

AMSTRAD CPCs and PCWs

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The name on the lips of every micro user these days is Amstrad. While Commodore and Atari struggle to make up for previous losses, and Acorn flounder, Amstrad calmly buys out Sinclair and consolidates an already formidable market position.

The secret is to squeeze the best out of old technology, attractively bundled and priced, rather than trying to compete at the cutting edge of the risky high-tech market. With the CPC computers, now regarded largely as games machines, and the newer PCW series, Amstrad is enjoying the best of both worlds.

Whether your interest is purely in games, or in serious applications, Amstrad has plenty to offer. As you'll read in this special supplement, there are now games to play on the PCW's and lots of serious stuff for the CPC's too – so take your choice and enjoy the Amstrad! ◀

Show business

SERIOUS SOFTWARE DOMINATED THE RECENT AMSTRAD SHOW. CHRIS JENKINS SUMS IT ALL UP

Considering the dominant position which Amstrad has achieved in the small computer field, the 14,000 attendance at the Database Amstrad Computer Show sounds like a disappointing result. However, the visitors made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in numbers, and overall the Show was judged a success by exhibitors and public alike.

The main point of interest was to have been Amstrad's PC-compatible machine, but the rumours of its launch had faded by the time of the Show, and it now looks likely that it will be some time before the official launch.

However, alternatives were available.



MML Software had warned that a "cut-price PCW 8256 lookalike" would be launched – and that 5000 were ready for shipment. In the event, the cardboard self-assembly machine – labelled "NOT the Amstrad PCW 8256" – was one of the hits of the Show. With only

a sharp pair of scissors and a little patience you could assemble your own machine, complete with monitor, keyboard, printer, floppy disks and documents. MML's more serious contributions include Amstrad CP/M Plus, a weighty tome dealing with the history, operations, programming, availability and implementation of CP/M, including popular software packages such as Multiplan and Wordstar.

On the subject of CP/M, New Star's latest software catalogue including the

NewWord package, Pocket Wordstar, and the database systems Cardbox and Magic Filer. Also included in the NewStar catalogue is the Ambyte games-on-disk service, an inexpensive way to get customised cassette games compilation transferred to disk – all above board! – at reasonable prices.

By far the most popular feature of the Show – to the disappointment of games players – was the wide selection of PCW business software. Caxton's Cardbox indexing system, Condor 1 database, Brainstorm ideas processor and Smart Key keyboard customiser attracted interested crowds, as did Saxon's Microfile and Microword programs.

Arnor's Prospell provided the solution to Locoscript users – and users of all other known PCW word processors – with text checking problems. The editable 32000-word dictionary and 2000 wpm checking speed makes Prospell a bargain at £29.95. There's a CPC version too.

Sandpiper's accounts package, created specifically for the 8256, is an integrated system including sales and purchase ledger, cash book, invoicing and VAT return sections, while the File Manager program is a fully relational database with user screen formatting



MML Software's cut-price cut-out



and record lengths of up to 400 characters, with field lengths of up to 255 characters.

Micro Simplex's Simplex D-based cash book system, **First Software's** DBase II and **SageSoft's** Retrieve and Magic Filr were among the many serious software packages which confirmed the 8256/8512 as the most important small business machine on the market.

For users who are convinced of the machine's power but unsure of their ability to operate it, a whole host of companies were offering training courses and guide books. The books are examined in more detail elsewhere in this supplement; the training courses included the **Iankey** typing tutorials from **Iansyst**, PCW word processor tuition courses from **Crayfield**, **CEEA's** computer training courses, and the typing tutor program from **Computer One**.

On the utilities front, **Hisoft's** Pascal, **TurobBasic**, **C**, **Torch CP/M** tutorial, and **Devpac** assembler/debugger, **Pride Utilities' Fido** disk organiser, **Printer Pac** screen dumper, **Super Sprite** animator and **Script** printer font definer, and several tape-to-disk transfer systems from **Mirage**, **Romantic Robot**, **Evesham Micros**, and others, continued to make the Amstrad machines more flexible and powerful.

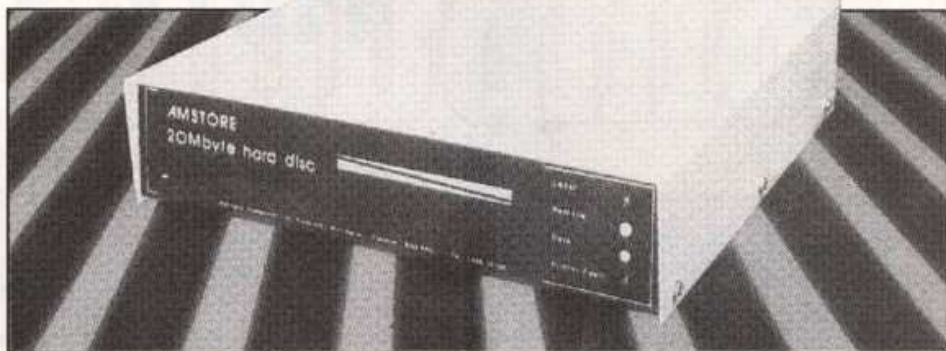
Comms software also made a good showing, with **Modem House's** Prestel system, which supports almost all modems but is specially designed for the Voyager II, and the **Telecom Gold Microlink** systems on display. This system offers telex and electronic mail services, closed user groups and bulletin boards. **Cirkit's** Prestel link hardware for the CPC's, complete with modem, interface and software, was on show, displaying demonstration pages from **Micronet 800**.

On the subject of hardware, **Cirkit** also showed as sideways ROM expansion card giving a maximum of 64K extra memory to the CPC's, plus parallel, centronics and serial printer interface cards.

DK'Tronics showed a fascinating innovation – a TV tuner which allows your



DK'Tronics' TV tuner



Northern Computers' Amstore 20 meg hard disk unit

Amstrad monitor to show television pictures. Priced at £59.95, the tuner will be available in a month's time, and versions for other monitors are on the way. DK also showed the **256K Silicon Disk**, a faster, high-capacity alternative to a disk drive. Priced at £99.95, the Silicon Disk is one of a series of DK Amstrad products including speech synths, light pens, and memory expansion packs.

For more ambitious users, the **Amstore 20Mbyte** hard disk unit, which can act as a store and file server for the **Amstrad Network**, was on show on the **Northern Computers** stand. The Amstore also contains a parallel printer output with spooling, a clock and calendar with battery back-up, and a complete multi-user networking system. Together with **Amstelex**, the telex management system, the network allows the CPC or PCW machines to become part of a fully professional office automation system.

Screens Microcomputer Distribution showed their 1.4 Mb disk station for the CPC 464, the 512K expansion board, and the new 1 Mb board at £199.

KDS's RS232 interface for the CPC



EMR's MIDI music system

machines is provided with Prestel compatible software, while the 8 bit printer port allows all 256 ASCII codes to be sent to a printer using a short Basic program.

Finally, on the hardware front, **EMR** showed the **Amstrad MIDI** interface, plus **Performer** software. Using an impressive array of instruments including Yamaha DX7, Akai MIDI Sampler, Korg drums and JVC home keyboard, EMR's Mike Beecher demonstrated just how easy it can be to create impressive music on your Amstrad with a minimum of musical ability.

While games players may well have been disappointed by the Show – with only **Audiogenic's** Test Cricket, Level 9 adventures, CDS's **Snooker** and **Colossus Chess**, and **Blue Ribbon Software** having much to offer – the overall opinion seems to have been that it was successful. Now it remains to be seen whether Amstrad can also dominate the games market once the Amstrad/Sinclair machines appear later this year. ◀



The Amstrad Network System

**AMSTRAD
COMPUTER
SHOW**

When the press use such words as 'Phenomenal', 'Outstanding', 'Ideal' and 'Worth Every Penny', they've obviously discovered something rather special.

But when that something special turns out to be a product in which they are already expert, then it must be something very special indeed.

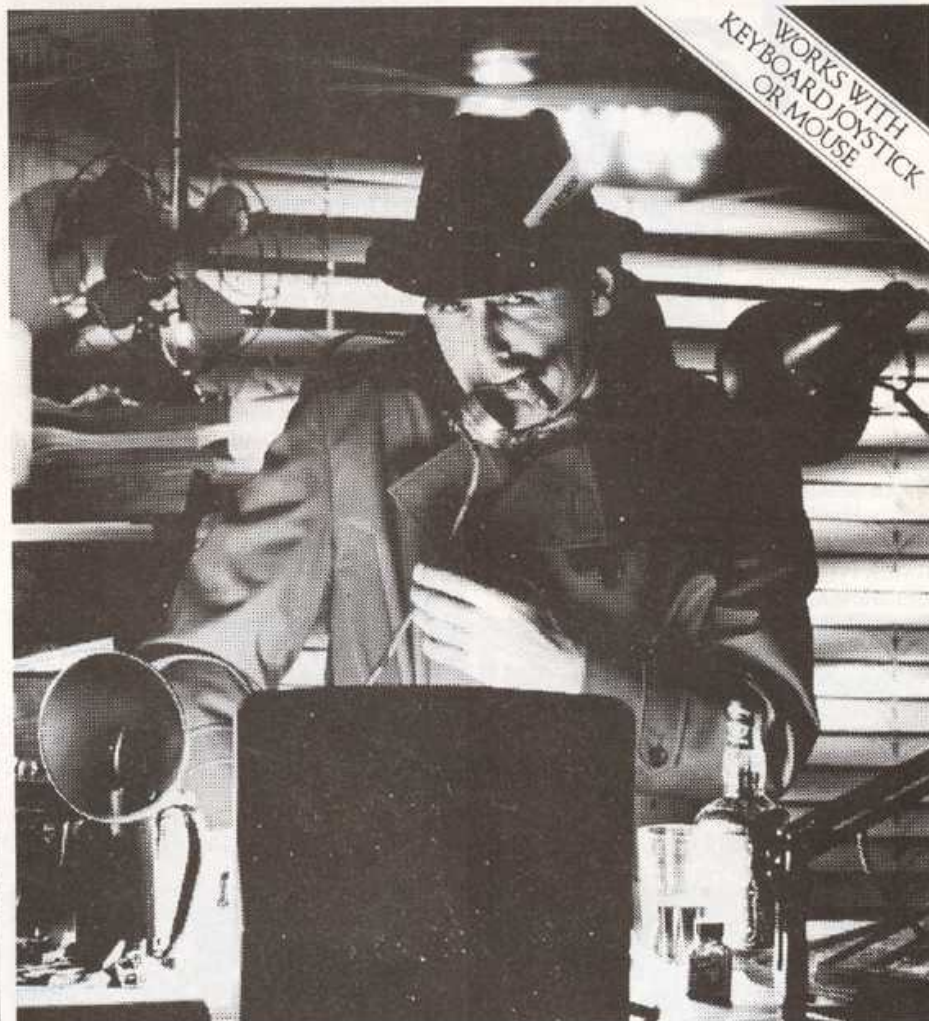
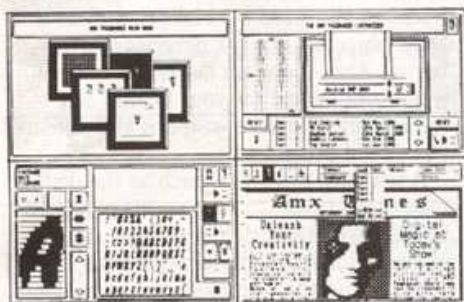
The object of their enthusiasm is AMX Pagemaker - a revolutionary software program that will produce newspapers, posters, leaflets, notices and hand-outs - in fact anything where text and graphics are required, to an extraordinary professional standard.

It's a complete graphics design system and word processor rolled into one. It has real time graphics with fast continuous scrolling up and down an A4 page and uses Mode 2, the highest graphics resolution on the Amstrad CPC computers.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

You can type directly onto the screen, with any of the 16 typefaces supplied or design your own, alternatively, you can load in any ASCII file or a word processor file, from programs such as Tasword, Amsword, Maxam, or Protext, with fully automatic on-screen text formatting during loading.

'Word processing' facilities such as centering, ragged right and literal justification are all available. There is full pixel resolution control over text and graphics. Also included is a micro spacing facility.



The program that's making front page news.

EXTRA, EXTRA

There are outstanding facilities for drawing, spraying and painting, using either the patterns supplied, or your own pattern designs. A screen conversion routine is included allowing screens created in Mode 1 and 0 to be used within the Pagemaker. The cut and paste facilities include copying, moving, rotating, stretching and a fantastic zoom is also available.

The preview allows you to view three A4 pages at any time before work is output to a wide range of dot matrix printers including: Amstrad DMP 1000-2000, Epson FX/RX/LX/LQ, Canon PW-1080, Kaga KP810, Mannesman Tally MT-80+, Seikosha SP-1000A, Star Delta, Star SG10 and any that are compatible with the above.

The AMX Pagemaker requires: a) Amstrad CPC618 or b) Amstrad CPC664+64K Minimum add-on Ram or c) Amstrad CPC464+64K Minimum add-on Ram + disc drive, DK 'tronics Ram boards or compatible.

Let's leave the last word to the press.

"Pagemaker" is phenomenal - it lends itself to creating anything where text and graphics are involved - notices, posters, leaflets, hand-outs, newsheets. Packages like this have been the province of the 16-bit micros until now, this product is worth every penny of £49.95."

AMX MAGAZINE MAKER - WE THOUGHT IT WAS ABOUT TIME WE PUT YOU IN THE PICTURE

A combination of AMX Pagemaker and the AMX video digitiser. Using any video that provides a composite signal and the digitiser, images from a camera or TV can be converted into a graphic screen on the Amstrad Micro. They can then be used within AMX Pagemaker to illustrate magazines or newsletters. The digitiser connects into the expansion port and scans a complete picture in only 5 seconds.

A special print dump routine is also included with the driver programs. This is specially designed to produce fast, correctly proportioned pictures, with reduced 'Contouring' resulting in a very accurate reproduction of the image.

Features offered by this package include:

- Dot resolution 256 by 256
- Standard 1 volt composite video input
- 10 bit A/D converter gives 32 grey scale output
- Low IC count
- Contrast and brightness control
- No external power unit required

These packages are your opportunity to join the desktop publishing revolution.

The AMX Pagemaker costs only £49.95, software is supplied on 3" disc and a fully illustrated

operating manual, AMX Digitiser only £89.95 including software on 3" disc, and AMX Magazine Maker (including AMX Pagemaker and AMX Digitiser) at any £129.95.

These superb packages are available from all good computer dealers or direct using the Freepost order form below.

*Educational Computing, January 1986.

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Play away

PLENTY OF CONVERSIONS AND SOME NEW TITLES TOO – ALL REVIEWED BY AMSTRAD EXPERT STAN BYERMANN

MAX HEADROOM is certainly one for fans of the computer-generated video DJ, and should also appeal to lovers of complex strategies.

Basically a maze game with elements of pattern-matching, the game casts you in the role of investigative reporter Edison Carter. On your self-appointed mission to rescue the Max Headroom Personality Module from the skyscraper headquarters of TV Network 23, you must discover security codes allowing you access to each floor, then avoid the robot guards as you search each floor for clues.

There's an icon system which allows you to choose to move around the floor, check which floors you have completed, take a rest, try to gain control of the lifts, examine the security terminals or check the video cameras to see if you are being pursued by live or robotic security guards.

similar trick to controlling the lifts, involving illuminating LED's in the correct pattern.

If you successfully penetrate the security measures, find the executive codes and retrieve the Max Headroom Personality Module, you are rewarded by an appearance



of old M-M-M-M-Max himself. Unfortunately, although the game features reasonably sophisticated music and animation, there isn't enough variation to hold the attention of any but the most persistent players – so many of us may be denied

the pleasure of meeting Max after all. ◀



To gain control of a floor you must complete a fast-moving pattern-matching exercise, by which you use the joystick to match the series of notes played by the security computer, only in reverse. There's a

GLASS is a visually impressive shoot-'em-up which soon palls when you realise that the plot is minimal. Described as a "ground-level alien strike simulator", Glass is in fact devoid of any real strategic or simulation elements, but simply requires you to blast the hell out of anything which moves on screen.



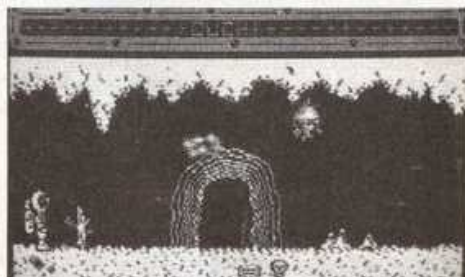
Since the action takes place in three alien emplacements, there is at least a variety of targets. First you have to destroy robot guards, then alien tanks, then battle cruisers, and finally you must fly between towerblocks to penetrate to the next city, which is very much the same thing again.

Although GLASS is very colourful and well animated, the sheer lack of subtlety in the gameplay makes it something of a disappointment. Not even the most indiscriminating arcade fan could get much out of this. ◀

Game GLASS Supplier Quicksilver Micro CPC 464/6128 Price £8.95/

CORE is another one which doesn't quite live up to its title. It's more like "Uh... yeah." In this one, you play fearless space pilot Andy Angelo, whose mission is to explore a ruined asteroid base to discover the secret of its destruction.

In order to solve the puzzle you must retrieve all the missing elements of a bio-computer and return them to your ship for analysis.

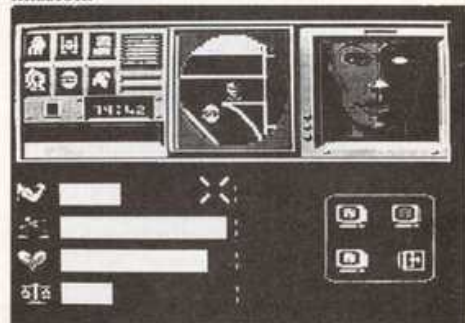


The caverns through which you move have a grid pattern of 16 x 16 cells, but there is no common interconnection system. You have to map your way through the complex, solving problems as you go. For instance, you need a metal detector to find some objects – but the detector itself is buried. Also, there are lasers and aliens which can be bad for your health, but somewhere there are weapons and defences which will protect you.

A few nice touches – such as the display

SHADOWFIRE certainly set new standards in programming sophistication when it first appeared on the Commodore 64 a year ago. It still looks pretty good today, with an icon-driven game system which is streets ahead of many otherwise similar games.

As controller of the elite Enigma Force, your task is to rescue Ambassador Kryxix and the plans for the Shadowfire ship from the evil General Zoff. You have one hour and forty minutes real time to complete the mission.



Your team consists of droids, weapons experts and hardened criminals, each of which has a status screen displaying strength, agility, stamina and weight lifting ability. Having selected a character to control, you can move to the Movement, Object, Battle or Quit screens. These allow you to move each character around the Zoff V space station, use various weapons and objects, fight the defenders, or change control to another member of the Enigma Force.

The Shadowfire strategy/adventure/arcade combination is unique, and although you sometimes wish for a more



dimming as your powerpack runs low on fuel, a game save routine and scrolling messages warning you of potential hazards – aren't really enough to make CORE stand out from the mass of similar maze-quest programs. ◀

Game CORE Supplier A&F Micro CPC 464/6128 Price £8.95.

straightforward play method, and get fed up with flipping from one selection of icons to another, the colourful graphics and complex strategic elements combine to form a unique game.

Since there are several different ways to complete the game, having finished it once needn't put you off playing it again – in fact you'll find the mixture of elements hold the attention well. Destined to become a classic



on the Amstrad, as it has on the CBM 64 and Spectrum. ◀

Game Shadowfire Supplier Beyond Micro CPC 464/6128 Price £9.95.

BATMAN may have little or nothing to do with the comic, TV series, film or bubble gum of the same name, but it's a complex and brilliantly programmed arcade adventure which for the first time gives PCW 8256 owners the chance to get in some real arcade action. Apart from the obvious fact that the screen display is green, it's hard to tell this version from those already available for the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC's. Designed in a caricature style which makes Batman a little cloaked gnome with pointy ears, the game is very similar in style to the Ultimate 3-D adventures. Each screen – and there are at least 150 of them – contains some fiendish obstacle or deadly enemy to overcome. First task is to collect your Batboots, Batbelt and Batbag, then you can set off in search of the scattered parts of the Batcraft which you need to rescue the imprisoned Robin.

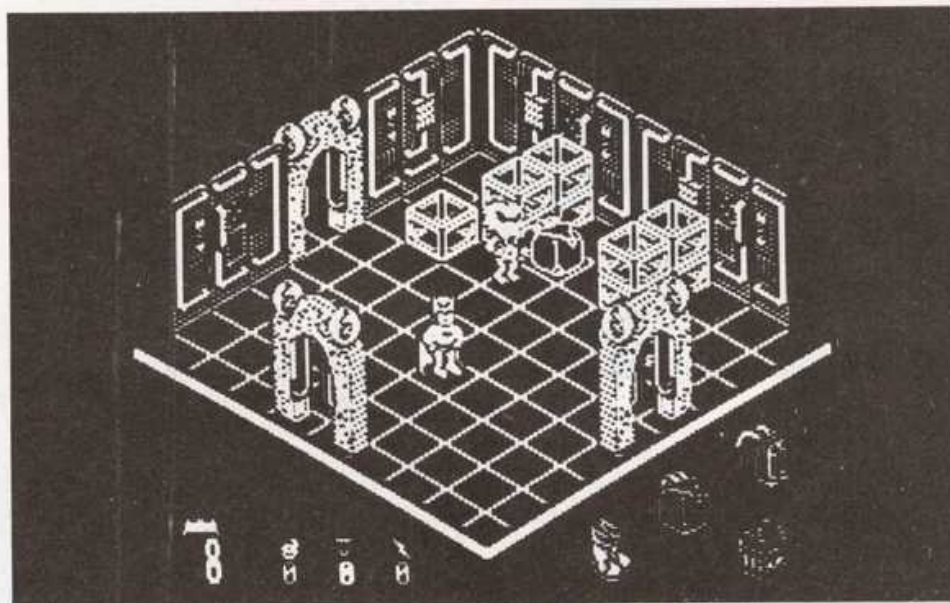
There are objects to collect which can give you extra lives, temporary



invulnerability or extra speed, but The Riddler has placed false clues throughout the caverns, which will cancel Batman's powers should he pick them up.

Although the sound on the PCW 8256 version is irritating, it can be switched off, leaving you to concentrate on those pixel-perfect leaps and split-second timings. ◀

Game Batman Supplier Ocean Micro CPC 464/6128, PCW 8256/8512 Price

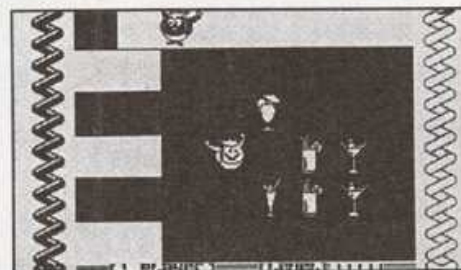


Deceptively simple yet colourful and charming, Harvey Headbanger is an excellent example of the "budget game" – immediately engaging and fun to play, even though the novelty will not last forever.

Dealing with a subject which most journalists find familiar – the inability to function without alcohol – the games

surrounding an area of squares of your own colour – blue or red. Moving over them to drink results in a horrid slurping noise and your boozometer going up. If your opponent is nearly dried out, you can bash into him to make his movements uncontrollable, and watch as he's reduced to a parched remnant of his former self!

Conjuring up your own cocktails and blanking out those of your opponent takes some quick thinking – though there's a similarity to "Painter"-type games, don't let that fool you. Harvey Headbanger is very original, has lots of play options – two players is more fun than playing the computer – and is very silly, which can only be good. Just £19.99, too! ◀



features two blobby opponents, Harvey and his rival Hamish Highball. They swing around the screen trying to outdo each other by keeping their cocktail level (shown on the curly straws to either side of the screen) topped up at their opponent's expense.

You make cocktails appear by



Game Harvey Headbanger Supplier Firebird Micro CPC 464/6128/6128 Price £1.99

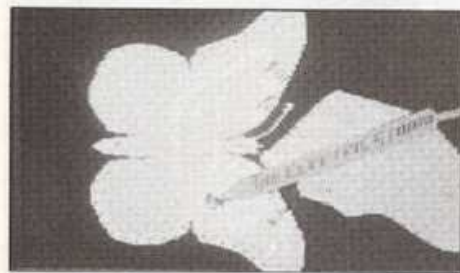
Getting the CPC picture

TONY KENDLE LOOKS AT TWO NEW GRAPHICS PRODUCTS

Electric Studio is probably the most exciting graphics software company working on the Amstrad at the moment – I genuinely believe that they are the only people who appear to know what a computer graphics device and the controlling software should be able to do.

The first problem is transferring your graphics ideas to the screen in the most painless way possible. Over the years I've tried a variety of light pens and found them to be almost without exception to be impossible to tolerate.

Recently however pixel accurate light pens have appeared used special hardware to allow you to draw freehand with a smoothness and accuracy that will shock anyone who has only tried the old style.



Typically these pens cost upwards of forty pounds but Electric Studio have achieved the near impossible with a pen that uses old style hardware but a pixel accuracy. It really does work and it is much cheaper.

The second problem is writing software that will really allow you to exploit the computer's strengths to complement your skills. Any package that doesn't provide a variety of brush sizes, stipple fills, block cutting and pasting, mirror, rotate and invert etc, is cheating you of the full potential offered by the processor.

Any package that doesn't allow you to work in any display mode use the full screen, zoom edit (essential for detailed work), or use the pictures in your own programs is cheating you of your potential for designing useful screens.

Electric Studio's software does not only have these features it has more that I would never have dreamt of – for example you can use four linked cursors to produce impressive looking kalaidoscope-like patterns in seconds.

6128 owners have more luxuries because of the extra memory – you can have several screens in memory at once, delete any changes you have just made or even merge two pictures together.

Excellent value for an excellent package. ◀

Hardware Electric Studio Lightpen Micro
Any CPC **Price** £19.95, £29.95 disk **Supplier**
ESP, P.O. Box 96, Luton LU3 2JP.

Timatic is best known for program conversions for the Amstrad machines and a range of powerful hardware add-ons. This is the first home-grown software that I have seen from them and I am very impressed by the quality of the idea and the implementation.

Microdraft is a CP/M + CAD program for the design of technical drawings on any size of A proportion paper. What makes it a true draughtsman program distinct from a screen designer is the fact that the drawing data is entered and held in memory as a series of coordinate points rather than as a screen bit image.

The advantages are enormous – pictures can be plotted to a accuracy of 0.01 mm, scaled, zoomed or shrunk at will without any loss of precision and very large drawings can be stored in just a few K. If you zoom to the maximum magnification you will be working on a total paper size of three hundred times the height and one hundred times the width of the screen! Of course at the smallest magnification not all details are visible on the monitor but any additions made remain at the highest precision.

The drawing commands are a respectable subset of those you would find on a CAD program costing thousands of pounds.

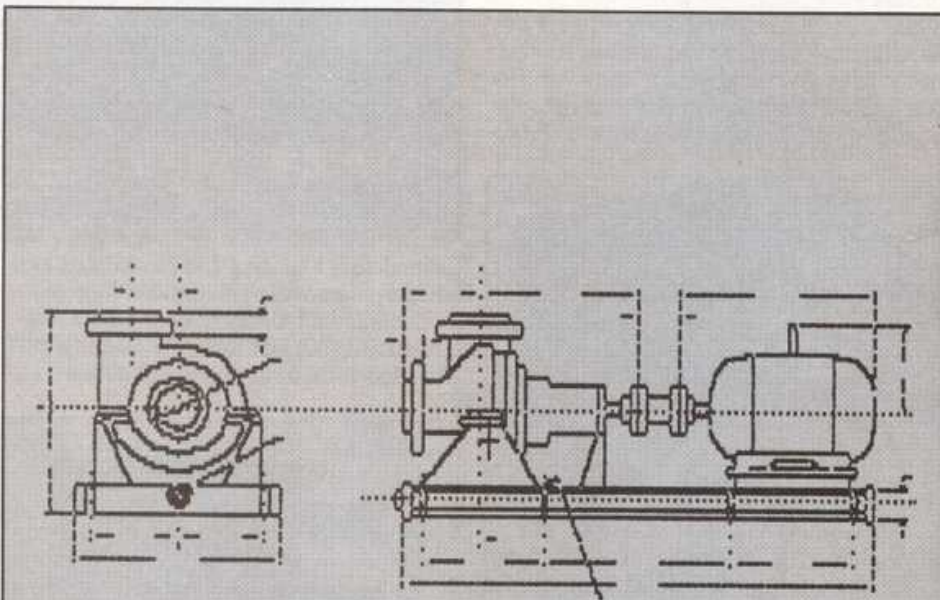
Lines, circles and arcs can be entered in a variety of ways to best suit your needs – specified by coordinates, joining two or three points or just put in by rubber banding with the screen cursor. Tangents, perpendiculars, hatching and dimension labels can all be added automatically in a choice of line types and text sizes.

Blocks can be defined which can be rotated, scaled up and down or loaded from a library of your drawings on disc and merged into other drawings, again at any scale or orientation. The program is full of small but powerful details e.g. the labelling remains the right way up as you rotate a block.

The whole picture can be printed on A4 paper with a dot printer but to get the full value a plotter is essential and a powerful plotter driver is included. Any part of the drawing can be produced at different sizes and with a variety of pen types.

A separate conversion program is available that will let you swap with 16 bit professional packages such as Autocad. Combine this with an RS232 link or a multi-format 5¼" second drive such as Timatic sell and you have a perfect system for a professional draughtsman who wants to take his work home from the IBM.

An excellent package that has opened up a new sphere for the Amstrads. ◀



Program Microdraft Micro Amstrad CP/M + **Price** £79.00 **Supplier** Timatic Systems, Fareham Market, Fareham, Hampshire.



"One of the best" — Popular Computing Weekly

"It is good, no-nonsense martial arts stuff with some really good animation" — Your Computer

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In Pride of place

THREE AMSTRAD CPC UTILITIES FROM PRIDE
REVIEWED BY MODEST KEN FARLOW

Demonstrated to great effect at the Amstrad Show, Pride Utilities' latest batch of more-than-useful CPC software showed once again that there's no computer which can't be made easier to handle with the right package.

The three programs we looked at cover very different areas, and all seemed to function efficiently with the minimum of fuss and frills.

Printer Pac 2 is a graphics utility compatible with Epson, DMP2000 and DMP1 printers. It adds six commands to basic, all of which are accessed by using the bar and a simple abbreviation.

The program loads into an area above the basic memory, and has an optional printer buffer of 1 to 16K which allows you to regain control of the computer while the screen image is printed out.

The most useful function is DUMP, which simply reproduces the whole graphics screen with proportional shading on your printer. If you are only interested in a text dump, then you should use TEXT. PRON can also be used to print out any new text which appears on the screen, while PROFF cancels this function. BFON is used to switch on the printer buffer, while BFOFF,

adding includes new Basic commands for movement, positioning, collision, animation and swapping.

The main display shows the colours available down the left hand side. These are selected using the 1 key, which moves an arrow along the choices. The sprite is then designed in the main grid, using the numeric keypad. As you design it, a real-sized image appears in a box to the right. You can also use a joystick in the design function. There are a number of extra facilities available, including mirror, invert, copy, and grid sizes.

Once you have finished your design, it can be stored to disk or tape, then loaded for modification at later date.

There are around twenty new Basic commands available, which allow you to use your sprites to create simple arcade games. As the manual points out, they would operate more efficiently if called from a machine code program, but the demo games provided with Supersprites is pretty impressive in itself.

New Basic commands include routines for positioning sprites, reflecting them vertically or horizontally, detecting collisions between sprites or between a

the files on each disk by type. There's a security password facility to protect the privacy of your intimate files, and the FIDO program can be copied to any of your existing disks.

The operating procedure is seemingly



complex but actually quite logical. First you copy FIDO onto all your disks – they must have 3K free. You then load up the FIDO Selector program, which will take the directories from each disk and display them as a single file.

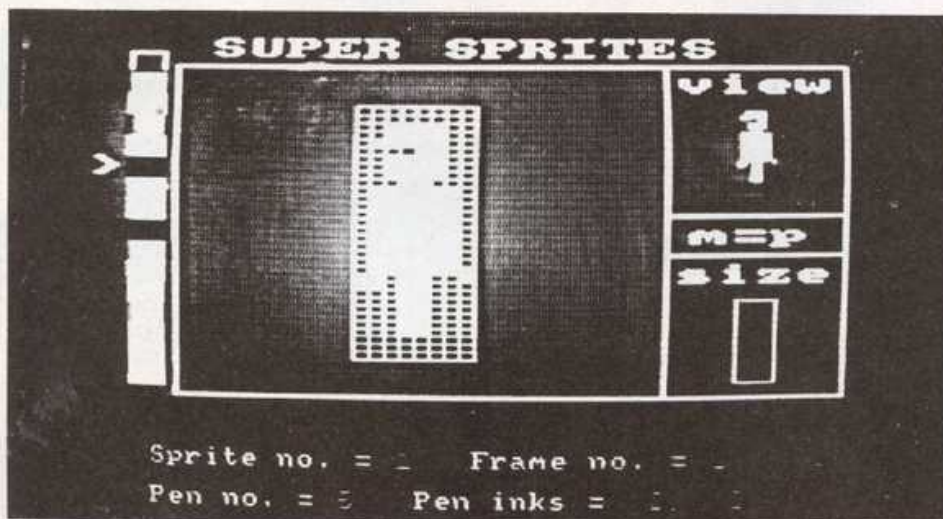
You can delete any unwanted titles from the master disk to make those displayed more clear, or run the programs merely by moving the cursor to the relevant program and pressing return. ASCII titles can be entered by pressing F2, and directories can be printed out using the PRINTER ON option on the main menu.

Other options allow you to search for a named file, perform an alphabetical sort, or locate free disk space.

Wild card matching is allowed to a certain extent – for instance, searching for JET would find JETSET, JETBOOT, or JUMPJET, or searching for .BAS will find all *.BAS files. You cannot, though, search for an ambiguous file reference such as *.?, though these are allowed in the UTILITIES section.

Overall FIDO is of immense use to anyone with a large collection of disks full of bits and bobs and little organisation. For anyone with a limited number of disks and a more methodical way of working, I wouldn't have thought it would be necessary – but then, every little helps! ◀

Programs *Printer Pac 2, Super Sprite, FIDO*
Micro Amstrad CPC 464/664/6128
Supplier Pride Utilities, Unit 14, White Hill House, 6 Union Street, Luton, Beds, LU1 3AN
Price Cass £7.95, Disk £11.95



naturally, switches it off.

Available on tape or disk, **Printer Pac 2** is undeniably useful, and very easy to handle.

For more creative programmers, **Supersprites** is a straightforward sprite designer and animator. This is a rather more substantial program than **Printer Pac 2**, coming complete with an 18-page booklet.

As with similar packages for most other home computers, the **Pride** package operated around the principle of a grid, on which the sprite is designed pixel by pixel. Operating in MODE 0, the package allows you to construct up to 60 sprites of 4 frames each at a time, and includes routines

sprite and the background, splitting the screen, defining screen colours, disabling interrupts during sprite movement, and so on.

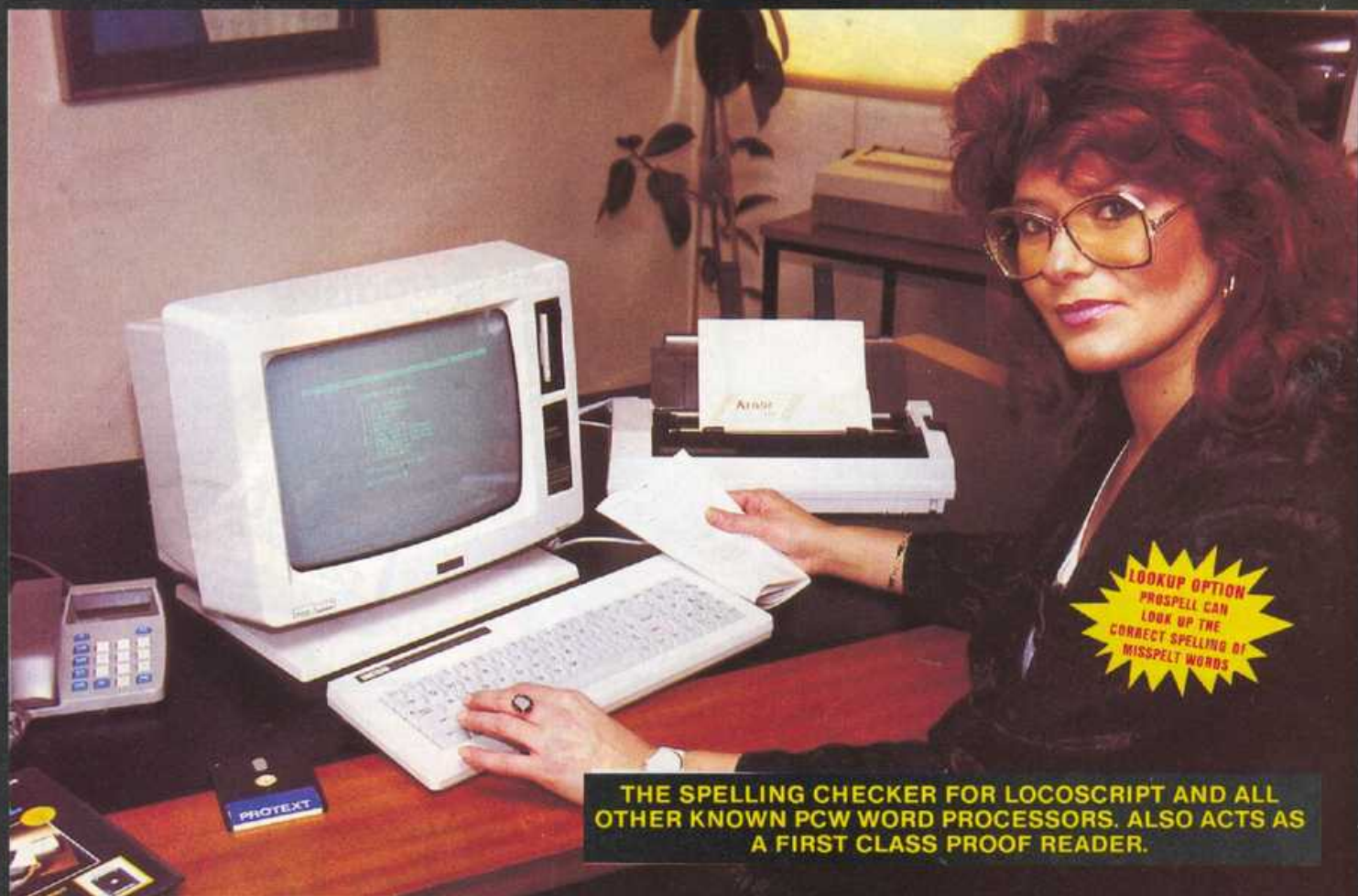
Supersprites is available on tape or disk, and struck me as being very user-friendly and fast. Whether it can actually help anyone to write a commercial game remains to be seen!

The last **Pride** program we'll be looking at strikes me as the kind of thing which is either the answer to a prayer, or a complete waste of effort, depending on your point of view. **FIDO** is intended to allow you to create a database of all your disks, listing

FOR THE AMSTRAD PCW 8256/8512:

PROSPELL

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Playing with Joyce

CP SOFTWARE PRODUCED THE FIRST GAMES FOR THE PCW 8256. JOHN MINSON DISCOVERS THAT THEY WILL BE THE FIRST OF MANY

With half a million 8256 and 8512s sold throughout the world there's obviously a firm hardware base; but quite how many people who brought the machines primarily as word processors will also want to play games remains to be seen. Perhaps the companies will take heart from the experience of CP Software, the first people to tackle the PCW games market.

CP Software is very much a "cottage industry". It's a term director Chris Whittington uses as we sit among the computers and cardboard boxes that fill the north London house that is his headquarters.

Chess

"It started over three years ago when I was teaching and hating it - so I quit," Whittington tells me. Without any real idea of what he was going to do, but having built several kit computers and completed an Open University degree in computing, he became interested in chess programs.

He produced one for the ZX81 which didn't sell too well, but hung on long enough for the big break, which came with an order from W H Smiths for 5,000 copies of the Spectrum version.

When the Amstrad CPC machines appeared, CP converted their programs and the business expanded but at the beginning of this year sales began to shrink, so they looked at the possibility of transporting the games to the highly successful PCWs, at the same time moving from Yorkshire to 'the smoke'.

"We got our best chess program up and running in about three or four weeks but with a great big gap in the screen where the graphics were going to go. We showed it to several people, who said they were very interested, but nobody would tell us how to do the graphics. Amstrad refused; Locomotive wouldn't tell us; there seemed to be just no information coming out at all. It seemed to me that Amstrad were deliberately not putting it out to stop games, so that it would stay an office machine."

Chess seemed to have reached a state of stalemate, but then CP had a lucky break. Though Whittington refuses to go into details, to protect his source, it all came about when they showed then unfinished program to somebody with inside information. "We said, 'Hey, doesn't it look good. This is where the graphics are going to go.' And in five minutes he came back with the full technical specification for us."

It then took a further month to fill the black hole with graphics, completing *3D Clock Chess*. Whittington's partner in CP,



Gilly Ashforth, designed all the pieces. "We knew that other people were doing chess so we were determined that not only was ours going to be first, but it was also going to be best."

"We also wanted to add the idea of the chess clock, in 3D, which nobody else had done. It gives the opportunity to play fast games against the clock, which good chess players really like."

That was the middle of March and Whittington says, "The whole place went totally bananas. We shipped over three thousand in the first two and a half days." What makes it all the more amazing was that all the duplication, assembly and problems with discs, which were in short supply and expensive - a common grumble from houses producing on the 3" format - had to be handled by CP rather than a middle-man.

Bridge Player followed as their second assault on the machine's games market, converted from the CPC but with added features. This has sold around two thousand units so far, nowhere near as good as *Chess*, which Whittington puts down to it being a minority interest in comparison. However a BBC series on the game has recently helped sales.

While the PCWs have been a blessing for CP, with their range of more adult programs that the weary word processor may turn to after a hard day at the green screen, Whittington admits that he finds

the Amstrad market a strange one overall.

"While a Spectrum title may sell consistently, what we find on the CPC market is that you push the stuff out for a little while and then it just dies. Virtually nobody is buying chess on the CPC Amstrad at the moment and I don't know why that is. It could be that Amstrad are selling a lot of software through mail shot offers and so it's never recorded by the shops."

CP doesn't plan further games for the 8256, but are hoping to release a toolkit in the near future. Whittington drops a disc into the drive and a graphic demonstration program leaps into life, drawing lines, plotting pixels and providing a wealth of different typefaces. It all goes to show that the Joyces can put on a good appearance, even if it hasn't been made easy by Amstrad.

Graphics

"People want to know about the graphics and about CP/M Plus. There's no easy guide to it like the ones to CP/M 2.2. So we'll do a simple guide to it and to this machine for what people want to do with computers when they start to write."

CP is now providing consultancy to other software houses on the graphics and doesn't see itself going further with the 8256. "I think that competent software houses will have sussed out this machine which means that software for it will soon be available. In three or four months there will be a flood of arcade games." ◀



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Read and write with PCW

FIVE OF THE LATEST BOOKS TO EXPLAIN JOYCE,
REVIEWED BY PAUL SVYCARSKY

Suddenly the traditional typewriter's future looks rather sickly and it's all thanks to the Amstrad 8256, the machine that brought word processing within the reach of anyone.

For many people, the Joyce will be their first encounter with a computer... and even those who have previously used one will find that the software, Locoscript, is far from standard. That makes it more ludicrous that the instructions are less accessible than the hardware.

Whenever a new machine appears it's followed by a flood of books and the only thing surprising about the 8256 spate is that it took so long to appear. Joyce's phenomenal success must have caught several publishers with their trousers down. Now the torrent is underway and it's time to look at how well they supplement those arcane manuals.

Using the PCW 8256 by Mike Gerrard £9.95

GERRARD'S is the friendliest of the books. Reading it is rather like a chat with a practicing freelance journalist; just what its author is. His enthusiasm for the machine and knowledge of it, gathered from practical use, shine through.

Where it is lacking is in its discussion of the other PCW software and presentation. The first is excusable; it deals with CP/M in just one chapter, Logo in the 13 pages, but these are only intended to be tasters for the complete novice.

More annoying is the lack of an index, or even of chapter content in the page headings. However any Joyce newcomer suffering from technophobia would find lots to allay their fears between its covers.

► **First Software Ltd., Unit 202, Horseshoe Park, Pangbourne, Berks RG8 7SW**

Mastering the Amstrad PCW 8256/8512 by John M Hughes £8.95

THIS IS a much more complete book and as well as an index it contains illustrations, which Gerrard's doesn't. The technically minded will find much to please them here, with an appendix on converting Locoscript files to ASCII plus plenty of details on how to handle CP/M.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Hughes book is his discussion of other software for the Joyce – and area which the other books neglect or treat very briefly. For example, you'll find out what a spreadsheet is and how a typical one works. It's all interesting stuff for the small business person.

Of course there's a price to pay for this detail. Hughes deals with topics in such a matter of fact fashion that at times he's only marginally less impenetrable than the manuals. But if you are willing to read and re-read, and perhaps you already have some knowledge of computers, then this could be worth looking at.

► **Sigma Press, 98a Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5BB**

Amstrad Word Processing on the PCW 8256 by Ian Sinclair £8.95

VETERAN of computer titles, Sinclair, comes somewhere between the previous two volumes. His is a well illustrated book and it fulfills its aim is to present an introduction to the software and nothing else.

My main complaint is that it's rather a slim volume; just over 100 pages with an additional 50 pages appendix recapping the various menus, all in large-ish type. While this sort of glossary may be useful for some,



my feeling is that it rather duplicates the manuals. However if you choose this book and want to go deeper there is a sequel *Introducing Amstrad CP/M Assembly Language* from the same author due out later in the year.

► **Collins Professional and Technical Books, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA**

Practical Amstrad Word Processing by David Lawrence and Mark England £7.95

YOU'LL JUST have to take it on trust that I'm being objective about the most recent addition to these guides, which hails from an office not a million miles from Pop Comp Weekly Towers.

Lawrence and England have taken the tutorial approach providing a series of graded lessons which are intended to be

read with the Joyce up and running in front of you. Their book is well illustrated and each chapter further divided into numbered sections, making quick reference of one topic or another simplicity itself.



While not so chatty as Gerrard their style is easy and providing the newcomer takes things at a reasonable learning pace there's absolutely no reason why they shouldn't soon be getting to grips with the machine by following the practical examples.

With a slightly larger page size than its competitors and running to 160 pages for £7.95, the main objection would seem to be where to put it when you've got a keyboard in front of you, but for a solution to that teaser, read on...

► **Sunshine Books, 12-13 Little Newport Street, London WC2H 7PP**

Reel Time Audio Tutors – Word Processing With Locoscript £9.95

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I think reactions to this are primarily going to be matters of personal taste. If you think you'd prefer these clearly read lessons to delving through printed pages then there's no denying that they will do the job. I wasn't quite so struck I must admit, and couldn't help thinking that looking something up just isn't possible when everything is audio.

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