CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW REPORT

The June Consumer Electronics Show gives retail store owners and buyers an opportunity to preview the electronic products that will fill their shelves for the fall and Christmas season. It's a time when these buyers expect to see new innovative products and gain hands-on experience so they can best serve their customer's needs.

This year, over 60,000 of these buyers came to Chicago looking for new computer products which they expect to provide a significant portion of their overall income for the rest of this year. They were for the most part not dissappointed. Atari introduced four new computer models, Mattel previewed their new Aquarius, Timex touted their 1500, and Coleco introduced a show-stopping bundled system called ADAM.

At the TI booth, however, retailers expecting to see an 80K release from the current industry leader openly displayed disbelief when it failed to appear on the showroom floor. A TI spokesman would not provide any reason for the absence of the 99/8, other than saying, "We will sell no computer before its time."

Acknowledgments were made that the/8 will be brought to market before year's end, but total details were sparse and TI representatives acknowledge that strategy changes may be made based on competitive announcements made at this June show.

Additionally, new software packages which TI announced to be available in the third and fourth quarter of 1983 must still have a long way to go, as very few were shown in their entirety at TI's booth. At a June 4 press conference held by Imagic, a leading cartridge manufacturer, an announcement was made that TI and Imagic have signed a joint agreement that will allow Imagic a license to create a minimum of seven new solid-state software modules for the 99/4A. They include: Demon Attack, Microsurgeon and five future announcements. Apparently this agreement must have just culminated as both packages shown at TI's booth were running under the control of Mattel equipment, cleverly concealed out of public view.

New additions to the compact computer line, which were expected by many, were also missing and no definite shipping date has been determined for the Hex-Bus and low-cost peripherals, as quality assurance problems continue to plague this project.

One large chain-store executive told a Users-Group interviewer, "We expected much more from TI than they showed. Our current sales of 99/4A products have dropped and we had hoped that TI would give us a new product to sell."

He went on to say, "There is a lot of confusion in the marketplace right now, and only manufacturers who can make strong committments to price vs. performance will survive."

In other new developments, many manufacturers of low-priced computers are for the first time showing bundled computer systems. Mattel, Atari, Coleco and others are offering system packages which include a variety of components, including modems, recorders and TV sets. It's still too early to tell if TI can pull off the official announcement of its 99/8 and supply retailers with significant product evaluation time to get the much needed sell-through they need to remain the industry leader.

THIRD PARTIES SHOW LITTLE FEAR

Although Texas Instruments seems to be taking its stand on protecting their uncontested patents concerning GROM technology quite seriously, other third-party software producers at the summer Consumer Electronics Show showed little fear in challenging the giant Texas electronics firm.

To set the stage for this battle, Texas Instruments announced in a press release May 18 that they will periodically make modifications in the design of the 99/4A Home Computer. These changes will implement

the machine to check any module plugged in to its cartridge slot for a proprietary auto-incrementing memory called GROM. The press release went on to say that TI does not intend to license this technology to others for manufacturing plug-in cartridges designed to work with their home computer products. Additionally, TI is prepared to enforce its GROM patents against unauthorized use by any outside parties.

This hard-line stance by Texas Instruments was again emphasized on June 4, the first day of the summer Consumer Electronics Show, when TI placed a full-page advertisement in a CES daily trade journal warning retailers that unless cartridges shown by third party sources are licensed by Texas Instruments, there is a distinct possibility that they will not work in current production 99/4A Home Computers.

Additional reinforcement was evident when the show doors opened on Sunday as all of the 99/4A consoles in the Texas Instruments booth were equipped with a new version 2.2 operating system that does indeed check for auto-incrementing memory. One would think that such stern warnings from such a powerful adversary would keep even the mention of any intention to produce plug-in cartridges for the 99/4A to an absolute minimum. The warnings, however, seemed to have little effect on at least four software manufacturers who showed new cartridge releases for the /4A.

At the Atari booth, demos were being run on soon-to-be-released titles such as Pac-Man, Defender, Donkey Kong, Centipede, and Dig Dug. Atari Publishing also announced that it will be bringing to market four additional titles under a licensing agreement with Synapse. These will include Shamus, Protecter, Picnic Paranoia, and Slime.

"We are very excited about releasing these packages for use with the 99/4A," an Atari spokesman said. "We feel that it offers a whole new world of arcade-style entertainment to over 1 million owners of the 99/4A."

One Atari employee was overheard saying, "The quality of speed and graphics we have been able to achieve with the 99/4A is not even surpassed by our stand-alone arcade machines." Atari plans release of its new cartridges sometime in August and suggested retail prices are expected to be $44.95.

Thorn EMI, a giant multi-billion dollar video conglomerate, also announced its plans to release three new cartridges for the TI 99/4A Home Computer. River Rescue, Submarine Commander and War Games all looked great to this correspondent. The War Games package should have a wide appeal as many of its screen sequences are those used in a newly-released movie of the same name.

Romox, a California-based cartridge manufacturer, showed three new releases for the 99/4A, including Hen Pecked, Typo, and Whiz Kid. Romox also plans to release a new low-cost cartridge programmer to the general public under an agreement with a Sunnyvale, CA, hardware manufacturer. Several other well-known software houses were also rumored to have products waiting in the wings for pre-Christmas release. Included are such well-known names as Parker Brothers and Mattel.

The most blatant show of defiance to TI's attempted lock-out of third party suppliers occurred on Tuesday, June 7 at 4 p.m. when Michael Brouthers, President of Funware, Richardson, TX, calmly walked up to a version 2.2 console at the Texas Instruments booth, inserted his newly released cartridge titled Ambulance, and showed that it will indeed work on TI's newly modified machine.

When questioned by an IUG representative for his comment on this bold act of defiance, a TI employee said, "It is a clear violation of our patent rights and I am sure that our legal department will take the appropriate steps."

Mr. Brouthers said, "We intend to release nine new cartridges for the TI Home Computer between now and September 1, 1983, and are willing to guarantee to our customers that all will work on present and future versions of the 99/4A. New releases from Funware will include: Ant Colony, Cave Creatures, Driving Demon, Saint Nick, Crisis Mountain, Trashman, Astroblitz and Pipes.

NEW ARCADE GAMES TO BECOME AVAILABLE

Four new software packages, two developed by Texas Instruments and two developed by third party sources, will become available later this year for the 99/4A home computer. Three of the four software packages will be in solid state software cartridges. They are: M*A*S*H, Snigget, and Moonmine. The M*A*S*H game was developed by Fox Video Games, Incorporated under a license from TI. Entrapment, which will require the use of the mini-memory command module, was developed by Tom Johnson of American Software Design & Distribution and purchased for distribution by TI. Snigget is the first game package to be developed by TI from an internal employ submission program, by which the author is paid royalties in addition to his normal compensation.

M*A*S*H

Players must pick up wounded soldiers from a battlefield and airlift them to the 4077th M*A*S*H unit, moving quickly to save as many lives as possible. A hawk's eye and a steady hand will help the players sew up the highest score. (Available third quarter 1983; suggested retail price $39.95; joysticks recommended.)

SNEGGIT

Players control a chicken that guards eggs from hungry snakes. Fast reflexes, wit, and skillful tactics help players save the eggs from the snakes, which are intent upon devouring the eggs by the dozens. The more eggs saved, the higher the score. (Available third quarter; price $39.95; joysticks recommended.)

MOONMINE

As captain of the U.S.S. Moonmine, the player's mission is to capture treasures stolen from earth. Players battle against Mighty Zygonaught and his menacing creatures to save the world's most valuable treasures. This one-player game challenges your skills in strategic planning and quick thinking.

Moonmine includes various levels of difficulty and synthetic speech capabilities. (Available fourth quarter; price $39.95; joysticks and speech synthesizer recommended.)

ENTRAPMENT

Players are in command of the spaceship that patrols the earth's atmosphere. Suddenly, hostile larvae enter the atmosphere to attack the earth. One by one they turn into ravenous insects, and players must destroy as many insects as possible while building a shield to ward off surviving attackers. This game requires the TI-Mini Memory cartridge and a cassette tape recorder. (Available third quarter; price $19.95; joysticks recommended.)

The above capsule reviews are basically taken from TI's press releases for the Consumer Electronics Show. After actually viewing each of the packages, we at the Users-Group were less than impressed with these new releases and feel that TI has neglected their duty to supply good quality software to their consumers.

While other manufacturers are dealing with outside software houses for good quality arcade-style packages, TI seems to be groping to release anything they can regardless of the quality.

We will make further in-depth evaluations of these new software packages as soon as TI supplies us with evaluation copies of these new products.

COLOR CHANGE FOR TI-99/4A HOME COMPUTER ANNOUNCED BY TI

Texas Instruments has announced a color change for its popular 99/4A Home Computer. Beginning this summer, TI will change over its Lubbock production lines to produce computer consoles and peripherals in a new gray color.

"After extensive research into the color preferences of persons for both a home and office environment, Texas Instruments has found a marked preference for lighter colors in both its computers and calculators," said Bill Turner, President of the Consumer Group. "Therefore, we have decided to change to a light gray color for the 99/4A and future home computers."

Functionally, the new gray 99/4A is identical to the black one that has been on the market for several years. The changes are essentially cosmetic, although the on/off switch has been moved to a more accessible location, and other cost reductions on the printed circuit board have been implemented.

FREE SPEECH SYNTHESIZER PROMOTION FOR 99/4A HOME COMPUTER ANNOUNCED BY TI

Texas Instruments has announced a new "free speech" offer to owners of its popular 99/4A Home Computer whereby consumers can buy certain software cartridges, cassettes, or albums and receive a free Solid State Speech™ Synthesizer valued at $99.95.

"Because of the overwhelming popularity of our previous free speech offer, TI is again making a free Solid State Speech Synthesizer available to consumers who buy a predetermined number of software packages for the 99/4A Home Computer," said Bill Turner, President of the Consumer Group.

Consumers can become eligible for the free speech promotion in one of the following three ways:

Buy six Solid State Software™ cartridges.

Buy two Software Albums.

Buy an Entertainment Value Pack and three Solid State Software Cartridges.

The Entertainment Value Pack is a collection of five cartridges and one cassette that sells for a suggested retail price of $99.95. If purchased separately, these packages would have a retail price of $154.70.

Consumers must purchase the above software between June 1, 1983 and January 31, 1984 to be eligible for the free speech promotion. All sales receipts and proof of purchase information must be submitted to TI no later than March 1, 1984.

NEW LOW-COST MODEM FOR COMPACT COMPUTER 40 AND 99/4A HOME COMPUTER FROM TEXAS INSTRUMENTS

A new low-cost modem for use with the Compact Computer 40 and the 99/4A Home Computer made its debut at the 1983 Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, held June 5-8.

The HX-3100 telephone modem is a 300 BAUD, full-duplex, direct-connect device that is Bell 103 compatible and operates in answer or originate modes. The modem plugs directly into the Compact Computer 40 through the built-in Hex-bus™ intelligent peripheral port eliminating the need for an RS232 interface. It also works with the 99/4A Home Computer through the Hex-bus Interface, PHP 1300.

The battery-operated unit is able to send and receive data simultaneously by using Frequency-Shift Keying (FSK). The manual-dial modem plugs directly into both the phone line and the telephone using standard modular plugs.

Used with the new Texas Instruments "Memo Processor with Data Communications" Solid State Software™ cartridge available for the CC-40 the new modem and the CC-40 provide a truly low-cost system for data communiations.

This configuration provides TI Compact Computer owners access to the TEXNET™ Information Service, which includes the SOURCE™ computer software service for business, education, and home entertainment, as well as access to Texas Instruments news and information. The modem gives users a low-cost means of accessing office, home, or public data base computers.

Powered by four AA alkaline batteries (not included), the modem is 5-13/16 x 4-9/16 x 1-5/16 inches and will fit easily into a briefcase along with the Compact Computer 40 and other Hex-bus-compatible peripherals. The HX-3100 Modem has a suggested retail price of $99.95, and will be available during the fourth quarter of 1983.

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