

On page 101 of THE HOME COMPUTER

ADVANCED COURSE we introduced you to

Micronet, an area within Prestel (British Telecom's public viewdata service) that is designated for the use of microcomputer owners. Micronet allows thousands of home computer users the opportunity to:

- Look at up-to-the-minute news;
- Download free or chargeable software;
- Send and receive messages to and from other subscribers to the Prestel system.

Anyone wishing to become a member of Micronet must first buy a modem to connect their computer to the telephone line. This can cost as little as £70. Then there are Prestel's subscription charges of £13 per quarter, and on top of that the cost of the phone calls themselves.

Since our previous article was written there have been some major changes to the organisation of the microcomputing databases on Prestel. Instead of subscribing direct to Micronet, micro owners must now join 'Prestel Microcomputing'. This is an umbrella name for several databases, of which the main one is still Micronet 800. The other two are Viewfax 258 and Clubspot 810. Both Micronet and Viewfax are commercial areas, selling telesoftware and providing news and computer interest sections. However, the third database, Clubspot, as its name implies, is run by members of computer clubs.

Clubspot began several years ago, before Micronet came into existence. It began as a small part of one of Prestel's experimental areas, and contained information about the Association of London Computer Clubs. As time went on, it proved a popular success and moved on to the Practical Computing pages of Prestel, followed by the IPC Practical Telesoftware pages. Last year, when Micronet was set up, Clubspot became a sub-Information Provider within Micronet, with its front page at 8008. At that point it had grown to over 1,500 frames of information. It is now on the move again, as Prestel have just given Clubspot the facilities of a Main

The major concern of Clubspot is to cater to computer clubs and their members. A major benefit for computer clubs is in recruiting new members, and many clubs find their pages on Clubspot useful for displaying club news and information for their members. Several computer clubs use their Clubspot pages as the focal point of club meetings. The pages are updated with information and club news almost immediately. For example, the North London Computer Club has a complete list of all the clubs and courses it organises, as well as club news.

Clubspot also includes information produced by enthusiasts, containing material of interest to ordinary Micronet members. There are pages concerned with shows and exhibitions, communication systems other than Prestel, a schools area, and several examples of hobbyist initiatives, such as Beebspot, Adventure Helpline and the Art Gallery. Beebspot is produced by two 15-year-olds, Michael Sparrow and Richard Ryczanowski, and it provides BBC Micro owners with news and information about all aspects of the machine. One of the most entertaining uses of computers is in playing adventure games and it will be of no surprise to find out that the Adventure Helpline is one of the most popular areas in Clubspot. As well as many pages of reviews of adventure games, and hints and tips for playing specific adventures there are also 15 'Helpliners' who do their best to deal with over 25 queries a week from frustrated adventurers. But Clubspot's pride and joy is the Art Gallery. This is the brainchild of Dr David Annal, who has a talent for getting the best possible graphics results from the low-resolution graphics used on Prestel. His impressive artwork is produced on a Commodore Pet before being placed on the system. He is also responsible for many of the well-designed frames seen elsewhere in Clubspot and Prestel.