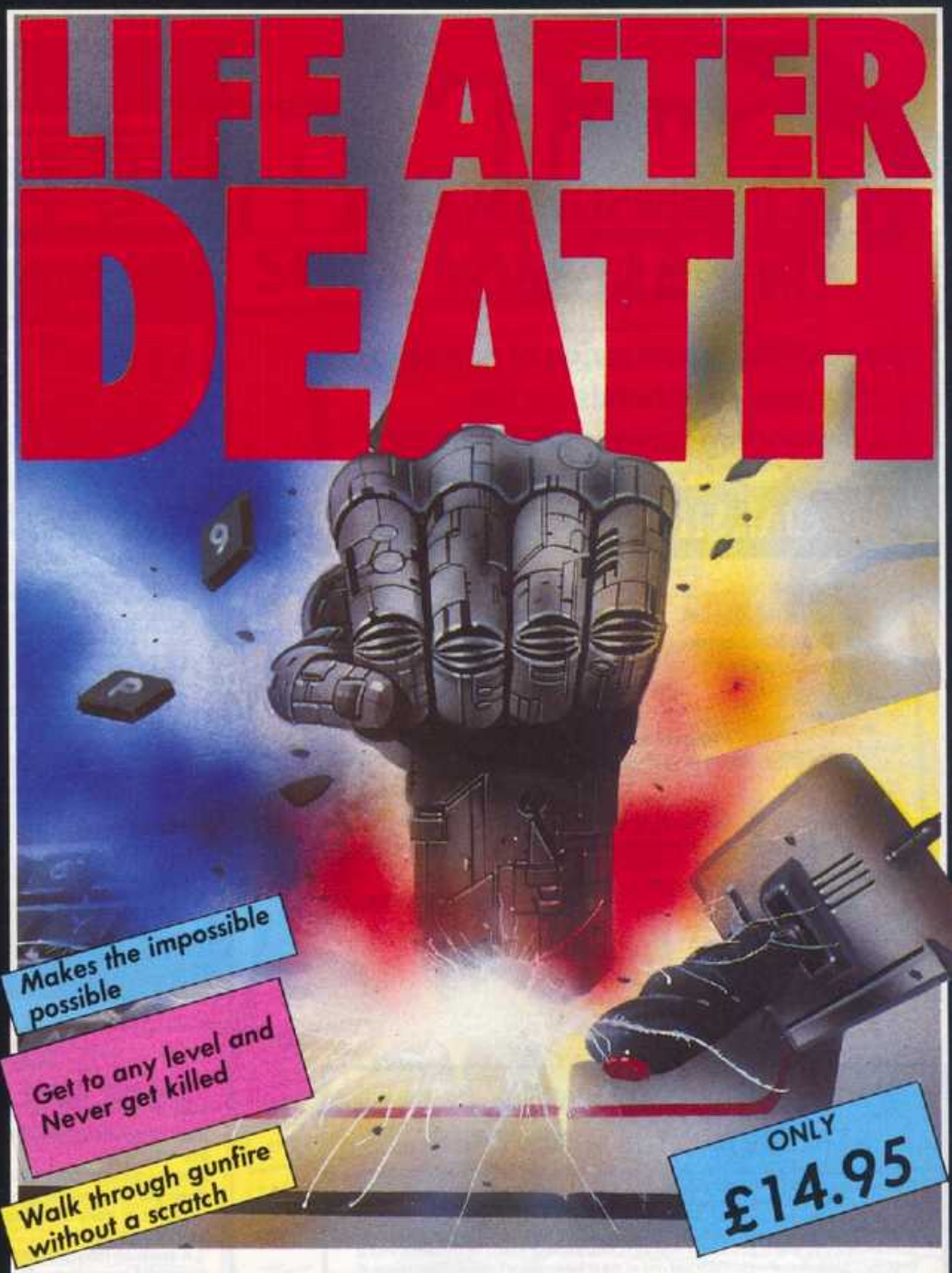

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Our complete price list is much bigger than this. For any enquiries that you may have please ring 0473 218229 Mon-Fri 9am-4pm (it's much quicker than writing).

Please make cheques/postal orders payable to: **T.L. DAVIS.**
All priced items include postage and packing except hardware items below £100, also are correct when going to press. (D) means the program is also available on disk. Post to:

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COMMODORE 64
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OPERATING "FREEZE FRAME"

"Freeze Frame" is simplicity itself to use. It is cartridge based so it is simply plugged into the cartridge port. When the computer is switched on a message is displyed, pressing "RETURN" will clear the computer back to the normal start up screen. Software can now be loaded from tape or disc **completely as normal**. The latest version of "Freeze Frame" will, to the best of our knowledge, allow **ANY software** to load and run normally (unlike competitive products).

"Freeze Frame" can be brought into operation at any convenient point by pressing the button on it. You can then do one of three things:

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Does any other utility offer all this?

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DISC TO DISC	DISC TO TAPE

PLUS the added flexibility of being able to save at any stage and return to that position, because programs restart from the point where the button is pressed.

An awe inspiring success rate.

Customise programs by putting in POKEs for endless lives, etc. and then save with those active.

Reload independant of the cartridge.

Available now.

ANSWER: NO "FREEZE FRAME" HAS NO SERIOUS COMPETITION

THE COMPETITION

A successful product always spawns imitators and "Freeze Frame" is certainly no exception. Fortunately for us, but perhaps not for the people who have purchased them, their main similarity seems to be in advertising style.

"The Final Cartridge" is a good product in many ways, **BUT** when it comes to making backups it is just not in the same class as "Freeze Frame". Another major drawback, not made clear by advertising is that saved programs can **ONLY be reloaded with the cartridge in situ.** (The use of the term "Freeze Frame" in their adverts is merely an attempt to benefit from the success and advertising of our product.)

"UPC1" has it's uses but in it's current form **cannot be taken seriously** as competition for "Freeze Frame".

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SERIOUS WARNING: THIS IS AN EXTREMELY POWERFUL PRODUCT AND IS STRICTLY FOR PERSONAL USE. DON'T COMPARE IT WITH ANY OTHER PRODUCT, NOTHING ELSE OFFERS THE POWER OF "FREEZE FRAME".

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Wild Bill is flying away from home

TOM COURTNEY TALKS TO MICROPROSE'S KING OF THE SIMULATIONS AND REVIEWS THE LATEST TITLES

The Royal Court in London has seen some dazzling actors in its time. But this month, the biggest show in town was next door at the Royal Court Hotel where "Wild Bill" Stealey was the main attraction. Major Bill had flown in to give us a taste of what was to come from **Microprose** software, the uncrowned kings of the flight simulator world.

The news is that Microprose are renewing the offensive in the air as well as opening up two new fronts on land and under the sea.

For a company which spends several man years developing its products, there is a positive torrent of programs to be released in 1986. **Silent Service** and **Acrojet** are due in May. This should roughly co-incide with the belated launch of two wargames **Crusade in Europe** and **Decision in the Desert**. Following close on the heels of that lot are **Solo Flight II** in June and **Gunship** in September. Also in the Autumn, a follow up to **Silent Service** is planned, which will show the other side of the coin when you take command of a destroyer attempting to save your convoy from the wolf pack in the Atlantic. The company also has a third string to its wargames bow with **Conflict in Vietnam**, but that may be considered strictly for the Yanks, and may never see this side of the Atlantic.

Marketing

Bill Stealey tells you all this in his usual verbal assault mode. Being on the other end of this barrage is to feel disorientated and dazed. Gradually, your senses return. You realise that there are other software houses out there, a possibility Bill hardly admits. Reluctantly, he concedes that Microprose are only the third to fifth largest software house in the States, **Activision** and **Electronic Arts** being the two big names Bill is gunning for.

If the latest Billboard charts are anything to go by, in the States at least, it is a fight he's winning. **F-15** is at number 2 after a whole year in the charts and **Silent Service** is number 5, with 17 weeks behind it. "When you talk about market penetration, 70 per cent of computer owners have three or more Microprose products over there! We've already got 30,000 advance orders for our 'Nam game."

On this side of the Atlantic, Microprose have yet to really break into the mass market. "U.S. Gold have been doing a great job for us, but we feel that with a little more effort we could make a much bigger impact". To this end, Microprose is setting up its own office in this country to try to improve marketing. But there are other problems. The company's games are written on disk, and never designed to work properly on cassette. "Our boys just keep working until they've filled the disk up!". This means, in Britain's mainly cassette based market, the games are awkward to play. The packaging also suffers. Most major high street chains want a single or double cassette case, into which you can only squeeze the most basic manual. This compares badly with the American A5 size versions with comprehensive manuals of around 50 pages!

Problems aside, Bill believes the combination of strong products and better marketing will do the trick.

Gunship

Microprose are also interested in recruiting some british programmers to try to get more in tune with the British punter. "We've already interviewed some big names, either to work here or back in Maryland with our other 15 in-house programmers." **Gunship** was originally due at the beginning of the year, but, after showing it to several army helicopter pilots, he decided it still needed some more work. "Helicopter flying is totally different from jets. It's all about tree hopping, using the terrain. So we've gone for a full 3D system that'll take your breath away. It's all about technology as well, so we've got all the systems in there including TADS (you aim the gun just by looking at the target). Once again, it's no shoot-em-up, there'll be lots of missions including some lightly armed stealth missions. we even improved slightly on the real thing, we gave the chopper air to air missiles. With the new Soviet attack helicopters its something the air force are considering as well."

Solo Flight II is an updated version of Solo Flight. It features synthesised speech

and a night flying option. The speech is used in the instructor pilot option which you can use to take you round your first circuit. This unique option makes it so much easier to get into the game proper, a common criticism of flight simulators – especially from Major Bill himself. "I can't even land Flight Sim II (from Sub logic) and I've got 3000 flying hours behind me!"

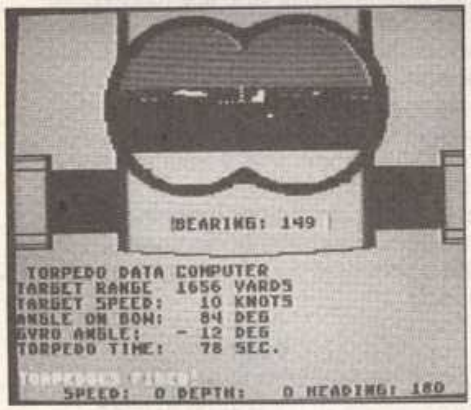
For the Amiga, Microprose plan conversions of **Gunship** and **Silent Service**. "Obviously these will be better with faster graphics."

Microprose has never produced a "zap" game or an arcade adventure and probably never will. "If you want that sort of game, then don't buy one of mine. But if you want to test more than your speed of reflexes, if you want 100 hours plus of enjoyable game playing, then Microprose probably have a simulation that's right up your tail pipe. ◄

SILENT SERVICE

Run silent, run deep. Submariners with an eye to a pension are not the gung ho type. Hours of boredom followed by moments of sheer terror summed up existence aboard a submarine in WW2. Not particularly promising material for a computer game, but Microprose has decided to bite the bullet with this detailed and challenging simulation of life beneath the waves.

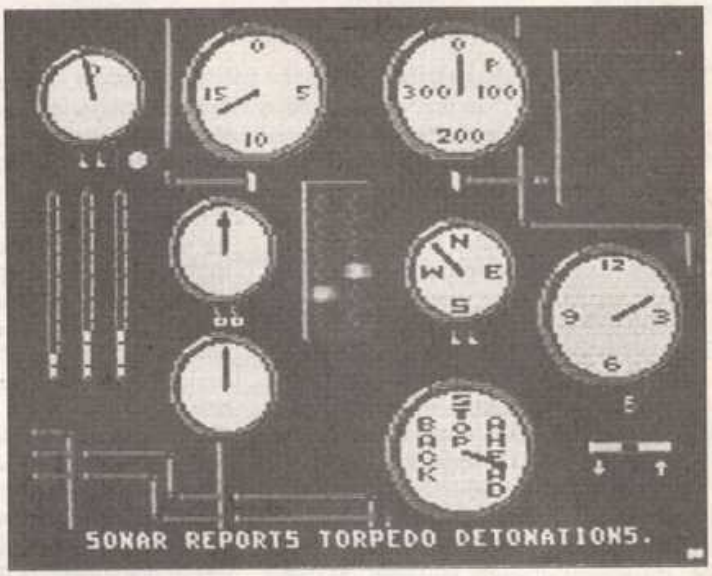
The most common comment you'll get from anyone watching you play this game is "go on, shoot him". This advice inevitably leads to disaster; the successful player in this game has to be prepared to play cat and mouse with his prey. Look for an opening, decide when to make your attack, be swift and decisive in your execution. After that, don't stand around to watch the fireworks: dive for all you're worth and hope you can avoid the revenge of the escorts.



There are three modes of play; practice, convoy action and campaign. Practice just gets you used to handling the controls, firing the gun and the torpedoes. Next, try your hand at one of the six convoy scenarios given. These cover most of the situations you'll come up against: night actions, day actions, shallow/deep water, early/late war. The period of the war determines the technology deployed by each side.

Once you've polished off a few convoys, it's time to take on a patrol. Five scenarios are available this time, covering some of the most famous patrols of the Pacific war. The game starts with a map of the south west Pacific; you move your submarine to the point where you consider Japanese ships are likely to be, if the screen border turns red, you're on to something. Hit the fire button and the screen changes to the inside of the sub. Check the map, work out your attack. Then it's eyes to the 'scope and see what you've got. If its the odd small cargo ship with a heavy escort, then discretion can be the better part of valour. But if there's a tanker or two with only a couple of slow Kaibokan escorts then it's action stations.

Control of most functions around the sub is form the joystick, using screen icons. It doesn't take long before you're effortlessly flicking between the map, periscope, instruments and damage control.



This game will no doubt leave the zap addicts utterly cold. It amply repays close attention to the 50 page booklet that comes with it. If you are happy juggling at least half a dozen factors against one another, then you could have what it takes to become an elite sub commander. An original idea brilliantly executed. ◄

ACROJET

So you think you're a hotshot pilot? You can land Solo Flight in fog over Steamboat Springs with half the instruments out, you can fly Fighter Pilot all day, but are you ready for **Acrojet?** This has to be one of the most demanding plane simulators on the market, and there's not even anyone shooting at you!

The program puts you at the controls of a BD-5J miniature stunt jet, like the one used at the beginning of the James Bond film Octopussy. The program offers you ten events to take part in. The object is to complete the given course and stunts as quickly as possible. This really makes flying Acrojet a "whole new ball game" as Bill Stealey would put it. Being up against the clock, its no longer just enough to avoid crashing the thing, you've got to fly as close to the wind as you can, taking as many chances as possible to get a fast time. Although the usual comprehensive manual takes you right through from the basics of aerodynamics and manoeuvres to hints on every event, this is probably not the flight simulator to cut your teeth on. However, if all this is a piece of cake, well, start turning up the wind, turning down the jet's performance and generally make your life hell.

The controls are sensible, and the graphics informative with all the information you need at your fingertips. This game is definitely one for the simulator butts to show off with. Right, where did I park my Pitts Special? ◄

Thrills without frills?

CAN DISC SOFTWARE AT £7.99 BE WORTH BUYING? CHRIS JENKINS SAYS YES TO THE LOAD'N'GO SERIES FROM BUG-BYTE

There is a theory that it's the price of software, rather than that of hardware, which restricts the popularity of disk drives in the UK. In the States, where income is high and hardware prices low, very few computer users use cassette based software and disks are the standard storage medium. This obviously makes more powerful software feasible, and accounts for the difficulty of converting some US products to the cassette format more usual in the UK.

Now it looks as if for the first time the vicious circle of high disk drive prices and high disk software prices may be broken in the UK. The Load'n'Go series from Green Valley publishing, distributed here by Bug Byte Software, is cheap, easy to use, and packaged in such a way that disk software may become an "impulse purchase" in the same way that budget games have.

Simple

This meant a bare minimum of packaging; no manuals (all the instructions should be on the disk in the form of menus and help screens); fast development time and high-quantity marketing. Like the UK's budget games labels, where profits are low per unit, sales must be high, and special outlets and displays were developed at computer specialists and chain stores.

Bug Byte's marketing deal with Green Valley involves, initially, a batch of nine disks and one hardware product. All the disks have several aspects in common; vac-formed plastic packaging, no manual, and a price tag of £7.99. What, you might well ask, can you expect for £7.99? Obviously the programs have no frills whatsoever; no graphics, significant sound, or remarkable features. What they do have is a refreshingly simple approach and straightforward operation.

- **Master Word** is a simple word processor – you might prefer to think of it as a text editor – which includes a number of demo letter files. These cover a number of useful subjects, such as business (nine examples) home affairs (nine examples) and love letters. Appallingly slushy and American, these will at least give you something to laugh about before you turn to the serious stuff!

The program runs through a series of menus, and at each stage you select the option you want – create document, edit document, save, directory, and so on, with a single keypress. At every stage there is a help menu available, which will explain all the options at your disposal and how you control them. This aspect is common to all the Load'n'Go programs.

Master Word features insert/delete, tab, line insert/delete, cursor control, skip page, skip to end, and so on. Print options include double spacing, page length, top and bottom margin, and so on. Master Word is fine for short letters, though not suited for heavy use since it doesn't allow such things as page headings, mail merge, file rename, and so on. Many computer users will go mad over it, though; I can hear them now, saying "This is all I want – why couldn't someone have come up with this before!"

- **Pro Financial Organiser** features three useful utilities. Chequebook Balancer is a simple ledger into which you can enter all deposits and withdrawals; Electronic Calendar is a month planner which allows you to place markers on particular days, and project ahead for the rest of the year; and Mail List Manager is a label printer.

For those who require a more powerful database, there's **G-Base**. This allows you to create 600 records per file, editing and adding as you require. The disadvantage is that a file may not be larger than the capacity of a single disk.

- **Home and Business Card File** is a contacts lister. It allows you to store your data by name, title, name of business, business type, address, phone number and any additional comments. You can search by any category, and produce hard copies to form a permanent contacts list.
- **Home Finance Organiser 1** contains a less powerful database, Address Keeper. This allows you to store names, addresses and phone numbers only. There's another version of the Chequebook Balancer, and The Budgeter, a limited financial plotter (it will only cope with figures up to 9999.99) which allows you to keep track of expenses, adding and deleting as appropriate.
- **Electronic Scheduler** is just that – an appointments diary which will sort by name, data, time, person, location, subject and special comments. You can of course update, on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, alter records and view on screen or printer.
- **Family Tree,** one of the more original packages, allows you to record information on up to 300 relatives, including birthdates, deaths, relationships, occupation, and, according to the blurb, "funny habits"! Up to 24 lines of 40 characters each may be stored for each individual, and each family tree stored on a separate disk. The program is a little intolerant of incomplete records – you can't mark an individual as being a sister or brother unless they have a parent entered, for instance – but it should be adequate for all but the most exacting genealogists.

The most straightforward of the data handling programs is the **Personal Spreadsheet,** which gives 16k of memory and a 15 × 50 workspace. You can calculate the sums of columns or rows, perform basic functions at any point, average across rows, or perform a series of up to nine calculations. Unfortunately you cannot store these strings of functions to repeat them later.

The last two products in the Load'n'Go series are programming utilities rather than data handling software. The **Commodore 64 Utilities** disk includes directory lister, disk format routine, file copy/transfer, file rename, erase and validate, and a master disk directory manager.

The final product is a hardware utility suite, the **One Step** cartridge. Similar in many ways to the familiar **Robtek Turbo** or **H&P Final Cartridge**, One-Step has thirty functions including auto line number, file copy, free memory, load address, un-new, screen dump, cold start, change disk drive device number, change colours, and various load and save functions. There's also the ubiquitous reset switch to allow you to reset programs without wiping the memory. One-Step may not have some of the fancy extras of its competitors (machine-code monitors, extra memory space and so on), but it does have the advantage on price at £14.99.

Value

Overall the Load'n'Go series, though unspectacular in comparison to more expensive programs, do the job well and represent excellent value for money. With some sensible little touches (such as the facility for making back-ups) and a very straightforward approach, the whole cheap disk concept seems ready to take off. My only reservation is that the packaging should be more informative; it wouldn't be too much trouble to at least give a full list of the routines on each disk, and with more sophisticated programs such as an icon-driven word processor on the way, it would be a pity if it wasn't made quite clear just what good value for money Load'N'Go represents. ◀

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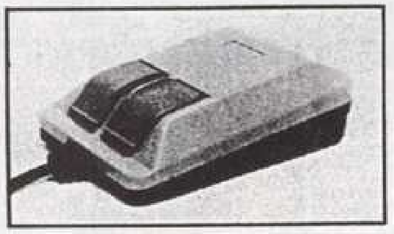

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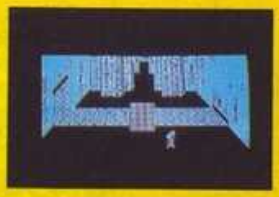

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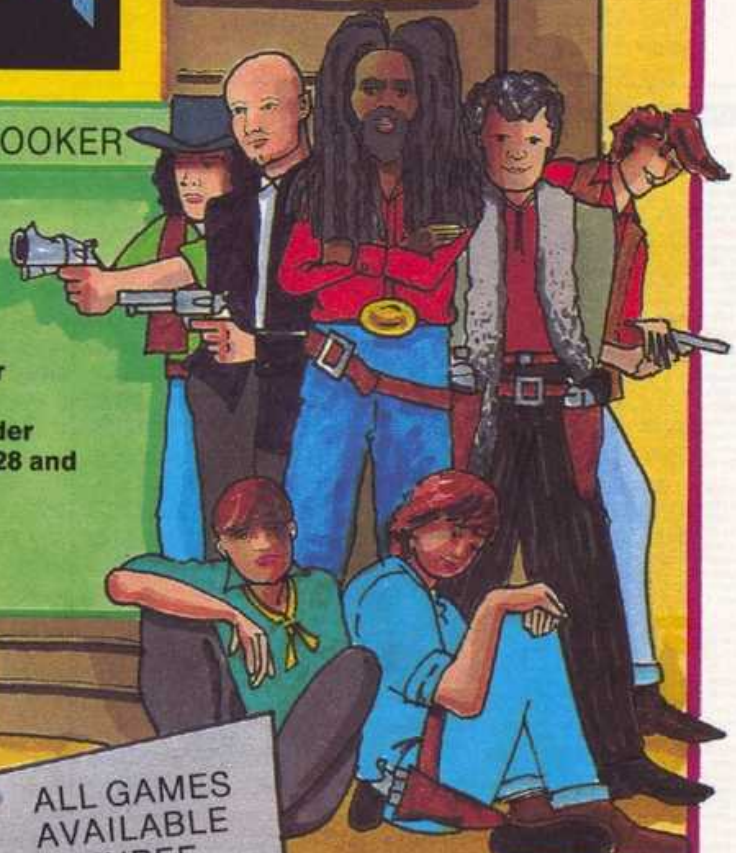

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