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17.10.88 BRITAIN'S TOP COMPUTER TRADE WEEKLY ISSUE 208

Epyx plays down UK presence

US leisure publisher Epyx was last week calming notions of it forming a UK operation — despite looking to appoint its own UK representative.

Epyx currently exports products into the UK through US Gold in what is largely a reciprocal agreement.

A shortlist has been drawn up for the Epyx job, with game designer/consultant/journalist David Bishop one of the frontrunners. The position is being pitched as a technical one rather than any adjunct to

Continued on back page

Virgin now Tronic's master

Virgin last week became the 100 per cent owner of all Mastertronic's multi-farious software and hardware interests.

The deal — signed at 11.15p.m. last Wednesday night (October 12th) — comes almost exactly a year after Virgin took a 45 per cent stake in the firm. That deal was worth £4 million in total, but at this stage both parties are refusing to detail how much the remaining 55 per cent of Mastertronic was worth.

As a result of the deal a new company called Virgin Mastertronic has been formed. Virgin Publishing's erstwhile boss Nick Alexander becomes man-

aging director, with Mastertronic's chairman Frank Herman becoming deputy managing director. Alan Sharam has been appointed sales director, Geoff Heath is now marketing director and Martin Alper has been appointed president of Virgin Mastertronic US.

Mastertronic's turnover totalled over £10 million in 1987. This was expected to rise sharply this year, not least because of the exclusive distribution tie-up for the Sega console.

Alexander claims that Virgin Mastertronic's expected turnover for this year will total around £30 million — making it one of the top five leisure software firms in the world.

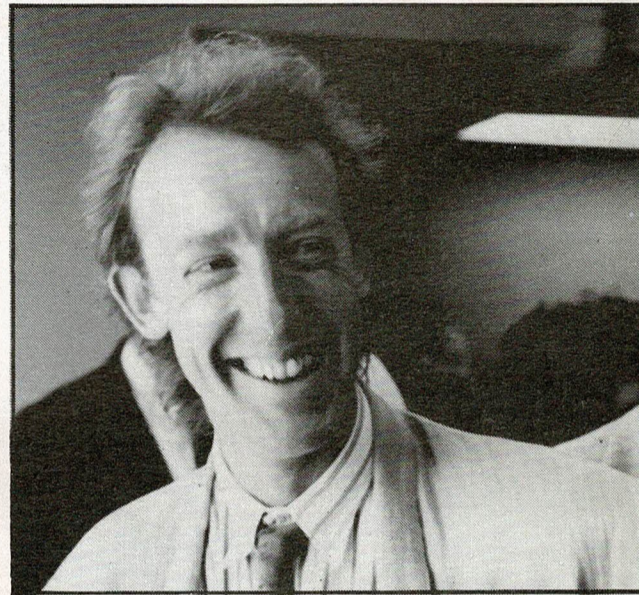
Virgin's decision to take

complete control of Mastertronic comes as little of a shock considering that the firms have increasingly combined forces over the past few months. Both firms share the same London office and Sega distribution was recently officially given to Virgin — handled by Mastertronic.

After completing the original deal last year Alexander told CTW that a controlling interest had been avoided due to possibilities of losing key staff as a result and subsequently "destroying a winning formula".

The Mastertronic directors, however, have all signed long-term contracts with Virgin Mastertronic.

Continued on back page



ALEXANDER: Heading up newly formed Virgin Mastertronic

INSIDE:

FLOOD WARNING

Once again the trade is rumbling with complaints of software houses stockpiling product for the Christmas market. CTW finds out what the dealers think..... 10

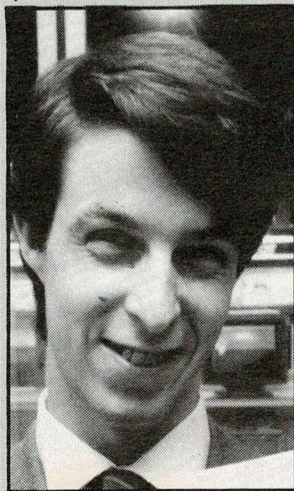
ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

The adventure genre refuses to die, but can it move towards the future while still clinging to the past? CTW peers into the Tolkeinesque twilight and tries to find a way out of the reactionary maze..... 18

AMSTRAD ALWAYS GETS ITS MARKET

Amstrad has been flying the flag in Canada for a year now through exclusive distributor AVS. CTW reports on the progress so far and tries to avoid making too many obvious puns about mounties..... 20

CIRCUS GAMES



The revolution starts at opening time. Well that's the boast of Software Circus boss Steve Markham, who is planning a chain of 50 stores. One down 49 to go..... 24

CHARTS 25/LETTERS 26

Amstrad fax for early '89?



SUGAR: Fax next?

Prospects of a forthcoming Amstrad fax machine have arisen again, with a £695 model apparently lined up for launch in late January.

Unsurprisingly, Amstrad itself has reacted to the news with some disdain — as it always does whenever details leak out about future product plans.

However, a move by Amstrad into either the fax or video camera market has been expected for some time. Indeed, in his recent annual results statement chairman Alan Sugar revealed that products were currently under development for a move into "yet another product area".

The possibility of a low-cost Amstrad fax arriving early next year has led to at least one

major manufacturer delaying the launch of its own models.

The firm in question told CTW that the decision to hold back a planned launch had been made "in the light of intelligence gained in the Far East".

Reports had filtered back to the firm that a major supplier is already cranking up production of what will become the Amstrad machine.

Amstrad itself responded in text-book style: "There's been much speculation about the next product line from Amstrad — ranging from in-car telephones to portable fax machines.

"Our policy as always is never to release future product plans for the reason that we must safeguard against the competition. Notification of any new product launch will be given in plenty of time. Speculation about a £695 fax

machine at this stage is rather premature."

All the major fax manufacturers have been watching Amstrad's moves carefully, some are known to be already reconsidering their price points.

If any launch were to come it would almost certainly be a machine priced well below the norm. An average group three fax machine — fine and standard print capabilities, copying and talk features — sells at around £1,000.

One of the leading fax manufacturers Canon currently sells its cheapest machine at £1,675. "If Amstrad came in and cut the necessary corners they would definitely find a market," commented Canon's fax division marketing co-ordinator Nigel Velissarides to CTW.

CBM lashes chip excuses

Commodore has accused rival manufacturers of giving out mis-information regarding the current memory chip shortage.

It claims that many computer firms are pitching lack of D-rams as an "industry problem" rather than admitting poor forward planning on their own part. It is also clear to a large degree that the comments are pitched directly at Amstrad.

Such is the strength of feeling within Commodore — or the confidence of its chip stockholding — that it has run ads in the national press belittling Amstrad chairman Alan Sugar's recent comments

about his firm's need to buy into US chip firm Micron Technology.

Commodore has maintained ever since the chip problem fully came to light back in March that it envisages no problems regarding supply of its own products.

It has now made public the staggering claim that it currently holds 40 per cent of the world's independently produced D-ram chips via guaranteed commitments.

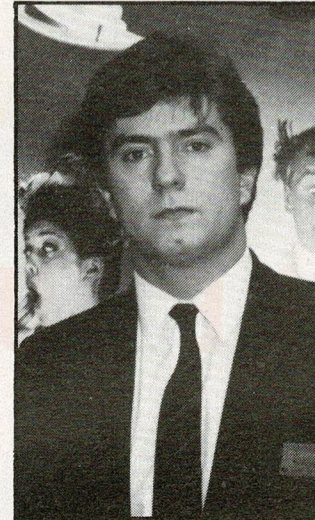
"You've got to remember that the chips we've got are for every subsidiary of Commodore worldwide. When you take out those that manufacture their own chips — like IBM and Compaq — the claim holds

water," insisted Commodore's UK marketing manager Dean Barrett to CTW.

Commodore feels that firms such as itself are being affected unfairly by the perception that all computer firms are having difficulty sourcing chips — and thus, supplying product.

"We've decided to speak out after reading all these annual reports from rival manufacturers claiming that the D-ram shortage is the reason that they can't deliver kit. They seem to be using it as an excuse," said Barrett.

"Obviously firms have had difficulties but we've been professional and had enough foresight to do some forward plan-

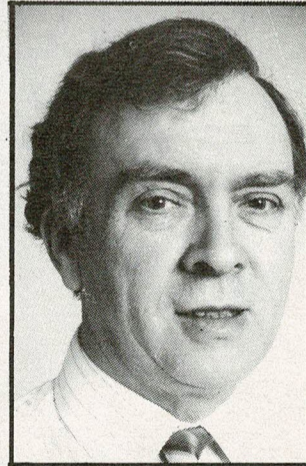


BARRETT: Rivals knocked down. We saw the problem 18 months to two years ago."

Elite plans US assault

Elite is currently making the first moves in a plan to set up its own US operation.

The only certain thing at present seems to be the intention, with details being very scarce. More decisions will be made when marketing manager Bernard Dugdale returns from a fact finding trip in a few weeks.



WILCOX: Looking Stateside

One of the aims of the trip will be to find a site for Elite US offices. The firm is keen for its location to be on the East coast in order to minimise the time difference.

Although the ultimate goal for Elite is to establish its own label in the States it has not ruled out the option of initially signing an exclusive royalty deal with an existing US firm. Eventually, however, it hopes to have an American operation which according to Dugdale would run along similar lines to the UK set-up.

Boss Brian Wilcox told CTW: "Basically, we've taken two decisions. One, to put some bums on chairs in the US and two, to make it an East

Continued on back page



▶ **ELITE** ◀

"The game of a lifetime" (Zzap 64)

▶ **SENTINEL** ◀

"There's nothing to compare with it" (Amtix)

▶ **TETRIS** ◀

"Tetris will have you hooked from the moment you pick up your joystick" (Your Sinclair)

▶ **ACE II** ◀

"This is the perfect flight simulation" (Crash)

▶ **STARGLIDER** ◀

"One of the best shoot-em-up's you can buy" (Ace)

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New US mail order outfit sets sights on \$75m haul

Ambitious US mail order giant CompuAdd is predicting a UK turnover worth \$75 million by 1991.

The Austin, Texas based firm has just opened its first European office in Bristol. This was after initial hopes of getting the UK operation underway as early as August

(CTW May 16th).

CompuAdd has immediately launched its own range of PCs, which have been re-named. Rather than market them under the US brand name of Standard, the firm has decided to use its CompuAdd name in order to build up UK awareness.

The range starts with the 8088-based CompuAdd Turbo/10, which comes in three models all with mono, EGA or VGA options. Prices start at £579 for a single floppy mono version, rising through to £1,269 for a 40Mb hard disk version with VGA.

CompuAdd's product line will range from PC games to its own 320Mb 386 machine. It has already signed deals with Epson and Panasonic to sell their printer ranges.

"We feel that a \$75 million turnover is optimistic, but certainly not unachievable. Following the success we've had in the US we think we can perform similarly in this market," commented international marketing manager Tom Irby to CTW.

In six years CompuAdd has built up a US turnover worth \$250 million. The Bristol office currently employs 25 people, with this expected to have risen to 150 by 1991.

Further offices in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Nordic countries are expected to open within the next 18-24 months.

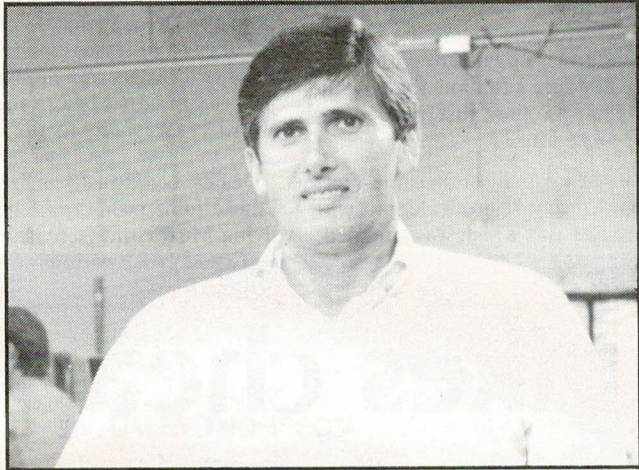
CompuAdd has decided to only sell its own range of PCs in the UK rather than look for any third party brands.

Whilst its biggest customers are expected to be small to medium sized businesses, Irby, added that he is willing to negotiate better prices for any dealer wishing to sell the CompuAdd PCs.

There are two 286 models; the 286/10 which offers 20, 44, 80 or 110Mb, starting at £1,099 and the 286/12 - 20, 44, 80, 110 or 150Mb, starting at £1,149.

CompuAdd claims that it is "appalled" by the level of support and prices being offered by existing mail order operations in the UK.

"It seems as if our competitors are selling products at higher margins here than they do in other markets. That's why we think we can come here and offer what we always offer - a better deal," added Irby.



IRBY: Open to dealer offers

CBM lines up more education signings

Continuing its recent education push, Commodore is promising the signing of two new distributors in the next couple of weeks.

This move comes after recent distribution deals with Acorn specialists 3SL, Kelator and Watford Electronics. It is hoped that the additional distributors will give the Commodore range of products greater national coverage in the education sector.

"We are anxious to get into all areas of the market and are looking to distributors to help us," Commodore's education sales manager Peter Talbot told CTW. "Different distributors provide different services and obviously give different expertise".

As part of the initiative, negotiations are also under way with the Open University and the National Union of Students and although no deal has been signed, Talbot is optimistic that both bodies will

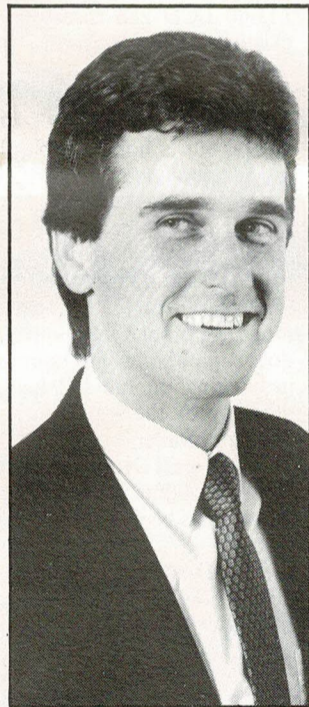
soon be supplying Commodore equipment.

Commodore has recently signed a deal with the Northumberland Education Authority which has taken on 20 Amigas. Kent, West Sussex and North Yorkshire are also said to be showing interest.

Talbot admitted, however, that in some cases LEAs are still committed to a firm Acorn policy, but is confident that "the limitation of thou shalt buy Acorn will soon start to lessen".

In a bid to get a firm footing within the market Commodore has extended its promotion of the Amiga 2000E, which is still selling at £1,099 to the education sector. This represents a saving of £1,031 on the recommended retail price.

Meanwhile, Commodore's education roadshow continues with four dates in November - Bristol (2nd), Sussex (4th), Leeds (10th) and Aston



TALBOT: More signings due University (17th) - ending up at Middlesex Polytechnic on the 6th and 7th of December.

BT sequel strikes blow for 16-bit

Telecomsoft's Starglider 2 has become the first title to top Gallup's all formats combined top 40 via solely 16-bit sales.

BT was also whooping with delight for a second reason last week. This followed sightings of customers actually queuing outside the Virgin Games Centre in Oxford Street, London for first deliveries of *Elite* on the ST.

Starglider 2's performance beats *OutRun* which returned to number one after the ST ver-

sion was released earlier this year - but in the US Gold game's case some 8-bit sales were also included. The Rainbird title reached the top spot solely on the back of Amiga and ST sales.

"It's incredibly good news for the 16-bit market. It means that there really is a solid base of users out there. It should encourage other publishers to produce 16-bit titles," commented Gallup researcher Fergal Murray to CTW.

Telecomsoft preferred not to give details on *Starglider's*

sales figures, only noting that the initial ship-out figure was "well over 10,000".

Regarding the queues for *Elite*, Telecomsoft's UK sales and marketing manager Debbie Sillitoe claimed that people waited two hours at Virgin last Tuesday (October 11th) to get hold of the product.

"The ST version is very good and a lot of interest has built up, *Elite* is obviously a classic game and a good product in its own right," she told CTW.

Gem confirms Dixons tie-up

As predicted in CTW (29th August) Gem has tied up a deal to supply Dixons' non-business centre stores with low-cost business software.

When CTW first reported the deal Gem refused to comment, but it has now confirmed that it will be supplying some 328 outlets.

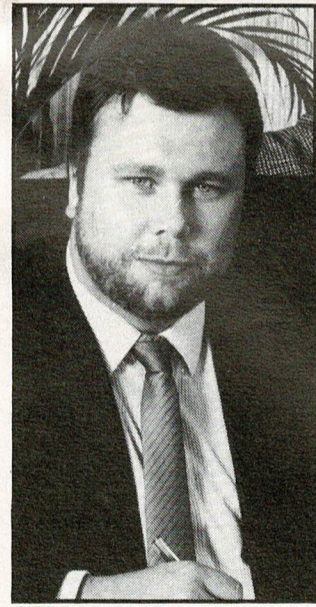
Gem had previously been supplying just Dixons' business stores with New Star dealing with the non-business area. However, this summer New Star lost the deal after making a similar deal with rival multiple Comet.

Gem's joint boss Peter Bellamy told CTW: "It is a significant deal from Gem's point of view, but let's not get this out of perspective. Our independents still account for the majority of our business."

He also claimed that despite there being considerably more of these stores than the business stores (328:46) the

rise in volume of trade would not be proportionate to the number of stores.

Most generous sources indicate that the new acquisitions' trade could just about equal that of the business stores.



BELLAMY: More stores

FAST happy as EC moves go on

The Federation Against Software Theft (FAST) has reacted optimistically to recent European Commission investigations into software piracy legislation.

After a deal of lobbying and pitching, software copyright has been introduced into a Green Paper which looks at intellectual property rights.

FAST's enforcement officer Bob Hay now believes that after some further discussions the EC will eventually announce a directive bringing all member states into line. Currently, countries such as Portu-

gal and Greece provide no software copyright protection at all.

The EC meetings were attended by a number of hardware and software firms following the issue with interest.

"There was agreement amongst all the delegates making the job a lot easier for the Commission. They're not being told to do lots and lots of different things and everyone's singing the same song," commented Hay to CTW.

The next step for the Commission is a decision on what are the best ways to combat piracy. Hay is confident that the UK will already be in line with any directive eventually announced.

CTW

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HAWKEYE

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Gold Rush

The Great Gold Rush Continues!

The prizes don't stop flowing from the THALAMUS Gold Rush, running with the smash hit Commodore 64/128 combat action game HAWKEYE. Gold and yellow cassettes reveal prizes for retailers and customers. Coming Soon: GOLD RUSH II playing with the next blockbuster ARMALYTE - a ZZAP! Gold Medal and a Commodore User SUPERSTAR!

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THALAMUS

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Softsel considers Softeach changes

After record attendances at the recent autumn Softeach, Softsel is now considering ways of coping with the event's growing popularity.

Apparently 1,418 dealers packed the Heathrow Penta hotel where they faced a selection of seminars on the hour every hour. Among the 25 exhibitors were Ashton Tate, Lotus and Microsoft.

Softel's marketing director Richard North commented to *CTW*: "We didn't know where we were going to put them all, but with a bit of streamlining it didn't seem too packed. Everyone was very complimentary about the event."

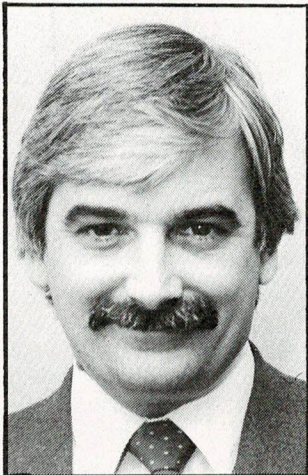
Now though the firm is

being forced to reconsider both the structure and frequency of the event. It seems unlikely to split from the Penta for the time being, but will be pushing for more of the hotel's space to be available next time.

It is also considering splitting the venue in two by having a software and hardware division.

Another option being considered is to stage Softeach more than twice a year. "If we do go for more than two a year then we wouldn't have the extra ones in London, we'd take them elsewhere in the country."

North added that at present nothing has been decided and indeed the event could be left unaltered. "I would rather have two full events than three



NORTH: Softeach moves afoot three-quarter full events.

For the moment the next Softeach is due on the 6th and 7th May at the Heathrow Penta.

Microdealer signs trio in promo plan

Microdealer has announced "joint marketing deals" with Mirrorsoft, Activision and Grandslam and is promising at least two more.

The deals will involve Microdealer originating promotional ideas for some of the firm's titles. Those ideas will then be put to the software house in question and if accepted they will be jointly financed between the two companies.

These promotions would then be exclusive to Micro-

dealer and in turn to the established network of Microdealer dealers. Sales manager Les Sinclair promised the promotions involved would be "a little bit more than a T-shirt or a mug".

He told *CTW*: "We have definitely been moving more towards the marketing aspect and these deals are part of an on-going situation for several months, they just needed finalisation."

That finalisation came after the recent Microdealer presentation day which was attended by major dealers and the nine top software houses. Sinclair

described the day as an "open discussion between dealers, publishers and Microdealer about joint marketing for the future."

He continued: "We've already got an advantage over other distributors and that day was just to cement that. With the T-shirts and Cover Up promotion we've put our money where our mouth is before and now we're prepared to do it again."

Dealers can expect the first of these joint promotions involving Mirrorsoft, Activision or Grandslam within the month.

Konix swaggers as stick orders mount

Konix is boasting worldwide advance orders totalling nearly a million units for its two latest joystick additions.

The firm has also lined up US distribution deals for the two products. The Navigator

and the Megablaster will both be handled by Epyx - the firm which already markets the successful Speedking Stateside. Two other US firms were said to have pitched for the new models.

Konix boss Wyn Holloway is claiming advanced orders of 250,000 units for the Navigator

in Europe and 380,000 in the US. The Megablaster also apparently has advance orders in excess of 400,000 units in all.

The new joysticks will be rechristened for the US market, although names have not yet been decided. The Speedking is known in the US as the Epyx 500XJ. Both new sticks are likely to gain similarly-styled US mantles.

"The response has been phenomenal, there was great interest shown at the PC Show, but the number of orders already placed so far has exceeded our expectation," Konix boss Wyn Holloway told *CTW*.

The Speedking is claimed to have sold nearly three million units since its introduction a couple of years ago - and Holloway claims that this figure will be beaten by the Navigator.

The first 50,000 units of Megablasters are due to be shipped to the US next week.



HOLLOWAY: Massive order claims

Dram takes cheap AT for PC debut

Card and up-grade distributor, Dram Electronics has made its first move into the PC market with a low-cost AT trans-portable.

Dram will be selling the £1,660 LCD 286 through its existing dealer network, although it is looking to expand this. Dram currently claims to have 2,200 dealers on its books, but is hoping for a 70 per cent growth by the next financial year.

Stockport based Dram has already started shipment of the PCs, and is hoping to sell between 100 to 250 units a month. Although the company does supply some big chains, it is banking on the PC being taken up by the smaller independent retailer.

In the past Dram has acted as a distributor for Samsung, but this has been its only foray into the PC market. Nevertheless, Dram boss John Landells is confident of dealer loyalty, claiming that Dram will be offering "a lot of facility back-



LCD 286: Dram's PC entrée

up with in-house testing and technical support."

The machine has been imported from Taiwan, although Dram is keen to keep the identity of its manufacturer under wraps. "We want people to associate the product with a tried

and reputable company. Customers don't want to deal with Taiwan, we want the PC to be Dram," said Landells.

The new machine weighs 9 kgs, measures 40cm width x 24cm height x 20cm depth and comes with 640K of RAM.

Network bites into Big Apple

New merchandising and promotional firm Network has announced Big Apple as another of its five start-up accounts.

Another two clients are still to be announced after contracts have been exchanged. Network's other two clients are its sister firms CDS and Blue Ribbon.

Network boss Mike Clark commented: "With Big Apple it will initially be a question of raising profile awareness for a new company. They've got a lot of good product and they're investing a lot of time and energy into it."

Meanwhile with Network having been operating for two weeks Clark claimed that dealer response had been "excellent". He added that Network is still searching for one



CLARK: Apple added more client to bring the total to what he sees as the firm's optimum number of accounts.

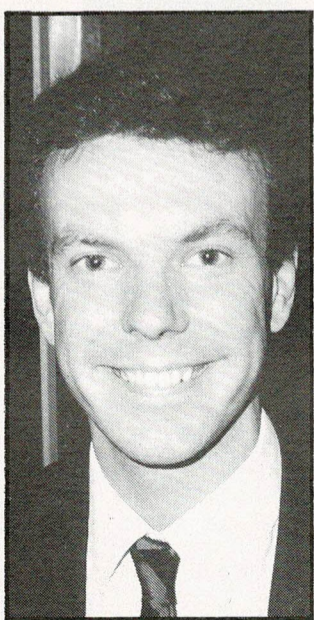
USD charts hits

Merchandising firm USD was last week parading its best ever chart performance for products it has pushed.

For the week ending October 15th, USD promoted products occupied 14 places in distributor Microdealer's ship-out charts. This included seven of the 12 top selling 8-bit titles.

"It shows that merchandising really works," said USD boss Andy Wood to *CTW*. "I doubt if all these titles would have performed as well without the extra push on marketing we gave them."

"And anyway, it's not as if



WOOD: Chart beater

I've got a magic wand to go around picking up products that are definitely going to be hits."

USD also stressed that it has recently gained a number of Gallup number ones, namely *Super Hang-On* (ST); *Barbarian II* (C64) and *Hawk-eye* (C64).

Lightning pitches for Scots stake

Distributor Lightning recently held a Scottish sales presentation in a bid to push the Commodore PC range north of the border.

The two day presentation held in Edinburgh was seen as an attempt to redress an imbalance in the number of Scottish dealers taking on the products, with representatives from both Lightning and Commodore present.

Lightning claims that the number of Scottish dealers able to view the Commodore PC range at the recent PC Show was low, with many dealers not having time to make the long trip.

By taking the range up to Scotland, Lightning is hopeful of extending its dealer base and is confident of gaining several new accounts. Over 50 dealers

attended the seminar.

"The amount of business we actually got at the presentation is not important", claimed Lightning marketing manager John Gardner. "The point of us taking the PCs to Scotland was to familiarise dealers with the product by providing a unique hands-on opportunity and re-emphasising our next day delivery service. Having made the contact, dealers will hopefully get back to us".

Gardner sees the presentation as a one off, with Lightning not intending to repeat last year's Lightning Roadshow which saw the company trekking all over the country. "This year we are extremely busy, and we simply don't have the time and the resources. We saw the need to go to Scotland, but our English dealers can easily come and visit us in London".

SOME GET IT WRONG...

Headlines from CTW back issues

Power House

Gal tussles blamed

Robtek goes unde

£125K shortfall as

Vanguard signs off

£1.3

Acorn loss

£22m

CSD debts

Distributor and pub- Creative

Directors currently face the prospect of the receivers' official investigation, which

Further, Acorn may s... a new headache if a claim HM Customs and Excise £2.6m is realised. company's result.

Van- went debts

ted to found a software label called GB Gold. The Birmingham combine took exception, won the legal case and made something of an enemy in Van-

north (Vanguard was based in Preston), the allegedly looming summer drop-off and even the apparently good weather had all combined to cause dif-

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...WHILE OTHERS GET IT RIGHT

Headlines from CTW back issues

ZAPPO CHAMPAGNE

Hundreds of bottles of finest French champagne have ordered by away to Lichfield.

Main D. for Tatung modore, Z given all and soft

Zappo gains Ams

Zappo last week took a major step to the business world with its first orders. ment as a trad distri-

ZCL ties SBC deal

ZCL (Zappo) has been appointed as the Spectrum Group's first ever distributor.

In a deal signed in the middle of last week, ZCL will be adding the full SBC range of PCs and printers to its line-up of Amstrad products at Olympia

Now ZCL tackles Amstrad leisure

Four months after picking up Amstrad's leisure business on the CPC

"I reckon it's just common sense," said ZCL boss Carter to CTW

ZCL ties Star deal

ZCL has tied

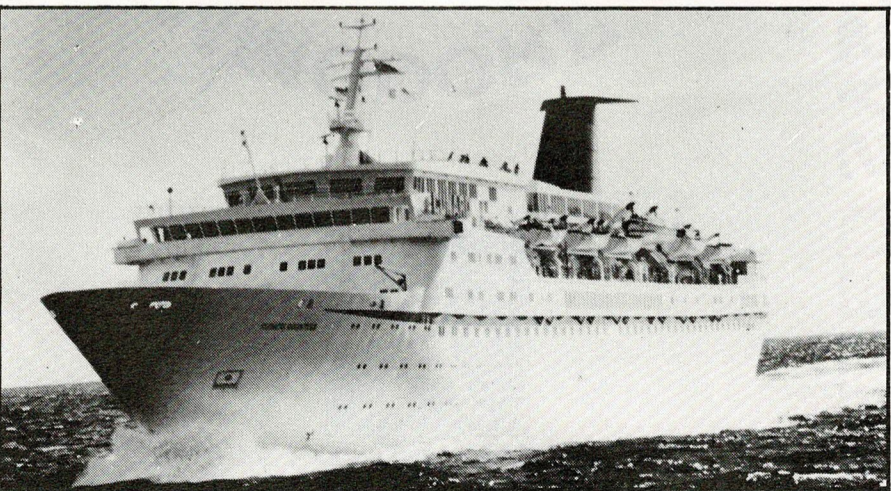
ZCL sales hit £6m

ZCL has announced a turnover of £6.23m for the year ending June 30th.

an 83 per cent previous

AND IT'S GETTING BETTER...

ZCL launches Caribbean dealer promotion 17-25 June 1989



- Fly B.A. direct to Puerto Rico
 - Join Cunard Countess cruising the Caribbean and calling in at CARACUS, GRENADA, BARBADOS, MARTINIQUE and ST. THOMAS.
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 - Contact Jillian Naylor on 0543-414817 for details.



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Now ZCL offers non-CBM promo

ZCL has announced another trade incentive trip for purchasers of non-Commodore products.

The latest promotion is a seven day Caribbean cruise on the Cunard, and for two tickets a dealer has to purchase £80,000 worth of product. The promotion began on the 1st October and will run through until the 31st March.

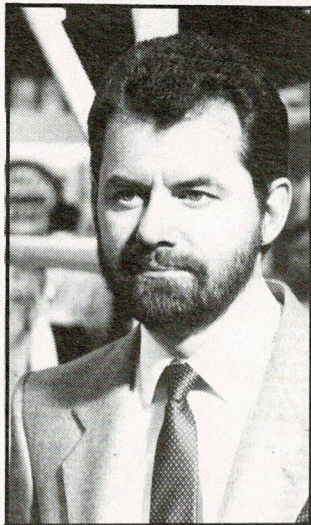
ZCL has excluded the Commodore range from the promotion as it is running a separate incentive trip to Hong Kong and China based exclusively on the purchase of £35,000 worth of Commodore products.

The Caribbean trip is applicable to purchases of Amstrad and SBC products. ZCL

boss Don Carter told *CTW*: "Commodore has always been extremely important to our business. We felt that our other customers who support different products were at a disadvantage by our pre-occupation with the Commodore incentive and a new promotion was needed".

Carter stresses that the cruise incentive is totally a ZCL promotion and is not run in association with any of the companies involved. This is unlike the Hong Kong trip which has been organised in association with Commodore "on a fifty-fifty basis."

ZCL is renowned for its trade incentive trips, having recently taken a group of dealers to Athens. Carter estimates that "by the end of 1989 ZCL



CARTER: Another incentive will have taken well over 300 independent retailers on trips abroad".

Carter is convinced that these dealer incentives are popular with customers, claiming that two retailers have already placed orders in excess of £80,000 and "have earned their first two cabins".

Lotus dismisses delay worries

Lotus has delayed the release of 1-2-3 Version Three until the second quarter of '89.

The firm is blaming the delay on "development difficulties" and the fact that the new version will be compatible with both DOS and OS/2. Spokesman Martin Preston told *CTW*: "We know that our customers realise that development is a complicated process

and they're prepared to hang on for 1-2-3."

He also dismissed the idea that sales would suffer and rival firms would benefit from the delay. "As far as competitors go, the most obvious is probably Computer Associates with *Supercalc 5* which they claim is 3D, but in fact it's not. They are also claiming it is available now which it isn't. They're virtually shooting themselves in the foot."

He also dismissed Micro-

soft's *Excel*: "They have reacted to the news that we have a definite release date for version three by practically trying to give it away - which seems to me to be a mark of desperation."

Preston went on to explain that anyone buying a 1-2-3 version 2.01 between now and 30 days after the release of version three would be able to upgrade to the new model for £35. "This means they will not be losing out as they will effectively be buying themselves Version Three."

Preston went on to boast that when the new version does arrive it will be a "quantum leap forward" that will "leave the opposition floundering".

New DI ties Zeppelin deal

Newly formed contract house Digital Inspiration has signed a one year sales and marketing deal with Zeppelin.

The budget firm will be publishing a number of new titles

as well as some ex full-price games it has gained the rights for.

Digital's back-catalogue licensing deals include Design Design's *Nexor*, *Forbidden Planet* and *2112AD* as well as a Reeltime tank simulator.

Its self-developed products

will include typically budget-sounding titles like *Ninja Space Troopers*, *Scoba Warriors* and *Combat Droid Simulator*.

Digital director David Lester told *CTW*: "We've looked very closely at what's selling on the budget scene and we're trying to write to what we perceive as the budget format."

Lester's firm also has a 50 per cent stake in Zeppelin's forthcoming full-price label Kognito. It was Digital Inspiration that won the Kenny Dalglish licence, and an aptly named football management game is due in late November.

Watch promo backs latest Innova push

Innova is offering a free watch to every dealer who can sell five copies of its word-processing package *TopCopy Plus*.

Innova is confident that the promotion will be a success with sales of the package increasing as a result. *TopCopy Plus* retails at £95 and the promotion is designed to appeal "from the smallest to the biggest dealer".

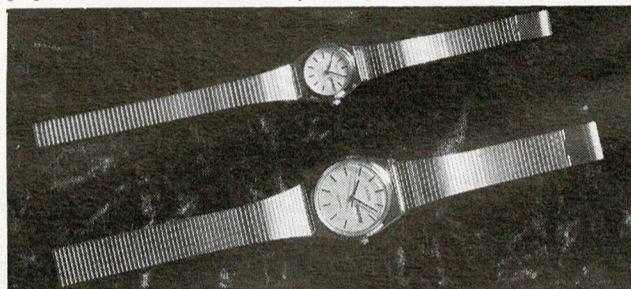
The watch is a gold plated

Zeon wrist watch, and has a claimed nominal value of £39.95. There is no limit to the number of watches a dealer can claim, and marketing director Jane Roberts hopes to see "entire shops walking around wearing the watches".

"Promotions are very popular with our dealers, they

certainly spice up selling and make it more interesting. Rather than a competition we wanted something that everybody could win," added Roberts.

The offer ends on November 30th and will run in conjunction with a new advertising campaign for the product.



TOPCOPY PLUS: Promo Pack

SDL in Seikosha fold — official

The on/off distribution tie-up between Seikosha and SDL has at last been confirmed.

The confirmation comes just as the Japanese manufacturer is preparing to launch its OP 105 laser printer. Whilst a ver-

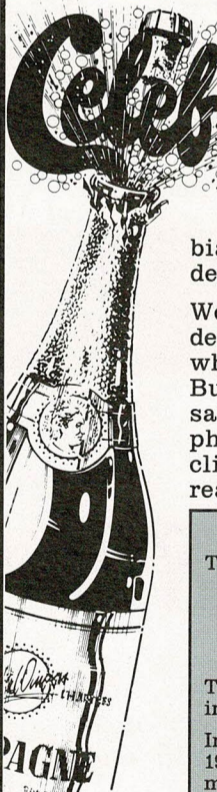
bal agreement was made between SDL and Seikosha.

Seikosha's official distribution network now consists of SDL, Northamber, Westwood Westrex and MBS Combro.

The firm is currently looking to appoint more upmarket distributors to concentrate on top-end product and change the market's perception of the firm as a cheap printer manufacturer.

"In the beginning we were concentrated more on the personal side, but since then we've gone more towards the high end of the market," Seikosha UK's managing director Shoji Aihara told *CTW*.

The five pages per minute OP105 utilises an LED print-head and is expected to retail at between £1,500 and £2,000. It will be available at the end of the month.



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We are opening a new store in Tottenham Court Road. Part of the store will be allocated to 16 bit leisure computer sales, a market in which we lead the field. The new store will have a systems bias and incorporate a floor devoted to business systems with demonstration and training areas.

We are seeking a Business Sales Manager to head up this new development and a team of 4/5 people. There is a Store Manager who will handle all the overall store management leaving the Business Sales Manager free to concentrate on sales. Most sales work will take place from the store which offers telephone and direct mail support. We already have a number of clients in the business and educational sectors but we are now ready to launch this Central London initiative.

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The successful applicant will have a package tailored to suit them. It will include a car, family BUPA cover, good basic and commission.

Interviews will take place between 9.00am - 8.00pm on Tuesday 25th October 1988 at The Strand Palace Hotel, The Strand, LONDON. Alternative arrangements are available if you are unable to make this date. Please send your C.V. to Brian Marriott at the address below, or FAX us on 01-309 0017. Ten bottles of champagne await the first ten CV's that fit the above criteria.

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We also have two vacancies for business sales staff at our new store in Tottenham Court Road. Candidates with previous PC or DTP experience preferred. Ability to train and demonstrate software packages is an integral part of the work.

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We have five vacancies for leisure sales staff at Tottenham Court Road and Selfridges. Previous experience with computers or retail selling is preferred but not essential. Candidates must be smartly presented and have a clear sales and computer aptitude.

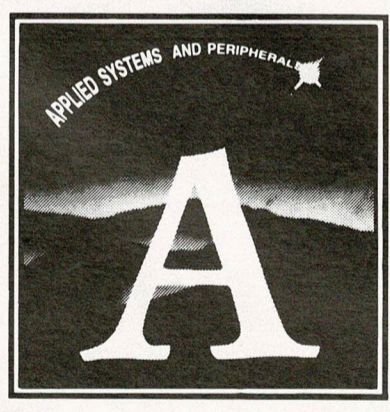
Please phone Jenny or Christine on 01-309 1111 for an application form.

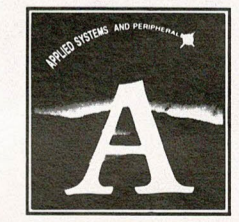
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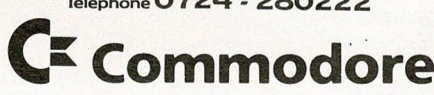
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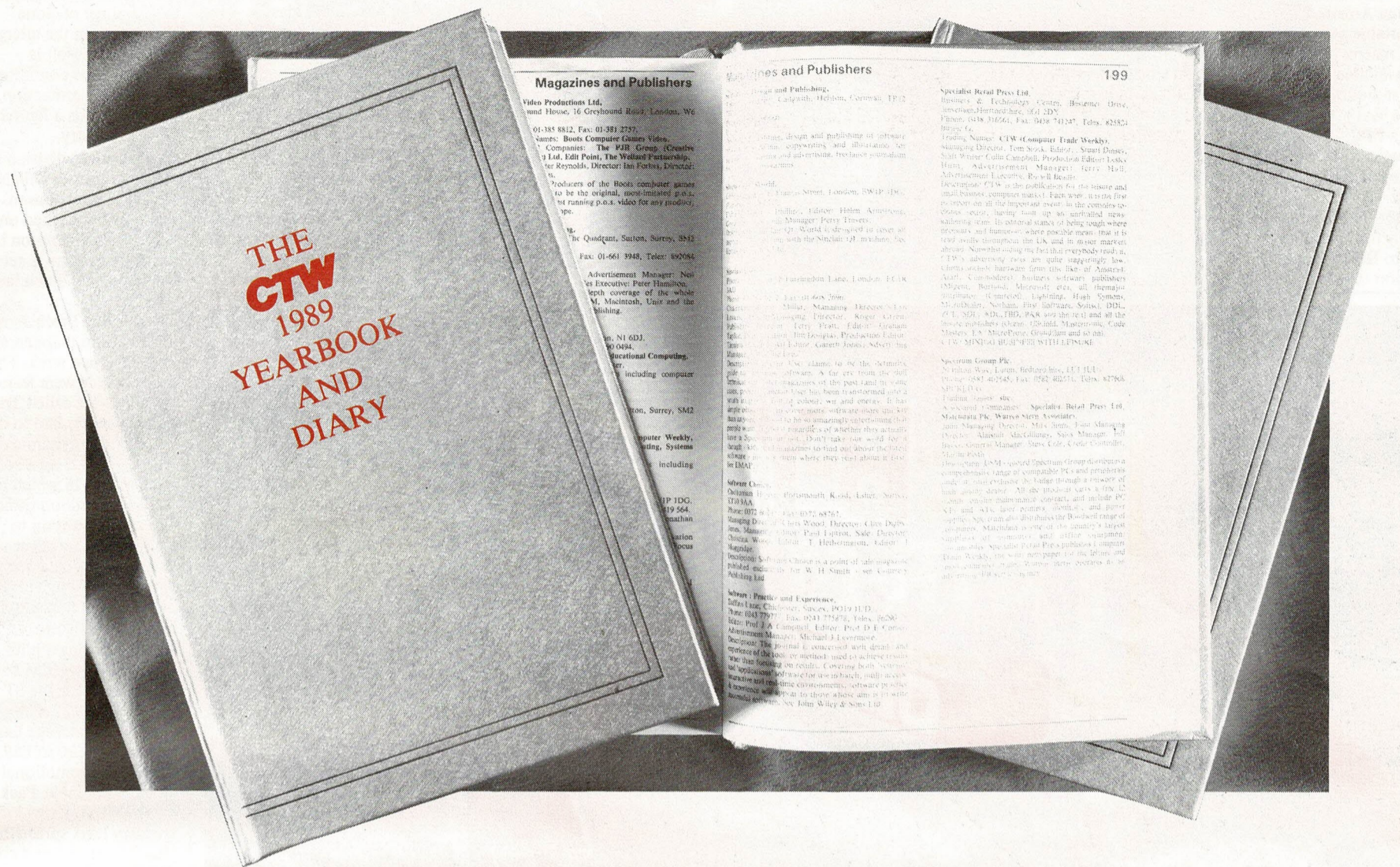




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SNIPPETS

The latest splash of Dixons computer ads in the dailies offer a saving of £100 on a combined purchase comprising Amstrad PPC 640D portable and DMP 3160 dot matrix printer. The two are available (while stocks last, but of course) for £748 (exc VAT). There's also £100 off a PPC 512S single drive bought with the DMP 3160. The package retails at £498 (exc VAT) . . . Distributor **P&P** has reacted favourably to the recent changes to **IBM's** UK distribution structure. Big

Blue has decided to phase out current distributors and let firms like **P&P** exist as authorised dealers under revised terms and conditions. It will be selling on to other authorised dealers. "With **IBM's** new operating changes, **P&P** can only further strengthen its position in the distribution marketplace," offered **P&P's** distribution director Glenn Graham . . . A cuddly teddy bear is being offered free by **WPB Computer Supplies** when a customer buys large quantities of **RPS** disks. For



WPB's spot the bear competition

50 disks the lucky buyer gets a furry "Honey Bear", while orders in excess of 100 come with a free "Scotty Bear". What next, a cut glass decanter or matching table mats perhaps? . . . **Domark** has moved offices again. This latest shift takes the amiable duo to sunny Putney. The new general office number is 01-780 2222, while technical enquiries will be answered on 01-780 2224 . . . **Microsoft** is flexing it's muscles after a recent software victory in the US over

retail computer chain **Master Systems**. The dispute was over illegal copying of the **MS-DOS** operating system onto a range of clone computers. In the afterglow of victory **Microsoft** is reaffirming its commitment to copyright protection, setting itself as a figurehead for the industry . . . **Mediagenic/Activision** has relocated to new offices in Reading. Rod Cousens et al can now be reached on 0734 311666. Southampton based **Software Studios** is set to join the happy band at a later date . . .

The **Darling Brothers** made an impromptu appearance on *Network 7* last week. The unlikely lads were featured in a regular slot called True or False. Viewers had to decide whether the dynamic duo really did start up a software company at 16 which now has a £1.5 million turnover. The chaps went on to predict a £3 million turnover next year as well as claiming to be already up there with the likes of Robert Maxwell and Richard Branson . . .

Kuma is having a blitz promoting its GEM based spreadsheet for the ST and PC compatibles. The *K-Spread 2* package has been reduced by £20 to £59.95, while two promotional packs are also available. Pack 1 is for the ST only and includes an entry level spreadsheet plus *K-Graph 2* and costs £49.95, a £20 saving. The second pack is for both machines and at £79.95 contains more functions . . . **Mitsubishi** has added a new 14 inch colour monitor to its range of peripherals. The new model is called the FA-3415 and offers autoscanning and automatic adjustment to all standard PC and PS/2 input signals. It also comes with an optional tilt-and-swivel base and Diamond Matte coating . . .

Commodore has announced two new Amiga events for its Christmas Show, a graphics workshop and music room. In addition there will be a Christmas card design competition, while celebrity guests Adam Faith and Anita Dobson should be making an appearance too. The Show will be staged at London's Novotel from November 18-20. Christmas really has come early this year . . .

Midwich Thame has added a new addition to its printer range with a low cost dual bin page printer that is "truly" desk-top. The Fujitsu RX7100 has a small footprint and is capable of five pages per minute, retailing just under £1,600.

Clever Dick schoolboy Oliver Riodan has solved an incredibly difficult mathematical riddle in just three hours using **Acorn's** Archimedes computer. The bright young chap from St Paul's School, London, beat the experts who took nearly three weeks. For his efforts Riodan gets a calculator and some free software, which compares to a prize of \$10,000 given for the original solution . . .

Compunet is claiming to have set a new record with 100 new programs being uploaded onto the system in the first week of September.

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Can you become The World Champion?

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A Fair Punch

BBC MICRO

The Ref Sees a Foul Move

COMMODORE 64

Opponents Facing Up

SPECTRUM

A Foul Move

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DROWNING BY NUMBERS

Dealers have come to accept the fact that the vast majority of major titles appear in the autumn selling season. After all, it's the time when the biggest sales are up for grabs. But would everybody be better off if releases were spread out more evenly? KELLY BESWICK asks retailerland...

This year the problem of a leisure market flooded with pre-Christmas releases looks set to be exacerbated.

That last comment has, of course, been uttered by many an industry pundit ever since software first became a big money business.

But this has been a year of leisure firms noting how mature everyone's getting. The standard of marketing has gone up, dealers are being pampered by merchandising firms and even market research occasionally pops its fact-filled head up.

It's rather strange then to be hearing cries from distributors and dealers alike that the software houses are still doing it wrong when it comes to scheduling major releases.

A large proportion of the dealers contacted were angry that games are being advertised in the consumer press, when their release has in fact been shifted back. "It makes the retailer look like a poor prier. When you tell them it isn't available they just don't believe you, they think you're lying. It makes you look like an idiot," complained Lisa Skeet at *Computer Magic* in Ipswich.

Summertime blues

So as the dealers brace themselves for the annual onslaught, many are sceptical of the industry's marketing strategies. Okay, so Christmas is bound to be a mega busy time and nobody's complaining about the increased sales. But what some dealers find so frustrating is the number of potentially good titles that simply get buried in the nest.

The general consensus is that if it's a good quality game it will sell anytime of the year, with the example most frequently cited being *Football Manager 2*. This was released mid-summer, a traditionally quiet period, and hit the number one jackpot with huge sales.

"Some software houses miss taking full opportunity of the market", believes Keith Wadham at London based *Gallery Software*. "After the top five games this Christmas the next 15 will have lost a large quantity of sales. If some of the Christmas releases were launched in the summer they would certainly sell in good quantities".

Wadham is angered by the fact that publishers flood the market without properly thinking about it. "On the one hand you have good products drowning and on the other you have money to take and nothing to sell", he fumed.

At *Miles Better*, in Callock, Staffordshire this feeling is echoed, "I just wish software houses would sit down and seriously think about what will be released over a 12 month period rather than just two," offered owner Rob Miles, adding somewhat bitterly; "Unless you're Boots or Smiths, publishers are just not in touch with the dealer's demands".



Skeet is more resigned. "It's come to be expected, but it is a pain coping with 50 releases every day with everything else going on". In an ideal world Skeets would like to see "games staggered throughout the year", adding the proviso "but 60 per cent of the rubbish could be dropped".

A general feeling amongst many of the dealers is that the software publishers simply don't know what's happening on the street. They have locked themselves into their ivory towers, with only their distributors for company. The reaction from many quarters is that this is a shortsighted mistake. The reaction from publishers will be that dealers will always complain, even when things aren't too bad.

"Those who have stuck their necks out have been amply rewarded", believes Tim Swift of *Tims Megastore*, Macclesfield. "Many just don't look and see how much software could be sold throughout the year, there is a tremendous potential market for the school holidays".

The question that is clearly being raised is whether the software industry is as seasonal as many have come to think. Wadham is confident that there is a strong software buying public throughout the summer months, saying "the six week holidays should be a prime time", but provided it is quality product.

So, have the publishers got it wrong and ensnared themselves in a vicious self-fulfilling

prophecy? This is not a view shared by all dealers. At *Pilot Software*, Malcolm Robinson is adamant. "Nobody in their right mind will play computer games in the summer when they could be laying out in the

sun. This is a seasonal business."

January sales

This year has seen the setting of a new trend by some of the bigger software houses

with the likes of *Mediagenic*, *Gremlin* and *Ocean* holding some major releases over until January. This has been greeted as a wise move from many quarters.

"For every computer pressie that's sold, there's a new customer out there" said Alan Hurt of Norwich based *One Step Beyond*. If you can cast your mind back to those halcyon days when you hit the shops with your gift voucher and granny money, then it would seem to make sense that January could be a potentially good market.

Swift agrees "Last year there was nothing, and business didn't pick up until March. Releasing products in January can only be a good thing as there's a lot of new customers looking for new games".

At *Software Plus* in Basildon, Nick Yates was far more cynical. "Rubbish. There is no new trend to hold major releases over until January, the products simply aren't ready in time for Christmas. All the shops are closed for ten days after Christmas, you try getting a product from a retailer in early January."

The main point for many dealers is that they simply can't take on all the new titles set to hit the market over the next couple of months. "If the market is flooded with 10 games all in the same week there's only so much you can take. The customer has limited spending power and will only buy so

much," adds Swift.

Many dealers will be taking fairly low orders this year to try to minimise possible losses, picking out the potential winners from the losers. "As a retailer you have to select a few titles and sit back and see how they perform," offered *Gamesworld's* Julian Musgrave. This is clearly an arbitrary process and obviously contributes to the whole problem of potentially good titles drowning.

The message that's coming across loud and clear is that it would be in the interest of the publisher, dealer and ultimately the consumer if more good quality products were released all year round.

Open Season

A constant comparison is made between the computer software industry and the record business, and while some would argue that the latter is in fact very seasonally orientated there is no doubt that a constant flow of major new records occurs throughout the year. The record business obviously gears up for the Christmas market, but this does not appear to be to the detriment of the retailer and consumer. One might also argue that the grass is always greener...

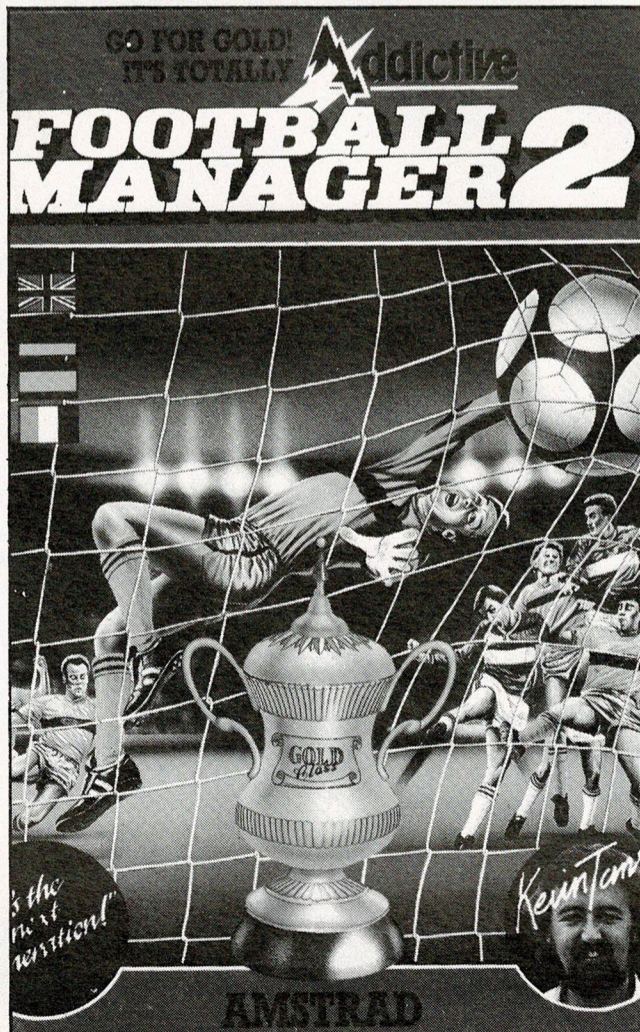
Does it all boil down to that age-old problem of an immature industry still learning by its mistakes? The view here seems to be somewhat mixed. While Yatec states rather scathingly, "It's basically a cowboy industry that has not grown up yet," Trisha Steadman at Liverpool based *Bits and Bytes* takes a different stance. There is nothing wrong in hoarding titles, everyone wants to be number one." While agreeing that the industry is not mature, she argues that such marketing strategies "are a sign of its growing maturity".

One solution to the heavy autumn release schedule offered by Steadman is all releases coming out on the same date. This seems a rather ambitious proposition, but from a retailer's point of view: "We could then be more professional about ordering with fewer titles getting lost in the mish mash of releases."

"The industry as a whole needs generic promotion," proclaims Robinson. "The selling pattern needs to be better structured to negate the effects of seasonal variations." But he does see this as being difficult as a result of "the current volatility of the market place and the short term philosophy of its members".

The up-shot is that most dealers contacted will be taking on less product this autumn and only picking what they consider to be the best.

It is a frustrating process that has aroused more than passing comment. Dealers are all too aware that after the Christmas rush the by now traditional "quiet time" will set in, when all those could-have-beens, probably would-have-beens.



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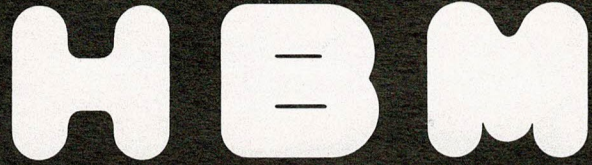
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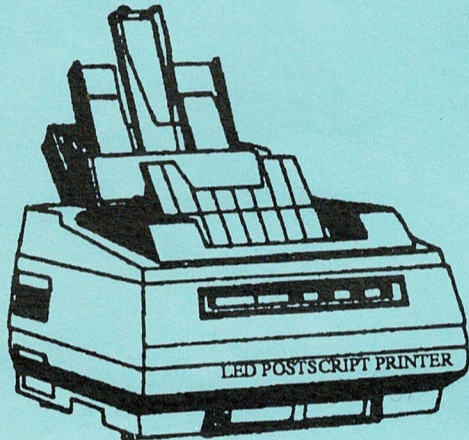
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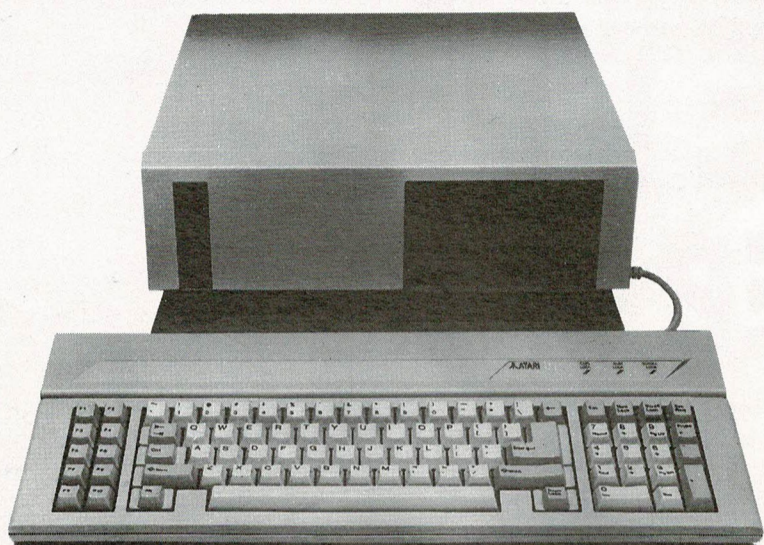
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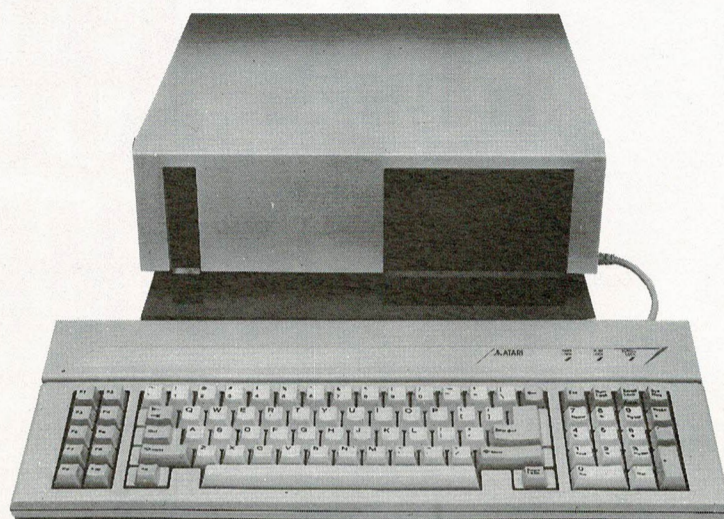


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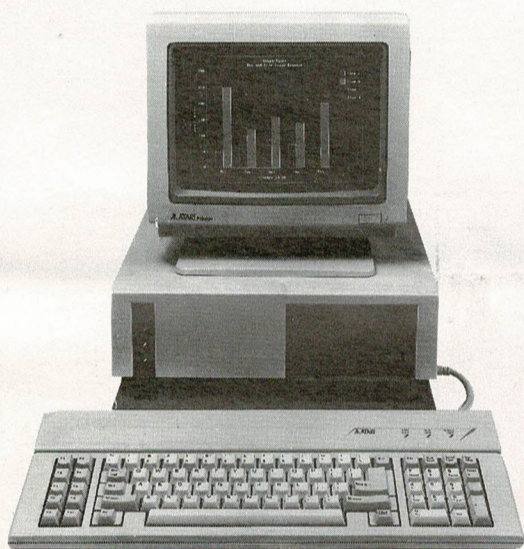
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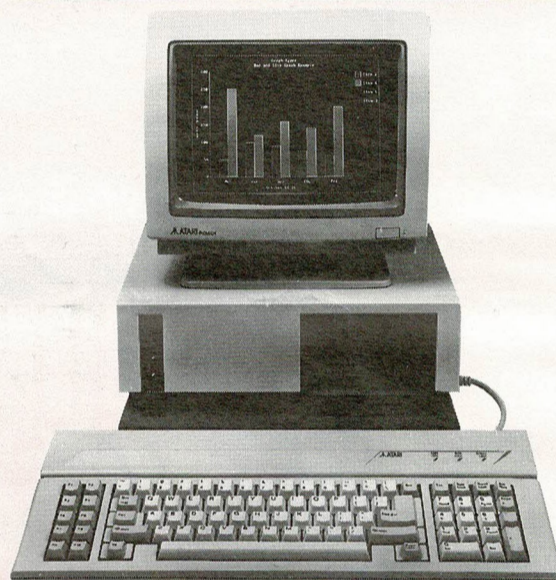
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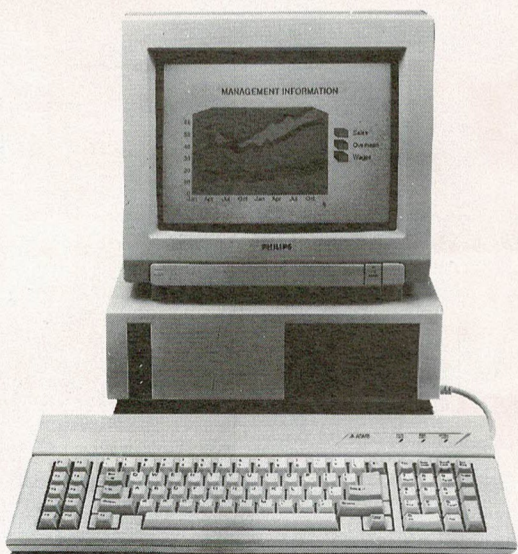
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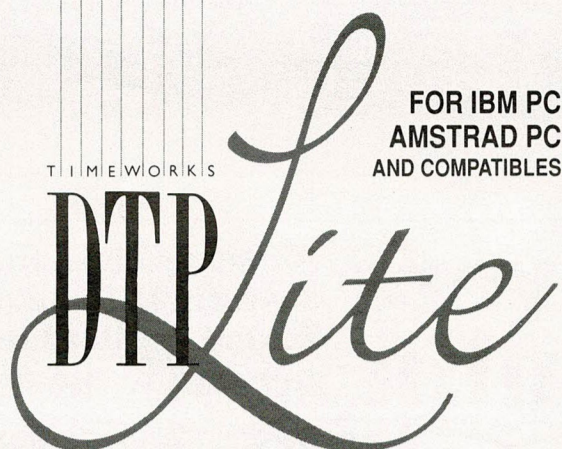
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ar Express	Taken on Amstrad Network 500 System		David Neal 021 356 3388	Top Copy +
Star s	Continuing business software	300-500	Michael Marshal 0274 722512	None
ord + (n 3)	Dec launch of biggest Timeworks DTP (£19.95)	300	Dave Brass 0954 61258	Timeworks DTP Light buy 5, get 6th free
-2-3	New: Claris and Uniplex range	60-70	Sales desk 0256 463344	Phone for details
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ar Express	None	500+	Jeffrey 01 965 5555	Various
ial Controller	Many new product lines	1-200	Nick Fox 0908 74000	Phone for details
inner	Nothing really	800+	Jane Nolan 0245 26501	For dealers 5 Next vouchers with every VP sold
1-2-3	Special offers on Lotus prods soon	800	Andrew Lord 0706 217744	Database, and range in general
amation	Combined 5 1/4" and 3 1/2" disk drive	120	Paul Burgess 01 330 7166	Digi-pic at £150
oll 2	Phone for details	250	Finuala Kavanagh 0977 795544	Special offers on disk organisers
ing Partner	Publishing Partner Professional	300+	Paul Ellis 01 300 3399	None
1-2-3	Softtech went well - 1,418 attendees, lots of new product	2,000	Richard North 01 568 8866	Word Tech DB XL, buy one, get one free, Multimate: win 2 tickets to Phantom of the Opera
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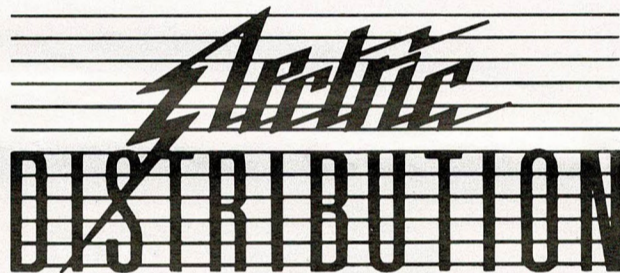
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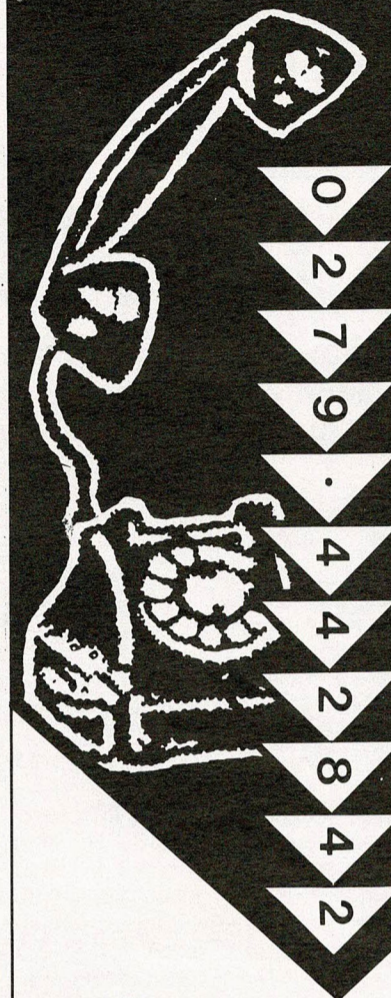


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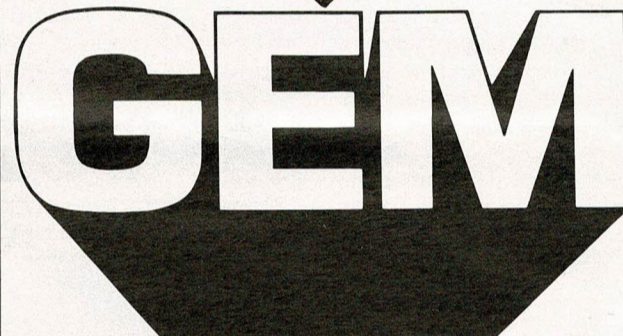
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Roy of the Rovers signs for Gremlin

Amazing news for all soccer fans. Gremlin Graphics have signed contracts with the whole of the Melchester Rovers football team to bring you action packed games, and the drama filled stories behind the games...

THIS IS THE MODERN WORLD

Adventure games have never been renowned for their grasp of the present day. More often than not they have been full of ridiculously out-dated characters searching for a golden key. DAVE ROBERTS talks to veteran adventurers Level 9 and attempts to see a future for a style so stubbornly set in the past . . .

Adventure: In the real world this means (according to the O.E.D.) "a risky undertaking of unknown outcome" and "an exciting or unexpected course of events". Unfortunately, in the computer world it often means an all too predictable series of vaguely Tolkeinesque scenarios, mazes, magic keys and different coloured trolls.

Level 9 specialises in adventure games. It is owned by three brothers Pete, Nick and Mike Austin. They formed the company in 1981 with the initial release being the tone-setting, if rather obviously titled, *Fantasy*.

Since its inception the firm has released approximately a dozen products. Prolific is most definitely not the word. However it has built up a steady reputation amongst the solid band of adventure gamers for producing quality adventures.

On a less positive note, the firm has also acquired a reputation as something of a difficult partner. It has recently split with two firms, Rainbird and Mandarin.

The rift

Pete Austin explains: "When the market stopped growing in '85 we thought we should get involved in the States so we signed a deal with Tony Rainbird. Unfortunately, just after we signed, Tony left and from then on we weren't happy with the way things worked at Rainbird so we split.

"That left us in a tricky position though, we needed to release games but because of the way Rainbird royalties work we didn't have the money to do it. Then Mandarin approached us and we signed up with them."

Last month though that deal also came to an end with Level

9 making various accusations about ineffectual marketing. "The thing is it doesn't really take much to market adventure games in this country as it's a pretty inelastic market. What we are interested in is getting into America and Mandarin didn't seem to be doing that for us."

So for now the firm is happy to handle its own product within the strict confines of that "inelastic" British market while also looking to sign a firm to handle its Stateside marketing.

But what is the appeal of this adventure thing? What about armies of kids and an alarming number of adults want to answer a computer's questions on golden chalices and secret spells?

Fans claim that it is the continuation of a rich tradition of fantasy adventure that has pervaded all the arts. The most re-

nowned and frequently cited as an influence is Tolkein.

But surely the appeal of a writer such as Tolkein, if it lies anywhere, lies in the open invitation to the reader to join with the millions in forming their own views of these "middle earth" type places. It is not bounded by visual restraints.

With adventure games though these mysterious creatures from Tolkein's twilight world are reduced to primary coloured blobs. Admittedly, with the advance of 16-bit machines the standard of graphics is improving, but it is the very fact that these games are at all visually reliant that detract from their potential as true fantasy products.

That's entertainment?

Unsurprisingly Austin takes a contrary line. He sees Level 9 games as "genuine fan-



AUSTIN: Banning mazes and caves tasy worlds" with the same entertainment value as books, films and television.

"If arcade games are all about zapping things then adventure games are all about discovering things."

He does concede though that many adventures have become ridiculously hackneyed, he is equally adamant that Level 9 is not guilty. "We've banned mazes and keys in doors. I hope we never do another game in caves. They are becoming very cliched and boring. I think people are looking for new and different worlds."

Recently though software houses do seem to be realising that the majority of games players are tired of looking for the magic potion and that the original cult market for the games is now spending much

of its time dressed as dwarfs in fantasy role playing games.

The trend now thankfully seems to be towards the modern world with the latest adventure hits such as *Corruption* concerning themselves with areas such as City fraud and drug rings.

Austin welcomes the trend, but with reservations: "What I really think people mustn't start doing is setting games in the present day without a twist, otherwise they stop being adventure games."

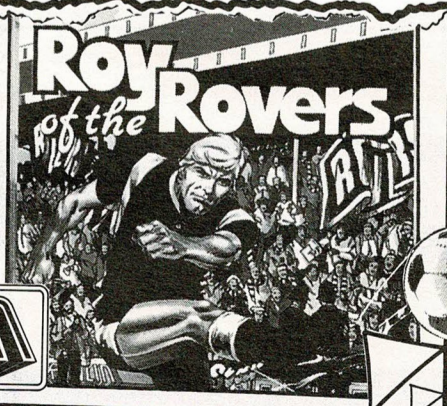
Well with the label's latest release being the Arthurian *Lancelot* it can hardly be accused of jumping on the modernist bandwagon. But it is surely the refreshing move towards the modern day that is to be encouraged if the adventure genre is not to be lost in an out-dated maze of its own making.



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Commodore

CANADA DRY OF AMSTRAD?

The Amstrad success story continues — with the odd hiccup and occasional new product launch — throughout Europe. But what about the less obvious countries, like Canada? Here, the product sales manager of the Oshawa, Ontario based firm Goldsoft Inc. PETER MUELLER charts the Amstrad story in the land where men will be mounties . . .

Before September 1987, the name Amstrad meant little in the Canadian market place but this situation is changing, thanks to Audio Video Specialists of Montreal, Quebec. AVS is the exclusive importer distributor of the Amstrad line of computers and word processors.

AVS officially began marketing the Amstrad range in September 1987 after signing an exclusive marketing and importing agreement with Amstrad plc in the UK.

In the space of one year AVS has covered a lot of ground in marketing the Amstrad line of computers and it has acquired an ever growing number of independent dealers carrying the full range of computers. It has also acquired a number of national accounts with whom it is planning even more marketing tests. With its expanded promotion plans for the up coming year, Amstrad is about to take its rightful place in the Canadian market.

UK strikes back

Up to this point in time the Canadian market has been dominated by US and Hong Kong imports but competitors are now finding that their competition is coming from the UK.

The Amstrad 1640 is lead-



Based in Montreal, exclusive Amstrad distributor AVS has been busy increasing the firm's Canadian profile for the past year

ing the sales figures and it competes very well with competing brands from the US. One of the success factors is its complete design with the optional built-in hard drive. The Canadian market almost demands a hard drive for any business class computer.

The Amstrad PPC Portable is in high demand as well. It

was first introduced during this past summer and is expected to have a great fall run.

The Amstrad PCW's are doing well, competing against typewriters and dedicated word processors. But up to now the PCW's have lacked the software support that they have needed in order to achieve the high sales figures they at-

tained in the UK.

One problem which has to be contended with is the stigma attached to CP/M as a "has been" operating system. CP/M systems had a bad run in the US and Canada and the system was dropped quickly for the more powerful MS-DOS system.

The Amstrad PCW should

see increasing sales figures over this next year as the marketing plans of both AVS and others come into play. The PCW competes very well as a dedicated word processor and is price compatible with all in its class and others from a higher range.

In the fall PCW's will be marketed through office equip-

ment dealers. The pricing makes PCW's competitive in the home computer market as well where a Commodore C64 sells for three to four hundred dollars more for a similar configuration of equipment.

Home thoughts, from abroad

With the introduction of software from the UK the PCW, for the first time, can be and will be marketed as a home computer. The companies unsurprisingly, are hopeful that these plans will reflect in the sales figures.

Within the time span of one year, AVS has built a solid base for the Amstrad Line of products. As the marketing plans for this next year are implemented, Amstrad could well become as much of a name to contend with as it is in the UK.

Goldsoft Inc. is a company specialising in the importation and manufacture under license of software and hardware products for the Amstrad PCW as well as the PC, Commodore C64, Commodore Amiga, Atari ST and Mega.

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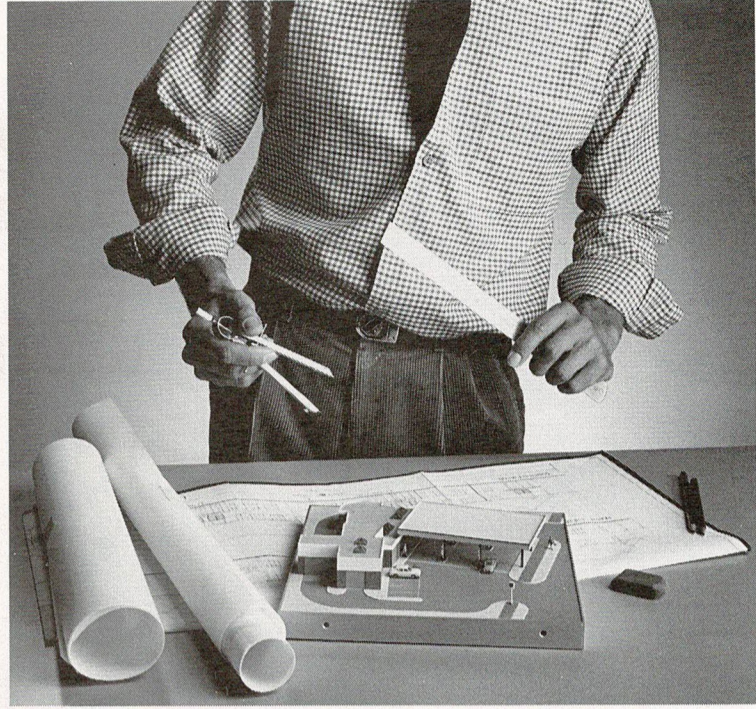
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TALKING 'BOUT A REVOLUTION

Yet another software store has opened up amidst extravagant claims that it will one day boast outlets in every major city. This time, Software Circus is even claiming that it will 'revolutionise' software retailing as we know it. CHRISTINA BENT listens in to the masterplan...

What is it that this industry has been crying out for? Faxes that don't run out of paper? Games that do not crash? Better goodwill and no solicitors? No, what this industry needs is a shop. A retail outlet especially for software. No computers, no hardware, just plain old (and new for that matter) software.

Look no further. Paperlogic, the software publishing group, has opened the first in what is claimed to be a potential chain of fifty stores called Software Circus. Situated in the Plaza shopping centre in London's prestigious Oxford Street, Steve Markham, heading the new venture and managing director of Paperlogic believes he's got it right.

"It's important to pick your location well - we spent a lot of time researching, and we chose a private store in the Plaza. Of course we'll modify it until we've got the formula right, but those changes will be so small that the customers won't even notice the difference."

Markham believes that he has managed to create a style and atmosphere that appeals to both business and leisure customers. And if the 500 square foot store's first Saturday was anything to go by, he could be right.

Apparently from 10am until 5pm, an hour before closing, there were never less than 30 people in the store at any one time. "And," claims Markham enthusiastically, "they all bought product."

Notion motion

Paperlogic moved into computer software after seven and a half years as an energy management company.

"I saw a window in the market. People were unable to find a good range of software and good, experienced staff. I'd had the idea for around three years - it just took a long time to surface." Big ideas need plenty of thought if they've got even a hint of a chance of succeeding. And Markham's done his research. However, nothing guarantees success, on any level.

With his location problem ironed out, having slotted his enterprise into a neat little spot in the Plaza, Markham's next concerns were style and atmosphere. He wanted things to be simple and comfortable for his customers. His solutions are simple, and it's often the most simple ideas that are the most effective.

Software Circus is laid out in a similar way to record and book stores. For ease of reference the shelves are

colour coded. Once a product has been carefully selected, it can be swiftly slotted into one of the three demo machines (PC, Amiga and ST) that are conveniently on stand-by in the store. But, these computers are most definitely not for sale.

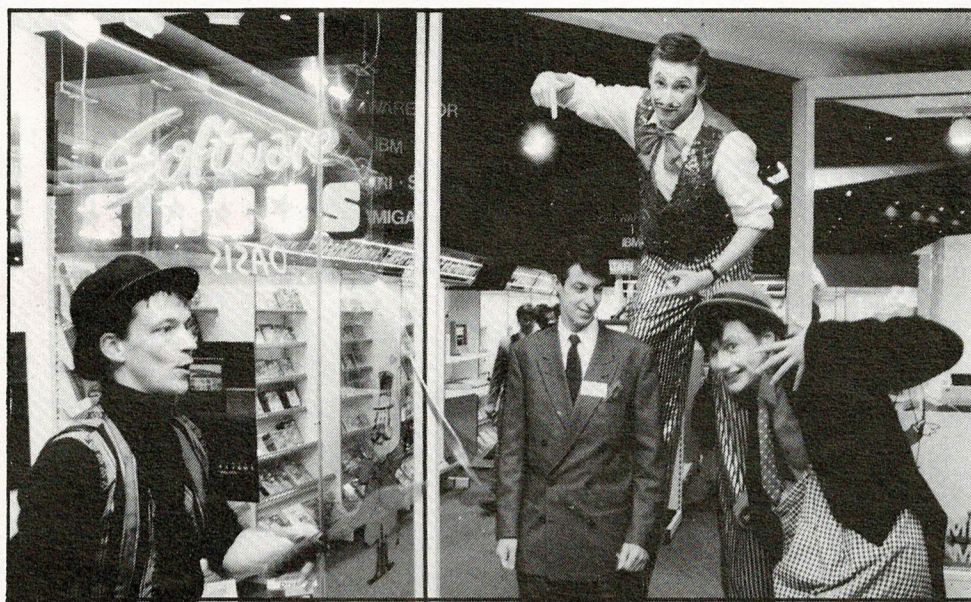
"Well, it's like when you walk into a record shop, you don't want to walk away with a hi-fi. The only hardware we sell are joysticks, and mice - the rest is all software. We've done hardware, and we don't intend to get back into that."

In store

Software Circus aims to provide the consumer with the best and widest range of computer software packages for both here and from the States. There's little new in a claim like that, except that Markham is more convincing than most.

"Up until now a limited choice of only the well-known and established software programs have been sold in computer dealerships. Although some software stores do exist, these concentrate mainly on the games market. If we don't have a particular program, then we'll endeavour to get it - fast."

The store has an in-house stock of over 500 titles, the majority of which is below the



Software Circus boss Steve Markham (middle) clowning around on open day

£200 price point. The product ranges from business to education to entertainment and graphical design, with 70 per cent of all its PC software coming from the US.

Markham claims that any title not in stock can be ordered and delivered the very next day - anything to keep a satisfied customer, but what if it's an obscure US import? Transatlantic couriers? Probably not.

On the business side free 'lifetime' telephone support is offered. The hotline can also be used to make orders, although this is not intended to be its main function.

The Circus stocks mainly 16-bit product. "The 16-bit machines have far more flexibility than 8-bit ones, as far as graphics are concerned. We will stock software for most 16-bit machines, excluding the Ma-

cintosh.

"16-bit is where the market is, besides, WH Smith and the other multiples major on 8-bit, so there's not much point in competing with them."

High hopes

Markham has big plans. Plans to turn his one little outlet into a nationwide chain of 50. Markham has absolutely no idea how long this is going to take, but is insistent it will take place.

Software Circus number two will come into being in the first quarter of next year in London. Later, stores will be opened in all the major towns and cities, but Markham revealed, "They will all be in high streets or in major shopping centres."

Markham continues, "Com-

panies open, then promptly close, because they're not right. We've spent a fortune on advertising, and a great deal of time researching. I've spent time finding out what experience and success other retailers have, and translating it into the Circus. I've been visiting retailers in lots of different countries, and looking at the way they do things."

So what is there to attract the punters? The window display is changed every week, games are shown on the demo machines and there will be a fair selection of computeroid T-shirt freebies.

No, there isn't much new about those attractions, but revolutions take time. And in software retailing's case it looks like it's going to take a long, long, time - Software Circus or no Software Circus.

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SPECTRUM TOP 20

TW	LW	Title	Publisher	RRP £
1	2	DALEY THOMPSON	OCEAN	9.95
2	4	BOMB JACK	ENCORE	1.99
3	3	JOE BLADE 2	PLAYER	9.95
4	5	TRACK SUIT MANAGER	GOLIATH	9.95
5	11	GAUNTLET	KIXX	2.99
6	10	ON THE BENCH	CULT	1.99
7	NE	SALAMANDER	IMAGINE	7.95
8	1	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2	ADDICTIVE	9.99
9	29	AIR WOLF	ENCORE	1.99
10	18	BATTLESHIPS	ENCORE	1.99
11	23	FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATOR	CODE MASTERS	1.99
12	31	KIK START 2	MASTERTRONIC	2.99
13	NE	END ZONE	ALTERNATIVE	1.99
14	9	ACE	CASCADE	2.99
15	12	FRANK BRUNO'S BOXING	ENCORE	1.99
16	21	GHOSTBUSTERS	MASTERTRONIC	1.99
17	RE	POPEYE	ALTERNATIVE	1.99
18	28	OUT RUN	SEGA - US GOLD	8.99
19	24	SHANGHAI KARATE	PLAYERS	1.99
20	NE	1943	US GOLD	8.99

C64 TOP 20

TW	LW	Title	Publisher	RRP £
1	1	BARBARIAN 2	PALACE	9.95
2	3	DALEY THOMPSON	OCEAN	9.95
3	8	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2	ADDICTIVE	9.99
4	11	BOMB JACK	ENCORE	1.99
5	5	PETER BEARDSLEY'S FOOTBALL	GRAND SLAM	9.95
6	RE	SOCCER BOSS	ALTERNATIVE	9.95
7	7	HAWKEYE	THALAMUS	9.95
8	23	PRO SKATEBOARD SIMULATOR	CODE MASTERS	9.95
9	6	1943	US GOLD	9.95
10	19	STREET GANG	PLAYERS	2.99
11	13	GAUNTLET	KIXX	2.99
12	2	TRACK SUIT MANAGER	GOLIATH	9.95
13	12	SCHOOLDAZE	ALTERNATIVE	1.99
14	21	ACE OF ACES	KIXX	9.95
15	28	EUROPEAN FIVE A SIDE	FIREBIRD	9.99
16	15	AIR WOLF	ENCORE	1.99
17	NE	END ZONE	ALTERNATIVE	1.99
18	20	OUT RUN	SEGA-US GOLD	9.99
19	NE	SUPREME CHALLENGE	BEAU JOLLY	14.95
20	18	ACE	CASCADE	2.95

AMSTRAD TOP 10

TW	LW	Title	Publisher	RRP £
1	2	BOMB JACK	ENCORE	1.95
3	10	KIK START 2	MASTERTRONIC	2.99
8	4	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2	ADDICTIVE	9.99
8	4	YOGI BEAR	ALTERNATIVE	1.99
4	3	AIR WOLF	ENCORE	1.99
2	1	GAUNTLET	KIXX	2.95
5	5	JOE BLADE 2	PLAYERS	1.99
7	6	ATV SIMULATOR	CODE MASTERS	1.95
9	RE	SUPER STUNTMAN	CODE MASTERS	1.99
10	14	BATTLESHIPS	ENCORE	1.99

ATARI ST TOP 5

TW	LW	Title	Publisher	RRP £
1	1	STAR GLIDER 2	RAINBIRD	24.99
2	1	STOS GAME CREATOR	MANDARIN	29.95
3	RE	BARBARIAN	PSYGNOSIS	24.95
4	3	VIRUS	FIREBIRD	19.95
5	NE	WHERE TIME STOOD STILL	OCEAN	19.95

AMIGA TOP 5

TW	LW	Title	Publisher	RRP £
1	NE	STAR GLIDER 2	RAINBIRD	24.95
2	2	VIRUS	FIREBIRD	19.95
3	3	INTERCEPTOR	ELECTRONIC ARTS	24.95
4	4	CARRIER COMMAND	RAINBIRD	24.95
5	RE	BIONIC COMMANDO	CAPCOM-GO	19.99

SHARE OF SALES BY MACHINE

Machine	Units sold (%)				Titles sold (%)			
	This week	Last week	4 wks ago	12 wks ago	This week	Last week	4 wks ago	12 wks ago
SPECTRUM	45.2	43.7	45.6	41.3	31.3	30.0	31.2	28.5
COMMODORE 64	24.3	24.3	22.2	23.6	24.7	24.1	24.1	22.5
AMSTRAD	17.2	17.7	19.6	18.7	19.6	17.8	17.7	17.7
ATARI ST	4.0	4.6	3.1	4.2	8.0	7.5	6.5	7.8
AMIGA	3.2	3.0	1.1	2.2	3.6	3.9	3.3	3.8
COMMODORE 16	2.1	1.7	2.4	3.1	2.7	2.9	2.9	3.0
ATARI	1.6	1.2	0.8	1.8	1.8	2.0	2.2	3.4
BBC	0.6	0.8	1.3	1.3	2.1	2.5	2.8	2.9
ELECTRON	0.6	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.5	1.9	1.8	2.2

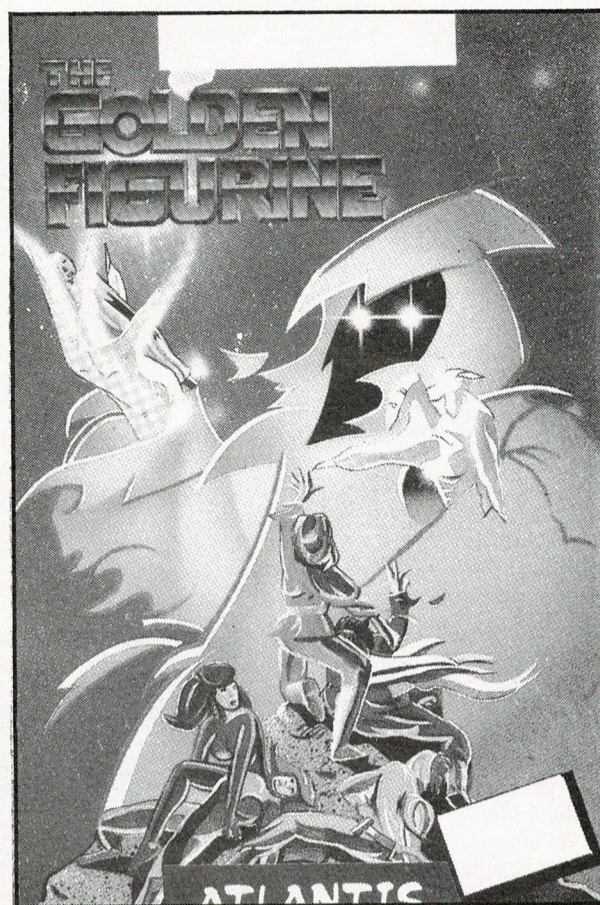
AVERAGE SALES PER PANEL SHOP

This week	Units Sold		
	Last week	4 wks ago	12 wks ago
70	77	119	119

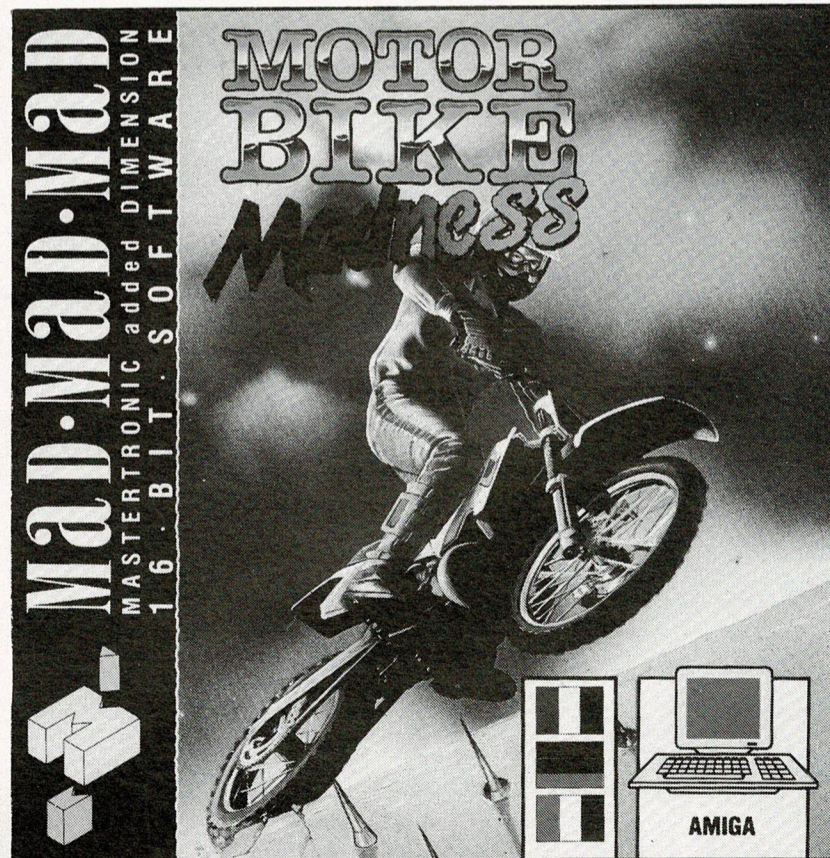
Soft options

Soft Options carries salient details of leisure software just released or which are due to appear in the next few days. Software house wishing to be included should fax (0438 741247) or phone (0438 310185) through details prior to our publication date.

INFOGRAMES: *Bubble Ghost* (64PC — £9.95-£14.95) A ghost trapped in a castle has to blow its way out. As if that wasn't strange enough the game also boasts the curious feature of "realistic ghost noises". **SOFTWARE HORIZONS:** *Mafdet* (ST — £14.95) In which the user takes the part of a cat. Not just any cat but Mafdet the Egyptian goddess of revenge searching for the Book of the Dead whilst battling against giant frogs (honest). **ELECTRONIC ARTS:** *Caveman Ughlympics* (64 — £14.99) Not quite as topical as it might have been, but EA will hope to make up for that with the novelty value and that oh-so-amusing title. Events include dino-vaulting, sabre tooth tiger racing and fire starting. **ELECTRONIC ARTS:** *Battle Chess* (Ag — £24.95) Interplay's animated chess game where the pieces apparently have personalities. At £25 for a chess game those personalities had better be interesting. **US Gold:** *Outrun* (Ag — £19.99) No doubt destined to be the best selling Amiga game so far, we can safely expect the US Gold hyberbole to start flowing again pretty soon. When the game arrived on the ST it pushed it back up to number one. This will follow a similar pattern but, perhaps, not quite so dramatically. **ATLANTIS:** *Golden Figurine* (BBC — £1.99) An arcade adventure with the desperately original task of gathering keys.



What will they think of next? **ANCO:** *Maniax* (Ag — £19.99) Arcade game involving the clearing of fog from the western hemisphere. If that's as much fun as it sounds, it won't be much fun at all. It is described however as "compulsive and addictive". **MASTERTRONIC:** *Motorbike Madness* (SpAm64 — £1.99) Straightforward motorbike race with poles, pools and Volkswagens for obstacles. **MASTERTRONIC:** *Jet Set Willy II* (SpAm64 — £1.99) Budget appearance of Software Project's reasonably successful follow up to the massive original. **GREMLIN:** *10 Great Games III* (SpAm64 — £9.99-£14.99) Now that's what I call not too bad. Well you can't moan too much at 10 ex full-price games for a tenner. This includes *Leaderboard* and *Fighter Pilot*, but very few Gremlin games - perhaps an indication of this year's performance chartwise. **US GOLD:** *History in the Making* (SpAm64 — £24.99-£29.99) Ambitious title for a straightforward 15 game compilation including *Bruce Lee*, *Gauntlet* and *Leaderboard* (again). It should do well and hang around for months, even if most of the titles have been released 55 different times already.



KEY: Sp = Spectrum; 64 = Commodore 64; Am = Amstrad CPC; ST = Atari ST; Ag = Amiga 500; +3 = Spectrum +3; PC = IBM PC/compatibles; PCW = Amstrad PCWs; C16 = Commodore 16; Mac = Macintosh; XE/XL = Atari XE console and 800XL; Sg = Sega console; Nn = Nintendo console; VCS = 2600 console; MSX = very unlikely.

SPEAKEASY

Two days' weight

I am having a hard time with a computer sales company, who are many miles away from me, I have just purchased a Commodore PC-1 from Lan Computer Systems of Romford Essex, for which I paid cash via a giro credit.

Monday September 26th 1988:

The computer arrived at 9.15am, I started to use the computer in the evening and within 2 hours the machine had developed a fault that stopped it from working.

I phoned the shop and a man saying he was the security guard said he would leave a message, and try to get someone to call me in the morning.

Nobody did.
I phoned at 10.00am and explained the problem to a person called Mary. She said: "We will replace it and get someone to pick it up, and I will get the sales manager to ring you."

He did not.
I phoned again at 4pm and said that I had waited all day for a phone call, she laughed, I said I did not think it was funny. She said, "I'll tell him again," and after a pause "He will ring you".

He did not.
I called again at 5pm, she said "he's busy in the shop he will ring you".

He did not.
I then phoned the *Micro Computer Mart*, who carry the

advert for Lan, that I had answered. I spoke to a nice person called Ricky who said she would call Lan and ring me back, she did too and then she said "Mark will ring you".

He did not.
I shall be seeing the Fair Trading Officer on Wednesday 28 September, and also be seeking advice as to getting my telephone expenses returned. But I don't see why I should have to go through all these phone calls and all this expense, just to get guarantee honoured.

I am unemployed and also in receipt of invalidity benefit because of my ill health and I

am not enjoying this exercise in "bad will".

I have now called Lan five times and have had no redress at all. I am sending a copy of this letter to Commodore, perhaps you would care to publish this, or use it to help those who can't help themselves.

Yours sincerely
Kenneth Hardacre
Bridlington
East Yorkshire

— Bearing in mind that this dispute was only two days and five phone calls old when it reached CTW's Speakeasy editor, one wonders if this is a record? Can anyone out there do better?



PC1: Fault thoughts

SPEAKEASY

Unpaid plea I

Following our telephone conversation today, I am writing to confirm on paper the problem that I have been having with The Edge software house.

As I explained to Dominic Handy of *Crash* at the PC Show, The Edge (and Softek — run by Tim Langdell) have never really made a good impression on me, often paying late — if at all — and responding rarely to requests.

I started my freelance programming back in 1983 on the Spectrum using their *SUPER C BASIC* compiler to produce games. When I submitted them for evaluation to Softek, they liked them, and marketed them for me.

Several games followed and in November 1984 my last game for them, *Psytraxx*, was released. Payment (on a royalty basis) had been reasonably acceptable to me, though I now doubt it's accuracy!

There were even plans to release a book on writing compiler produced games, in which I had the part of providing around ten games as examples supplied on a tape with the book to load in, and provide the technical test. I did all this, but nothing came of it. That is a typical example of their attitude.

When *Psytraxx* was released around Christmas 1987 as part of a compilation tape, *Classix I*, the first I knew about it was

when I saw the advert for it in a magazine! Since that time I have received no payment for this whatsoever.

The last time they contacted me was in a brief letter in December 1987, where they told me that there had been no sales on any of my games, but there had indeed been a number of "returns" in *Psytraxx*.

This was probably an attempt to discourage me from pursuing the case any further. This letter was the result of much prompting on my part. I approached them at the *PCW* show last year, and went to their offices in Covent Garden about the matter. But I only got a response after a stern letter which ended with a suggestion about resorting to a solicitor if they didn't respond.

As you can see, they are quite hard to co-operate with and I have chosen Palace Software to release my next game, who seem more dependable.

I understand that there is

some sort of legal problem at the moment between The Edge and *Crash*, due to failure to pay for advertisements in the magazine, and this was the main reason why the editor could not be of assistance through his magazine.

I hope that you understand that although *Psytraxx* may be an old game as part of a compilation on a tape, and therefore will not generate vast amounts of money, it is the principle of the matter that counts (just as it did in the past). Anything you could do to help would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Beale
Chessington

— Perhaps Softek would like to respond to these accusations of non-payment. This offers the opportunity of noting that if all similar accusations about Softek were answered there'd be no room for anything else. But in the knowledge that the firm's legal troops are poised for battle no such remark will be made here. That's us safe.

Unpaid plea II

As you have covered the Power House story, I thought you might like to have a copy of our last letter to them. I have heard of other programmers who have not been paid apart from us.

Yours
Paul Andrews

Dear Mr Hildebrandt,

Following recent comments by you, in your capacity as a director of The Power House Limited, to the trade press it is obvious that the company has ceased to trade and has a number of debts which it

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cannot meet and we assume that it will be placed into liquidation. We would be pleased to have this statement denied by you.

Our company entered into agreements with The Power House Limited in regard to the following products:

1. *Space Jack*
2. *Tomb of Syrinx*
3. *Sword and Shield*
4. *Hercules*

We would point out that your company has not honoured the terms of the agreements and in particular your company has not provided information with regard to sales on which royalty payments should be made. Neither has your company made any of the

payments that are due within 30 days of the end of each quarter as royalties on the products.

We require that you provide up to date information on the sales of the products by return of post and make proposals for payment. Should this information not be forthcoming it is our intention to notify the Registrar of Companies, or The Receiver if one is appointed, of the failure of directors to ensure that the company was run in a proper manner.

In consequence of your failure to honour the agreements take this letter as formal notice that the agreements are terminated and we reserve our rights to take action for dam-

ages for our losses both against The Power House Limited and the directors. We have now entered negotiations for the products to be published and require that all existing stock in your control is destroyed.

Yours faithfully,
Paul Andrews
Black Knight Computers
Chislehurst

— The one crumb of comfort that can be taken from Black Knight's experience with the now rotting Power House corpse is that it probably isn't owed that much in royalties. After all, in all the time that Ashley Hildebrandt's budget pretender existed it probably released more games than it ever sold.

Hacked off by hackers

I could not help but notice the much higher profile adopted by the software piracy gangs, at this year's PC Show.

A large group of people wearing T-shirts proudly proclaiming the "Kent Cracking Team" could be seen closely examining the new games on display.

The stand of one software house was raided by an indi-

vidual who, carefully choosing the right moment, ripped the side off a display cabinet and was away with an un-released Atari game before anyone could stop him. No doubt that game will be "cracked" and on the pirate circuit within a matter of weeks.

The attitude of some of the stand management only???? encourage the worst in

people. On Saturday, not a single person was visible on the exhibit stand, they were presumably attending to visitors in the "inner sanctum" — while outside, the kids were taking the stand to pieces.

I have been told that "it's simply not worth trying to sell Atari or Amiga software" due to the activities of the "pirate" circuit. What do the retailers say about this? I'd like to know.

Certainly there can be no doubt that a vast amount — perhaps the majority — of pirated games software for those machines is circulated. Do we just blame the hackers, however? In my opinion, the software houses themselves are largely to blame.

Copy protection on Amiga and Atari disks seems to be about as effective as a plastic padlock. The hackers seem to experience little difficulty in defeating it.

In this case, it seems that better security is called for. I don't claim to have the universal answer, but there are some methods which seem to be reasonably effective; for instance, the issue of prismatic colour-film devices for each package tied into a unique passcode on each disk; or the "novella" method (e.g. "The Pawn") where at some stage in the game, the user must enter a keyword from some part of the text.

If the cost of PAL chips reduces substantially, copy protection for games could be made well-nigh perfect by issuing a plastic "dongle" with each package. (Requiring insertion of a matching device into the parallel port before the game would run).

Please note, I do not advocate or approve of copy protection on business packages. The history of such practice is that it alienates legitimate users and does little to improve revenue. The same cannot be said for games, however.

I look forward to reading any reactions from the software authors, publishing houses, distributors, and retailers.

Yours sincerely,
Clive Warner
Managing director
Digital Matrix
Solihull

— Considering the enormity of the piracy problem, one would have thought that after six years leisure publishers could have found some way of thwarting the hackers. The effective novella method does work but can irritate the gameplayer and, no doubt, adds to a product's retail price.

Nothing is likely to change there for a while so surely it's the cracking teams — enjoying a perverse form of superstardom — that should be hunted out and brought to book. The trouble is that too many software houses sit around and expect the Federation Against Software Theft (FAST) to do all the work.

In fact, many will back FAST's efforts without even becoming members. If current levels of piracy are to be reduced every firm active in the industry must play its part. Publications must give the issue publicity — either educating its readers or shopping offenders — and software houses, distributors and retailers alike must all act against offenders when possible.

If nobody is going to do anything, nobody has the right to complain — and nothing will change.

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Virgin Bullet promises hardware

Continued from front page

"It was always a possibility that this would happen. But we wanted to see how we got on. Everything has worked very well and this move makes sense of all the things that have been happening lately," Alexander told CTW.

"By pulling everything together we know we can get more out of the people involved. The buzzword I'm afraid is synergy."

Virgin will not be overly concerned about any City reaction to the move as it is currently in the process of buying back shares in order to become a private company once again. This is expected to be completed in mid-January, and has been a result of "the City's rather peculiar valuing of Virgin".

Elite plans

Continued from front page coast operation.

"In the UK there are really only four substantial customers and you can cover the whole continent with just 10 wholesalers, in America it's the same. It just doesn't make sense for us not to take advantage of the US market."

He went on to explain that the firm had not made the move before because in the States a successful firm's product must be available for the PC. Previously Elite was not in a position to fulfil this requirement but apparently now after a year of development it has met that target.

At present the firm's product is sold through various tie-ups with publishers such as Epyx and Key Punch. According to Wilcox though Elite's return on these deals is minimal compared to what an autonomous Elite could achieve in the States.

When the Elite games do arrive it is likely that they will sell at \$40 - the usual price point for full-price US software.

Epyx plays

Continued from front page

Epyx' current sales and marketing through Gold. The latter is already handled by Roger Swindells.

"We're not really setting up in the UK, we're just looking for an individual to help us manage our software. That includes the product that goes through US Gold and titles that we're bringing back to the US," commented Epyx president Gil Freeman to CTW.

Epyx wants to have more contact with actual software development on Gold conversions for the UK. The UK representative will also work closely with sourced product, such as Palace's *Barbarian* which is due for export.

Regarding the setting up of a UK Epyx office, Freeman offered: "Well he's got to work somewhere. Whether he'll work at home or in an office I can't say."

Freeman also refuted suggestions that the new appointment was a way of testing the potential of a full UK operation.

"Anything is possible - but that's not the intent," he responded.

Merchandising and promotional firm Bullet has tied deals with Electronic Arts and Elite, and is also promising an imminent hardware signing.

At present the firm deals exclusively with software but according to boss Barry Evans talks are now underway with Commodore and Atari. He claimed that a deal with one or possibly both firms was "highly likely"

He continued: "There's no

doubt that eventually we will announce a hardware deal. Whether it's pre-Christmas or not we can't tell, but it's definitely a logical step for us."

Any hardware move the firm does make would follow rival merchandiser USD's recent announcement that it has tied up a deal with Virgin/Mastertronic to promote the Sega. It now seems that Bullet did in fact pitch for that deal itself and was more than just a little disappointed with the outcome.

Indeed, an undoubtedly

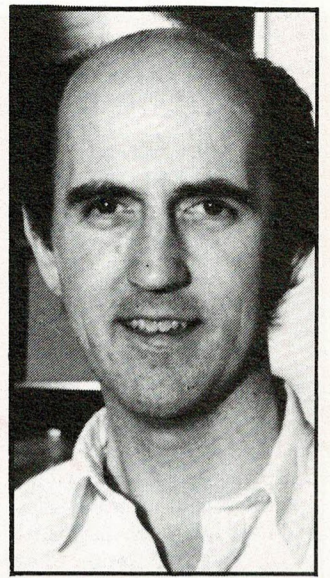
riled Evans went on to claim that Bullet's service was "far superior and more relevant" than that of USD. These strong words are just the latest in a rather bitter rivalry between the two firms.

Meanwhile, Bullet has also announced merchandising and display deals with both Elite and EA. Evans claimed that factors behind the deals included the recent chart performance of Bullet controlled products such as *STOS* as well as the reps of EA "reporting back on the quality of work

Bullet do at dealer level."

He continued: "We've put a lot of investment into the computer market which is now starting to come to fruition. People are starting to see how much we are worth."

At Elite joint boss Brian Wilcox commented: "Hopefully the deal will get us a bit closer to the retailers. At the PC show a number of retailers said to us that they didn't know enough about the product that was coming out and hopefully this will rectify that."



EVANS: Hardware promised

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