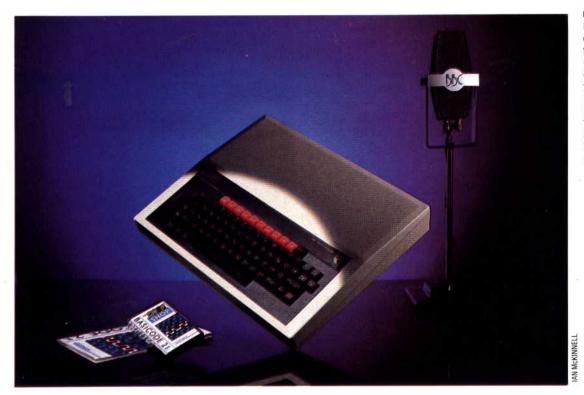# COMMON DENOMINATOR

Common Standard
BASICODE enables micros to communicate with each other through a common standard. It uses a minimum set of BASIC commands and its own tape format to allow a dozen or so micros to swap programs. BASICODE programs are even transmitted by radio stations, allowing listeners with different micros to use the same programs

The main obstacle facing most home computer users who wish to exchange software is that of machine compatibility. Software written for one make of computer will not, as a rule, run on another. However, BASICODE, a language recently developed in the Netherlands, is a new approach to solving this perennial problem.

BASIC has now firmly established itself as the standard language for home micros. However, as every home computer user knows, there are enormous variations in the dialects available. Even when machines do share a common dialect, such as Microsoft BASIC, there is no guarantee that a program written on one type of computer will necessarily run on a different model.

There are now signs that this may be about to change. At the beginning of 1984, BBC Radio's *Chip Shop* programme began transmitting programs in a single dialect of BASIC known as BASICODE, and these programs have been successfully loaded and run by a wide variety of different computers.

BASICODE is a new approach to the problem of compatibility. It was first developed in the Netherlands for use on *Hobbyscoop*, a science and technology programme produced by Teleac, the

Dutch equivalent of the Open University. When *Hobbyscoop* first began broadcasting programs in 1978, the programme based its transmissions on the four most popular machines then available — the Apple, Exidy Sorcerer, Commodore PET and Tandy TRS-80. There could be only one transmission for a single machine each week and, as two of these computers had extremely low data transmission rates, listeners had to endure up to eight minutes of screeching. Clearly, this state of affairs was unsatisfactory, and as new machines came onto the market, each requiring its own broadcast, this method of programming transmission was obviously becoming impossible.

The problem was first tackled by an amateur radio enthusiast called Klaas Robers, who produced the first version of BASICODE. This was based on a common subset of BASIC commands, which could be understood by all types of computer. There were teething troubles with the new system. Although different types of machine had identical commands, the computers had different methods of executing them and so the standardisation broke down. So, together with Jochem Herrman, Klaas Robers developed an improved version of the language, known as BASICODE-2.

The first broadcasts of BASICODE-2 were made on New Year's Day 1983, and soon proved to be a