



PERSONAL COMPUTING AT A PRICE

It could be argued that the microcomputer revolution didn't really begin until IBM joined in. IBM is without doubt the largest manufacturer in the world of office equipment and computers, but it did not enter the microcomputer market until 1981. Such was its impact, however, that things have never been the same since.

IBM'S reputation in the mainframe and minicomputer markets is certainly not that of an innovator in hardware. Its software and documentation, though often enormously detailed and accurate, could be improved in terms of presentation and ease of use. However, the company is known for the robustness of its equipment, and the IBM PC is certainly sturdy. Like most IBM hardware, it also costs considerably more than its competition.

This doesn't seem to discourage sales, though, and despite prices that make other home computers seem cheap, the machine soon became one of the most popular. It has been paid the

ultimate compliment of being mimicked and cloned at least as much as the Apple, and certainly more quickly.

IBM explains that the PC's high price is a reflection of the level of support that the company provides. Support is indeed available — if you are prepared to pay 11.2 per cent of the cost of the item per year for a service contract. The cost of most independent service contracts is at least two per cent higher, and few companies can offer exchange units at a moment's notice, so perhaps there is some additional merit in buying machines built by a very large company such as IBM.

The IBM PC's specification isn't outstanding. It has an 8088 processor, which is described as a 16-bit CPU, but has the data and address lines multiplexed to save pins on the chip, and this means that it isn't fast. In fact, it generally performs only about 25 per cent faster than the average eight-bit machine.

As supplied, the basic model needs some expansion before it fulfils its potential, since it doesn't have much memory (not enough to run complex programs) and it has almost no input and



Ergonomical Design

The physical design and layout of the IBM PC reflects the company's huge experience in the field of computers and office products — unobtrusive and ergonomically sound. The three main units — keyboard, processor and monitor — are separated for ease of positioning. The machine comes with a monochrome unit as standard, but a full colour monitor is available

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