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CTW

31.10.88 BRITAIN'S TOP COMPUTER TRADE WEEKLY ISSUE 210

Lombard
Rally

Nov 8: Atari ST
Nov 15: Amiga
Nov 22: PC

See Page 8

MANDARIN
SOFTWARE

Sub-£100 ST console to hit UK

Atari is planning to launch an ST console into the UK next year, set to retail at under £100.

The firm is also hoping to be able to give early versions of the still unofficially confirmed ST Plus to software developers at the end of November.

The news that a third Atari console is on its way to the UK comes after CTW's exclusive revelations in August that a \$199 ST console was due to go on sale in the US next spring.

It was not sure then whether the product would be deemed suitable for the UK, but senior sources have revealed to CTW that after being shown to distributors in January it will be launched here in August, backed by TV advertising.

Atari's UK boss Bob Gleadow last week preferred not to comment on the new machine as the firm has recently begun a sales drive on its existing two console machines – the ultra-cheap but ancient VCS and the more expensive XE.

CTW's Atari source commented: "We're optimistic that the price can be kept down to below £100 at retail. That will mean the end of the 8-bit market as we know it."

"At the moment the C64 and Spectrum still have the bulk of the market but in '89

with the 16-bit games consoles such as ourselves and Nintendo it will be very different."

Atari is known to believe that it can continue selling its other consoles for at least another year despite the arrival of the ST machine. The VCS, for example, is due some extra add-ons such as light gun and the like that could stimulate demand.

Software for the console will be provided on cartridges with Atari likely to seek licence deals with software houses whereby the manufacturer itself will transfer titles to the new system. This has become more viable for Atari since the establishment over the past few weeks of a publishing division, which looks set to grow.

The software pricepoint is expected to be similar to that currently commanded by existing ST games – around £20.

"We're looking for a retail

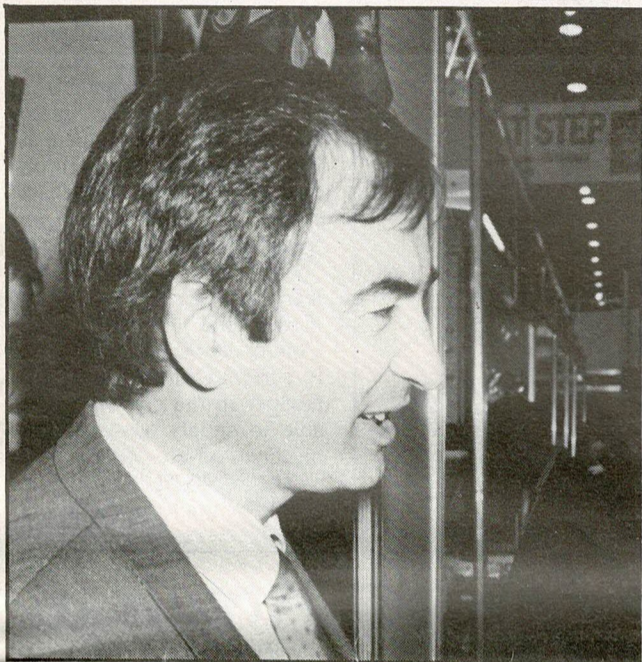
launch as late as August even though the machine will be ready before then. It's obviously a Christmas product and it'll be launched with TV advertising."

The ST Plus still looks set for its spring launch (CTW August 8th), although the pricepoint seems unlikely to be the originally hoped £399. Just short of £500 seems a better bet, thus giving Atari its usual scope for cuts at a later date.

Software houses will be shown the Plus in November. The machine will run old software but will require different programming for games to make full use of its better sound, colour and scrolling.

Atari is hoping that publishers will supply ST software with the mass appeal version on one side of the disk and the sexier Plus version on the other.

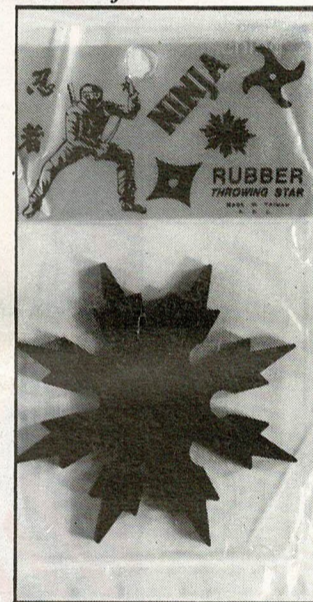
The ST Plus will be unveiled for the first time at the January CES in the US next year.



GLEADOW: Still no word on ST console or ST Plus

System freebie banned by Boots

Retailers throughout the trade – including major chain Boots – have reacted worriedly to the threat of injury caused by a free gift in System 3's *Last Ninja 2*.



System 3's controversial freebie

Boots has stipulated that it should not be supplied with any of the 25,000 'limited edition' *Ninja* boxes containing a plastic Shiraken Star – a toy version of a martial arts weapon.

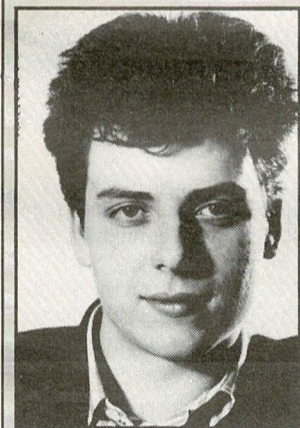
Several independent retailers also contacted CTW last week expressing doubts about whether they should continue to sell the game including the star. They were worried about their own legal position should injury be caused by the toy.

"Boots have asked that they shouldn't have the star. Some dealers are obviously taking it

Continued on back page

INSIDE: CBM shuffles business range

ARTISTIC LICENSE



Marc Ullrich's Rainbow Arts is Germany's biggest leisure publisher and hopes to be a coin-op contender in the new year. It's also looking for a slightly more up front UK profile..... 10

SCOTS MULL

Once again the Scottish dealers are bemoaning their fate with complaints of neglect and poor treatment by an essentially southern based industry..... 12

STATESIDE SHUFFLE

Elite has a dream, setting up its own offices across the Atlantic – an ambitious task and one which like of US Gold and Ocean have not felt up to. Can Elite go where others fear to tread?..... 18

SWISS WATCHING

We've had the French invasion, we've had the US invasion and now we have the Swiss, or perhaps more pointedly, here comes Linel..... 20

CHARTS 23

Commodore last week announced a range of new configurations and price cuts for its range of 286 and 386 business machines.

The move means that the firm's range of AT machines, the PC40-III series, starts £100 lower at £1,299. More importantly, however, the 40Mb hard drive version with VGA mono monitor falls £550 from £2,249 to £1,699.

The multi-configuration 386 machines, the long-awaited PC60, now start at £1,799 for a single drive mono monitor version with 512K.

"With these new configurations we've put together a complete range which allows either the dealer or the end-user to re-

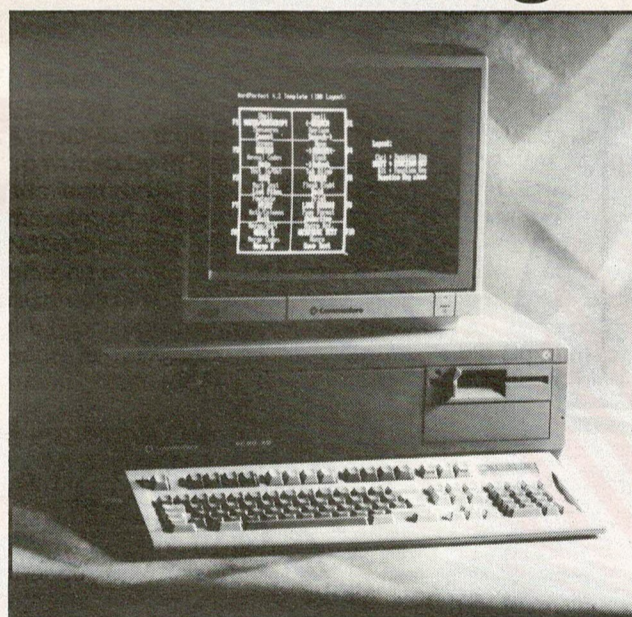
ally ramp up," commented Commodore's business division sales manager Andrew Cornish to CTW.

"The prices, particularly on the ATs, mean that we're now very, very competitive with a very good price."

Despite the sizeable cuts on the higher end machines – the top-end 386 has fallen from £5,459 to £3,599 – Commodore's range is still largely above the price points set by main rival Amstrad and its own PC2000 range comprising 8086, 286 and 386 machines.

"I don't directly price myself in relation to Amstrad," responded Cornish. "Our products' build and quality is totally different. There's the

Continued on page two



PC60: New entry level, top-end cut

Amstrad calls PC 200 summit



ROBACK: Calling summit, keeping quiet

Top software houses last week gave a cool reception to an Amstrad summit on the future of its Sinclair PC 200 range.

Around 10 publishers were represented including US Gold, Ocean, Virgin/Mastertronic, Elite, Mirrorsoft, MicroProse, Martech and CDS. Some of those invited, however, chose not to attend.

The forum follows a rather lukewarm trade reaction to the range and was used by Amstrad to outline the support it requires to improve the situation. Two of its suggestions

though seem to have been rejected by the software houses.

One Amstrad idea was to establish a £10 pricepoint for 3.5 inch PC software. All the firms contacted by CTW regarded this as an impractical suggestion and will almost certainly not be complying.

Mediagenic's UK boss Rod Cousens commented: "They've tried to do this before but if they want an original product that may be endorsed in some way or will challenge the machines capabilities then the retail price has got to reflect those increased costs."

"I do not believe that dic-

tates work. If hardware manufacturers could come to realise this then the marketplace would be much stronger for it."

Another Amstrad suggestion was that all the firms should join together in some sort of consortium in order to buy blank disks cheaply in bulk. Again though this was dismissed as impractical and looks highly unlikely to bear fruition.

Cousens offered: "Theoretically yes it can work, because of the increased buying power prices would be cheaper. But when you consider the compe-

Continued on page two

Tandy ups profits

Tandy UK's parent organisation InterTan Incorporated last week announced further improvements in its financial performance.

These latest figures have been released just prior to Tandy's annual November launch - which will see its revised range of PCs unveiled (CTW August 8th).

The results for the first quarter of 1989, ending September 30th, showed a 22 per cent in-

crease in sales rising from \$109.3 million in the previous year to \$132.8 million. The company is also posting a net income of \$3.3 million, a 35 per cent rise on \$2.4 million for the first quarter of 1988.

Although no separate quarterly figures are available, it is claimed that the results for the UK are substantially higher than they were for the same period last year.

Tandy UK is continuing its plans to expand to 400 outlets by 1990, and is set to open 8

new stores this month. The outlets will be spread throughout the country and include: Macclesfield, Manchester, Merthyr Tydfil, Doncaster, Folkestone, Ramsgate and Tottenham Court Road, London.

"The fact that we are expanding our operation is contrary to what the press has been saying about the computer retail trade, with the likes of Dixons not opening any new stores," UK vice president John Sayers told CTW.

BMF reveals show dates and details

The BMF has announced details of its first trade show but as yet has tied up no exhibitors.

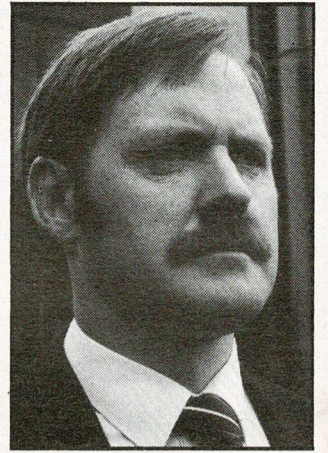
The show will be held at Olympia over the 18th and 19th April. The body is pitching the event as a serious and very much trade-only show.

BMF chairman David Fraser told CTW: "It will be strictly for manufacturers, distributors and publishers but no purchasers. Grandiose £150,000 stands will not be

needed or indeed welcome."

The show will take up a total floor space of 1,500 square metres with stands costing around £105 per square metre. A price reduction will be available for BMF members. Fraser commented that it was too early for any exhibitors to be confirmed, but claimed that "roughly ten" BMF members had promised to attend.

He went on: "The whole show will be designed around a single concept for the trade. There will be individual com-



FRASER: Show news

pany booths in the middle but surrounding the floor will be conference, presentation and meeting rooms."

CBM

Continued from front page

same sort of differential on the pricing of our 386s as there is on our XTs."

The new cuts and configurations should bring an end to Commodore's meanderings on business products' price and innards for the moment at least. These have been going on throughout the year, at the last count Commodore had no fewer than 34 different models.

The latest announcements mean that there is now six AT models and 17 386 models. Commodore is boasting that it is currently the only manufacturer in the country to be able to supply low-cost 386 machines off-the-shelf.

The PC 40-III 286 machine should be available within the next five weeks.

Amstrad

Continued from front page

titiveness between companies in this market then ultimately the idea breaks down as a result."

One solution that seems more acceptable to the publishers would be for Amstrad to use its own buying power to acquire the disks then pass them on. Currently the software houses are paying around £1.30 per disk, whilst Amstrad has a target of 30 pence.

Amstrad also made the general complaint that there was simply not enough PC software in the market. So far it looks like none of the publishers are willing to change their schedules to accommodate the firm's wishes.

Telecomsoft boss Paula Byrne was among those who declined the invitation. She told CTW: "They'd only have summoned everybody and said this is what you must do and this is what you must sell at. But I've always said that it's up to them to sell the machines and then we'll support it."

Those present were also told by Amstrad not to expect the Sinclair range "in any great volume" before Christmas, but to gear up for increased supplies in the new year.

Gremlin boss Ian Stewart was not actually invited but did offer some views on the subject. He noted that no development machines had been made available and summed up the Amstrad attitude as "we're the big boys you must do what we say".

Amstrad was predictably sensitive to the matter. Software development manager Peter Roback commented: "It's a little bit confidential that. It was a discussion about many things."

Christmas List

- Rebelstar II SPECTRUM · C64
- ~~Mountain Bike~~
- Skateboard Joust SPECTRUM · C64 · AMSTRAD
- Video Classics ATARI · C16 · BBC
- ~~Snooker Table~~
- Night Gunner SPECTRUM · AMSTRAD
- ~~P.A.~~
- Peter Pack Rat
- ~~Video~~
- Cauldron II
- International Speedway C64
- Motocross Mania SPECTRUM · C64 · AMSTRAD · MSX
- Billboard
- G.D. Flaxton

SILVERBIRD

What's on your list this Christmas?

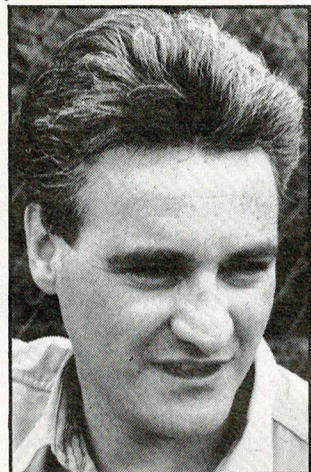


Telecomsoft, First Floor, 64-76 New Oxford St, London WC1A 1PS. Silverbird and Silverbird Logo, registration applied for.

All available on Spectrum Commodore 64 and Amstrad unless otherwise stated.

Gremlin cuts releases by half for "flooded" market

Gremlin has decided to more than half its number of original releases next year.



STEWART: Repositioning Gremlin with less product

By the end of December the firm will have published some 33 titles in 1988, but as part of its planned repositioning in the market it is expecting to produce only 12-15 games in 1989.

Gremlin is also in the process of moving out of its offices within the Centresoft/US Gold headquarters to another part of Birmingham. This is a move which it hopes will result in a greater perception of independence from the distribution and publishing combine.

"The decision on product has really come because the market is flooded over. More funds are required for the type of programming we're doing and these will demand a longer shelf-life," explained Gremlin's boss Ian Stewart to CTW. "We're also going to do

more promotion. We do a lot of promotion now, but we can give fewer products far more attention than you can when you're putting out five a month."

Gremlin announced earlier in the year that it is attempting to move further away from its historical positioning in the younger games purchasers' market. More expensive products such as the current *Federation of Free Traders* have replaced the firm's one time penchant for toy and children's TV Show licences.

Stewart added, however, that the youth market will not be forsaken altogether with several specifically targeted releases already planned.

Gremlin's future releasing schedule will be made up of products originally developed

on 16-bit formats and then converted down.

The cut in numbers means that one and a half to two times as much product will have to be shipped on each title. The move follows a similar decision by Ocean at the turn of last year - followed by a fair deal of success.

The 12-15 1989 releases will be supplemented by three or four compilations on the Star Games label. "We've always been one of the most prolific publishers and, yes, I suppose we are one of the last to cut back," added Stewart.

Gremlin is moving to offices in Ludgate Hill, near the centre of Birmingham. This will house all sales, marketing and PR staff with warehousing and accounts still being dealt with at Centresoft/US Gold.

"There's a number of reasons for the move, one being that there is pressure on space as the whole organisation is growing so rapidly. But also over the last year we have tended to become a little bit faceless, which has been detrimental. It'll be nice to have our own name over our own door again."

The "faceless" image even provoked some industry watchers into speculate that Gremlin was due to be swallowed up as just another US Gold label.

"I've always been the one who stands up and says sorry that's not the case, never has been the case and never will be. This is an independently run company apart from warehousing and accounts," responded Stewart.

Speller professes UK innocence from losses

Micropro UK was last week disassociating itself from the world-wide losses of \$5.1 million recently posted by its parent company.

The poor results for the year ending August 31st have led to vice president of international sales operations John Speller calling for the figures to be broken up for each territory.

Speller is claiming that the UK division has experienced a steady growth rate of around 30 per cent for the last two years. "The States has been very up and down, whereas the situation in the UK, and most of Europe has been relatively stable for some time," he told CTW.

Following Micropro's flotation in the US, the company was landed with a securities lawsuit with shareholders suing as a result of initial share prices being too high. A \$1.8 million settlement was finally reached.

The US arm ran into further problems with the delay of *WordStar Professional Release 5*, having taken large advanced orders before the product was ready. This is claimed to have had an adverse affect on revenues due to a subsequent six month delay for improvements.

As a result of its losses, the company called an emergency meeting last week in the US to provoke better feeling. "They outlined the new structure and



SPELLER: UK performing well, US not policies and I think everyone came away feeling more positive," added Speller.

Thaw comes for M-P PCW sales

Micro-Peripherals has resumed shipping of Amstrad PCW8256s after freezing stocks for a short period.

The distributor ceased selling the machines after several dealers complained about Amstrad's supply of German specification product (CTW October 10th).

The main problem with the German models was that peripherals interfaces were different to those required in the UK.

"Amstrad have located a dongle which effectively eradicates the problem," explained Micro Peripherals sales director Gordon McDowell to CTW.

He refuted any notions that M-P might have actually lost out because it stopped selling 8256s, whilst most other distributors continued shipping regardless.

"We certainly didn't lose any momentum. If anything, I think we came across quite well. Rather than just continuing to ship we made our customers aware of the problem.

"We were seen as being responsible and professional and the dealers respect us for that," added McDowell.

He also backed Amstrad's decision to import the German product into the UK - a move which Amstrad itself explained as a short term remedy to excess demand in the UK.

Amstrad Show shows drop in attendance

Database has reported a drop in attendance for the recently held Amstrad Show.

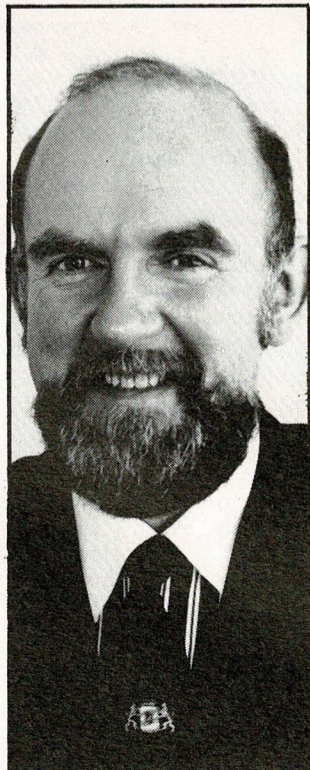
The show was held at Manchester's G-Mex centre over three days and attracted just 9,000 visitors. That represents a drop of over 1,000 on the last Manchester figure.

Database's Mike Cowley blamed the fall in attendance on the postal strike and claimed that the firm usually "do a bundle" on advance bookings, which were held up in the dispute.

He continued: "It's not a tremendous drop and I'm sure it could have been worse, both Saturday and Sunday were busy days. Anyway the purpose of these events is to sell things and I think the standard of visitor was high."

There were 74 exhibitors in all with the two major players in attendance being Amstrad itself and MAP. Cowley claimed that Database was not discouraged by the figures and that "things still bode well for next year".

The next Amstrad show is scheduled for Alexandra Palace running from 31st March to 2nd April.



COWLEY: Dropping figures

Emap boasts sell-out for new monthly

Emap is claiming a technical sell-out for its first issue of the computer games monthly, *The One*.

The 16-bit all format magazine launched at September's PC Show, had a print run of 49,300, with the print run for the second issue being subsequently increased to 50,000. A sales uptake of around 85 per cent means that the launch issue can be proclaimed a sell-out.

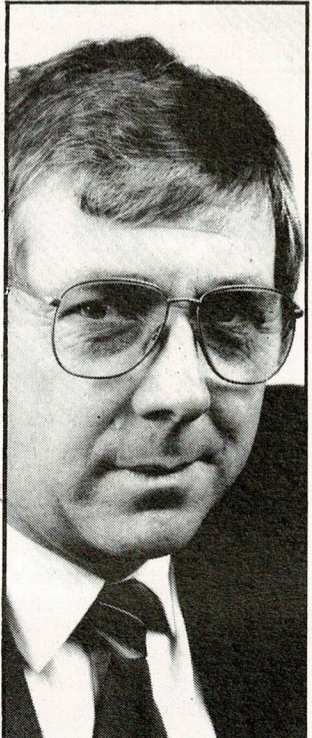
The latest issue sports a cover-mounted buyer's guide for ST and Amiga games, with a major promotion lined up for the Christmas issue.

Emap is also planning a big promotional spend on its other titles, *Computer and Video Games*, *Commodore User* and *Sinclair User*. Playable demos, full games, booklets and posters are all set to be part of the Christmas push.

"We're deeply committed to this market and are investing more money in our titles than ever before," Emap's marketing manager Clive Pembridge told CTW.

Barriers eradicated for Acorn threesome

Acorn has made changes to its distribution policy, which redefines the brief for Hugh Symons, AB First and Kelator.



SHERWOOD: Barriers dropped

Previously Acorn had looked to its distributors to specialise in specific market areas. This had been an informal agreement between the companies involved, with Hugh Symons concentrating on the music and health market.

The new arrangement will mean that both Kelator and AB First will now sell into these markets, whilst Hugh Symons will be approaching other sectors and selling into different areas.

By widening its distributors' market, Acorn hopes to eliminate claimed "artificial barriers" that have arisen. "Due to distributors concentrating on identified areas there was less activity than there might have been. We want our distributors to grow their businesses by approaching other sectors," commented general sales manager Terry Sherwood.

In the short term Acorn is not looking to appoint new distributors, although Sherwood did admit, "we are always reviewing the situation, if in due course it looks necessary then we will look at it".

CTW

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HAWKEYE

£9.99 cass £12.99 disk

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 ZZAPI Gold Medal and a Commodore User SUPERSTAR!

ARMALYTE

£9.99 cass £12.99 disk



THALAMUS

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Palan bosses plan Prestwich buy-out

Palan's parent group Prestwich is currently in the throes of an attempted management buy-out.

The company is currently quoted on the Stock Exchange, which according to Palan boss Lou Fine means that "the directors of the firm are directors in name and money only". Now though the firm's management team is attempting to gain control from those directors.

Fine told CTW that about £50 million is involved in the deal and that if everything goes to plan it will go through at Christmas time. He added that the general mood in the com-

pany was that the deal would almost certainly be completed.

"There is a feeling at the moment that the people on the board are not that involved with the company, whereas with a management buy-out the directors would be handling the day to day running of the firm."

Fine also revealed that much of Palan's time is currently being spent on preparing budgets and financial reports for its prospective new owners. He added that the affect any such deal would have on Palan would be minimal.

"We will just carry on as we are but with different people pulling the strings," he offered.



FINE: Christmas buy-out

Channelmark widens UK distribution net

Channelmark has appointed two more distributors, with the signing of Gem and Centresoft to handle its Power Uprange of software.

The company has an existing two year distribution deal with Softsel, which along with Centresoft will take the full range of Power Up products.

Gem, however, will only be taking a selection of the Power Up software to compliment its existing range of business packages.

"With the proved professionalism of Centresoft and Gem, we felt that they would fit well into the existing skill offered by Softsel," Channelmark's UK boss Graham

Lomax told CTW.

Centresoft has been looking to make greater inroads into the business market for some time and Lomax believes that the company will be "a little hungrier because they are emergent in this field".

"Centresoft now has a complete business catalogue with as little fuss as possible. We could offer them 24 products and a 300,000 user base with a single purchase order, obviously we are both going to benefit from the deal," commented Lomax.

Channelmark is not looking to tie any more distribution deals. "If we chopped the UK market up any smaller there would not be enough for anybody."



LOMAX: Distribution widened

Wargame label proves Atarisoft intentions

Atari is planning to launch its own wargames label - which could eventually be publishing across all formats.

Called Battlescapes, the label will feature a range of "classic" battles from ancient Rome to "modern scenarios".

The first will be *Borodino*, which was apparently the inspiration for Tchaikowsky's 1812 Overture.

The firm's marketing services manager Darryl Still claimed that a new label was needed for the games because of their marked difference to any previous product. He de-

scribed Battlescapes as "a whole new system of wargaming".

He continued: "You see all the battles in 3D and the scenes are exactly as the battlefields looked, it really is incredibly realistic."

The only release on the label due before Christmas is

Borodino on the ST. After that games will be released roughly every three months with an Armada game featuring high on the schedule.

Initially all the games will be available only on ST, with Amiga versions following. There are no definite plans as yet for 8-bit versions but Still offered: "If it will work on 8-bit formats then we'll do it, but obviously it won't look as good."

All the games will be priced at £29.95 and will be packaged with a glossy battle history and map.

Schneider takes on MSL for UK

Schneider has appointed Akhter offshoot MSL as its second UK distributor.

The Harlow based firm is expected to start shipping the German manufacturer's range of PCs, XTs and portables early next month.

Negotiations have been held between the two companies for some time. MSL was formed by Akhter in July as a distribution-only operation. It already has agreements with Canon, Philips, Star, Citizen, Hitachi, Accodata and Hyundai.

"They gave the equipment a very sound examination and were happy with what they saw. We thought they could do a good job with it so we got together," commented

Schneider's UK marketing liaison co-ordinator Cliff Preston to CTW.

Schneider appointed Greyhound as its first UK distributor earlier this month (CTW October 10th). MSL is rather more established in the business market, although it is still not one of the high profile UK PC distributors.

Schneider expects to appoint other distributors in the near future and is currently in the middle of a trade and consumer advertising campaign.

The £399 entry level Euro PC will be advertised in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* just prior to Christmas.

"When you consider that it's got *Microsoft Works* in there worth £145 the Euro's a very good bargain," added Preston.

Citizen passes UK milestone

Citizen was busy celebrating last week, when the 100,000th computer printer rolled off its Scunthorpe production line.

Having recently launched its low-end 180E printer, the company is also toasting the new model's success, claiming that after one month 30 per cent of its entry level sales are made up by the British built printer.

In January this year, production of Citizen's entire range of dot matrix printers was switched from Japan to Scunthorpe and the company now boasts a run of 1,450 units per day.

Citizen is set to move to a larger plant in the centre of Scunthorpe by the beginning of next year and is estimating runs of over 30,000 units a



Model Citizen workers welcome 100,000th printer

month, with staff of around 300.

The company is also forecasting the sale of over 315,000 units by March 1989

with a turnover of £52 million.

"This is a significant milestone for Citizen. We are now a truly European operation and the next few months will be an

exciting time when we can expand production and realise our full potential," commented Rokuro Otake boss of Citizen Manufacturing (UK).

CBM prepares Beebsoft taster

Commodore is due to preview its long-awaited BBC emulator for the Amiga at the forthcoming Commodore Show.

There is still no definitive availability date for the product and no inclination on price. At the moment Commodore is only offering that the emulator will be available "very soon" after the Show.

BBC emulation is being pitched as a major boost to Commodore's hard work in the education sector which has carried on throughout the year.

"In one fell stroke it absolutely eradicates any objections authorities might have to putting Amigas in schools due to software investment," commented Commodore's UK marketing manager Dean Barrett to CTW.

"Once this product has arrived the only obstacle then will be that Acorn has been in the education market longer than us - and that can be overcome by thoughtful marketing."

The Commodore Show, dubbed a "Christmas" Show, will be held at the London Novotel from November 18-20.

Cecil switches Gold for Genic

Charles Cecil is leaving his job as product development manager at US Gold to take over the same mantle at Mediagenic.

Although this may appear to be something of a step sideways, Cecil himself sees the move as a career advancement. He told CTW: "At US Gold I'm third line management, but at Activision I'll be responsible directly to Rod Cousens so I'm looking forward to that."

"I'm also going to be sourcing arcade licences for the firm and I'm looking forward to being responsible for a product from beginning to end. At least if they fail I'll know it was my fault."

Cecil has been with US Gold for 15 months. He claimed that his departure was amicable and added that it came from Mediagenic's instigation rather than his own job-hunting.

Cecil takes up the new post next week and US Gold is currently seeking a successor.

New Hugh Symons trip promo looms

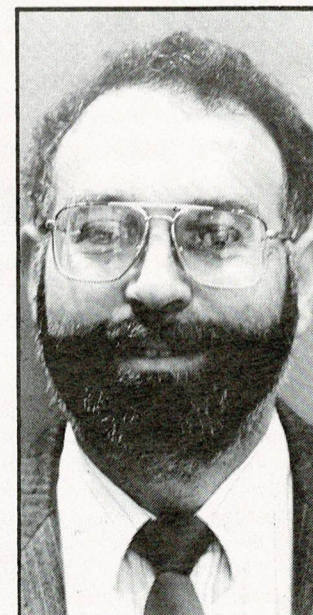
Distributor Hugh Symons is currently beaver away to put together yet another dealer holiday incentive.

The company has also reported a good take-up on first shipments of Amstrad's PC2086 - the first product to become available from the new PC2000 range launched in September.

Hugh Symons ran its first ever holiday incentive - offering a trip to Monte Carlo - last winter. It is now planning another, despite noting that the incentives areas has turned into something of an uncontrollable fad.

"The industry has set a standard and if you don't follow suit you get left out. They're all a bit me-tooish, but we're trying to come up with something lovely, exciting and glamorous," commented Hugh Symons director Kenneth Abrahams to CTW.

The incentive will apply to dealers buying all Hugh Symon's product lines - which include Amstrad, Commodore, Atari, Acorn, Cambridge Computer, Samsung and Citizen.



ABRAHAMS: Trip hawking

Meanwhile, Hugh Symons has recently shipped two consignments of Amstrad PC2086s, totalling over 100 units.

"They're selling very nicely. The dealers have taken the product well, although I think end-user awareness is not as high as it could be. But then Amstrad's advertising is yet to come," added Abrahams.

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- ★ 5 ADVENTURE GAMES
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* Depending on Quantity

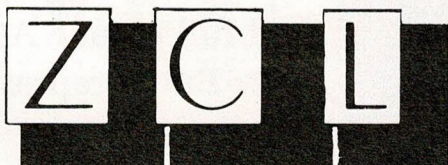
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Budgeteers secure Database catalogue

Alternative has secured publishing rights to all Database back-catalogue titles.

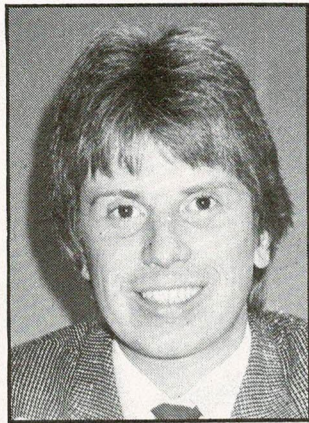
The deal basically means that when Database decides a product has outlived its usefulness as a full price title it will be given over to the R&R offshoot. So far the only titles involved are *Mini-Office 2* and Atari titles.

Alternative boss Roger Hulley commented: "To be honest

budget distribution is specialised to a certain degree and there is no-one that can hold a candle to us when it comes to re-issuing back-catalogue."

It is expected that Database's Mandarin label will eventually be involved but Hulley conceded that "it will be a long time before any of their games are ready for budget release."

The titles will all be appearing on either the Alternative label or Summit. The first re-



HULLEY: Budget deal lease will be *Mini Office 2* on Summit at £2.99 in mid-November.

The Atari titles will appear in the new year.

Acquired Eidersoft takes direct route

16-bit. Software firm Eidersoft has been bought out by Bedford based Power Computing, which has formed a new distribution wing.

All Eidersoft accounts, staff and lines will be kept on by the hardware manufacturer, with the major thrust of the new company being greater emphasis on direct selling both to dealers and the general public. The company has created

the new division Power House Distribution to take on its entire range of products.

The main reason for the company's decision to go direct is anger over the discounting of its products. "The situation had got ridiculous, and that's why we decided to take a similar stance to US Gold. We will be offering a maximum discount of 45 per cent on software and 35 per cent on hardware," general manager Ken Browning told CTW.

"We don't expect to cure

things overnight, but we want to see accurate and positive placement of our products supported by promotional materials. In the past we've placed over £10,000 on advertising only to see Joe Soap advertising for half the price it should be."

Browning did offer a placatory note to distributors. "We don't want them to get too upset by saying they did a shitty job, but our kind of area is just not suited to mainstream distribution."

The new Power Computing will market its products under the Triangle title for hardware and the Eidersoft label for software and music products.

Virgin poaches

Virgin/Mastertronic has announced two new appointments - Lesley Walker as PR manager and Andrew Wright as budget product manager.

Wright joins from Activision where he was press officer and "ambassador". He was also responsible for the foundation of Newsfield's software arm Thalamus a couple of years ago.

At Virgin/Mastertronic he will be responsible for the "direction and development" of the budget labels. One of his targets is to step up the firm's range of re-releases after the success of last year's Activision deal.

Walker joins the firm from Barrington Harvey PR and will be responsible for all the firm's PR activities including the national TV and radio push for the Sega console. Both announcements follow the recent appointment of Terry Jeffries as key accounts manager.

Virgin/Mastertronic's managing director Nick Alexander described the moves as part of the firm's formation of a "considerable management team that can attack all sections of the market".

Active signs again

Active has signed an exclusive marketing and distribution deal with German software firm EAS.

Active will be handling EAS' most recent release, *Zero Gravity* which will be available at the end of October on the ST, Amiga and 64 formats. It will also be distributing an EAS music programme *The Ultimate Soundtracker* which will also be on the market at the end of this month.

"There is a lot of good software coming from Germany at the moment and EAS is at the forefront of that software. We are always eager to deal with quality products," commented Active boss Robert Stallbrass to CTW.

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FULL STOCKS NOW AVAILABLE

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for the Holy Grail
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MANDARIN

SOFTWARE

Level 9

Format	Tape	Disc	Price
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Amiga		●	£19.95
Amstrad PC, IBM PC and compatibles		●	£19.95
Amstrad CPC/PCW/Spectrum Plus 3		●	£19.95
Commodore 64	●	●	£14.95
Spectrum	●	●	£14.95
Amstrad CPC	●	●	£14.95
*Atari XL/XE	●	●	£14.95
BBC Master		●	£14.95
*Apple II		●	£14.95
Macintosh		●	£19.95
MSX 64K	●		£14.95

*These formats and all tape versions are text only.

Screen shots from Atari ST version

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SNIPPETS

The Games Machine has followed up CTW's exclusively revealed news that Konix is planning to launch its own games console in January (CTW October 3rd). According to TGM the £130 machine has a working title of Slipstream and 18 software houses have pledged to produce three titles each in the first year. The latter point seems rather premature at this stage as does the notion that game cartridges will cost a staggering £50 each... One time Hewson PR executive Julia Coombs has

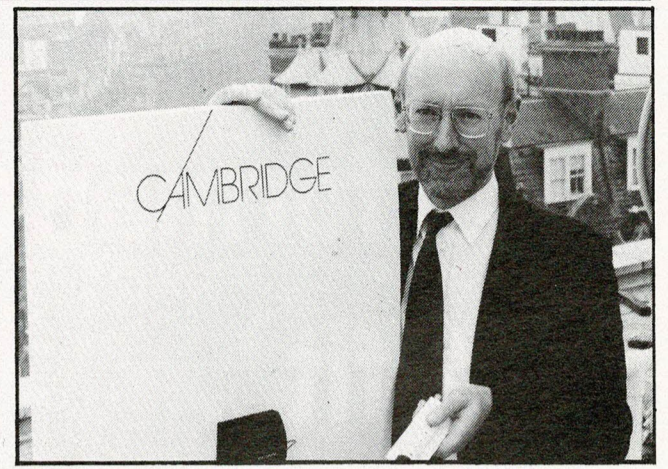
returned to the leisure industry after 18 months at Key Communications. She has joined Telecomsoft as sales and marketing support



COOMBS: Returning via BT

manager... Commodore Computing International has tied up a deal with Intrnational Periodical Distribution (IPD) in the US to distribute some 10,000 copies of the monthly to US computer dealers. Although, CCI doesn't file for ABC figures it claims that overall sales are 45,000 copies per issue... Sir Clive Sinclair's Cambridge Computer is set to enter the satellite broadcasting market with a new receiver. This news comes more than four years after Sir Clive first

promised to produce inexpensive equipment for Satellite TV. The dish is a flat square measuring 60cm across and capable of receiving at least 14 channels from the Astra satellite due to be launched in December. The basic unit is priced at £149.95 and will be available early next year... Staving of concerns that the US personal computer market is slowing down, Apple and Microsoft have reported strong growth in sales and earnings. Apple is claiming net sales of \$1.2bn



Sir Clive's new satellite baby

for its fourth quarter, a 49 per cent increase over last year. Net income for the quarter is up 51 per cent to \$107.9bn. Microsoft is also boasting record first quarter results with a 72 per cent increase in revenue reaching \$176.4m, and net income up 72 per cent to \$36.6m... A new hard disk system for the Amstrad PPC has been launched by Cumana. A 20Mb or 30Mb version is available, with both containing a Kyocera drive mechanism and stepper motor. The drives slot into the expansion port of the PPC and are priced at £464 and £489 respectively... Her Majesty's Stationary Office will now be stocking Tandon has set up shop in Europe, with a new manufacturing facility in Vienna. The factory has already started production of Tandon personal computers, previously produced in Los Angeles and Singapore. The new Austrian plant will be responsible for the production of all machines sold in Europe, which last year reached an estimated 100,000 units... Keyboard manufacturer Paperback Software has finally released its new catalogue of products for PC and PCW users. Better late than never, the book is claimed to be a complete guide to paperback's full range of software... Accodata is offering a 'buy one get one free' promotion in a bid to boost sales of its new products. The offer lasts until the end of December, and purchasers of any new product from Accodata's autumn collection will receive one free accessory. For example lucky purchasers of Glarecare glass screen filters will be given a free PC cleaning kit worth £16... Superbase Professional from Precision has undergone further enhancements and now contains many of the features included in Superbase 4. Version 3 includes cut, copy and paste facilities, communications facilities and multi-line transaction handling. The new Superbase Professional is the same price as its earlier versions at £249.95 for Amiga and ST... Scanner specialist Cameron has launched a new range of scanner products. They include a Handy Mouse (£49.95), plus three variations on the original Handy Scanner. Type 2 (£199.90), 3 (£299.90 and 5 (£299.90) all have additional features. Cameron is also offering a personal A4 scanner (£590).

Lombard



rally



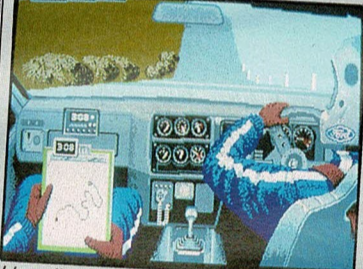
Atari ST, Amiga and PC £24.95



See the driver steer and change smoothly through each of the gears



Drive down twisty lanes at night with an incredible 3D view of the road



Use all your powers of concentration to negotiate the mountain range



Build up or repair your car at any time in the well-equipped workshop
Screenshots from Atari ST version

Five... four... three... two... one... GO!

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● Inside every box: A detailed 16-page booklet containing a history of the rally and technical specification of the Cosworth, 15 maps to help you plot out your course, and a colourful sticker to commemorate your participation in the rally.

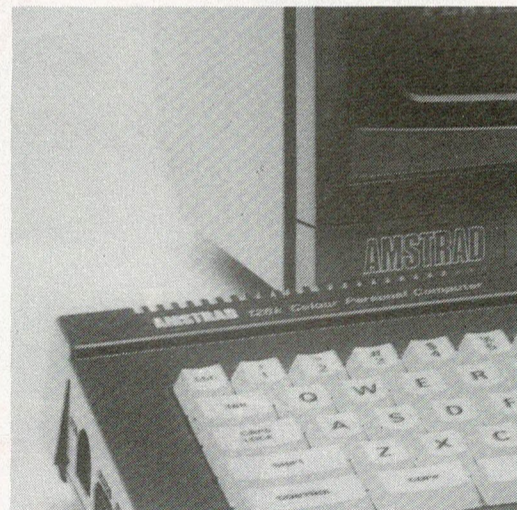
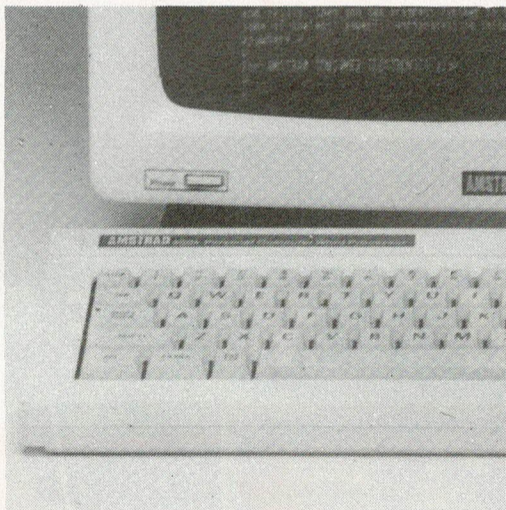
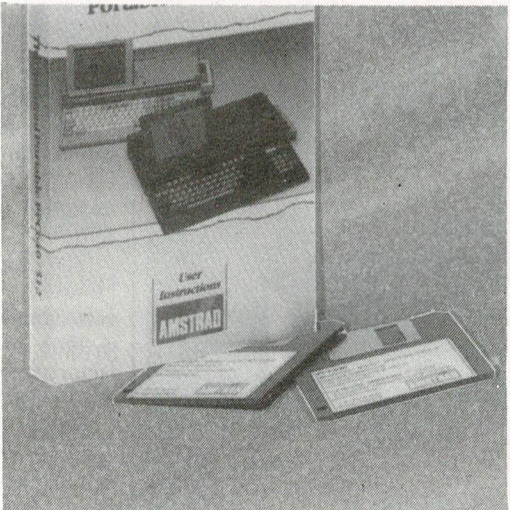
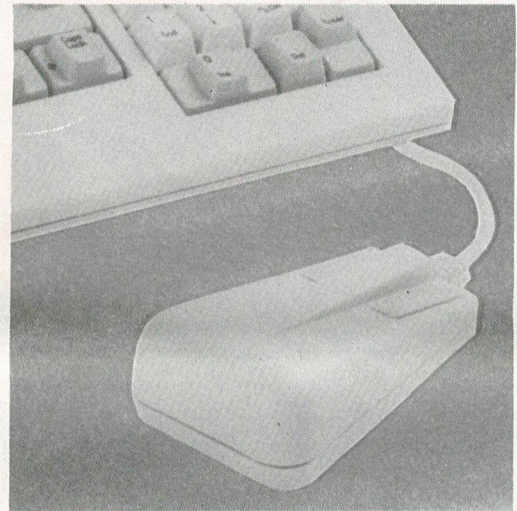
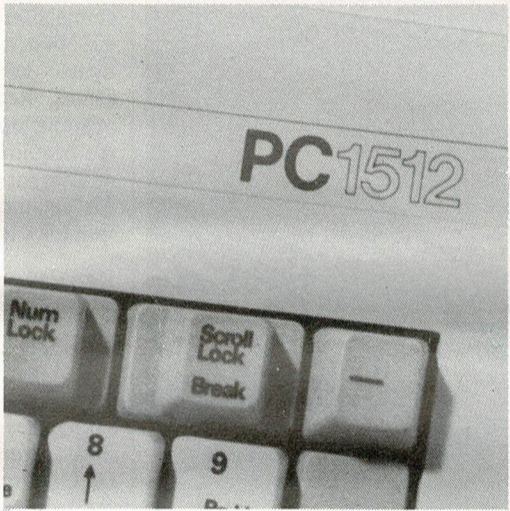
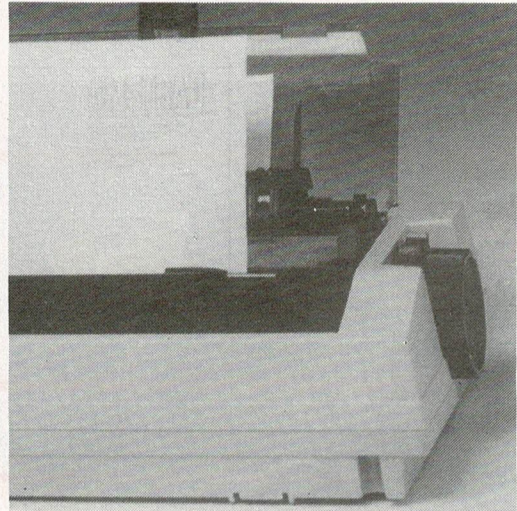
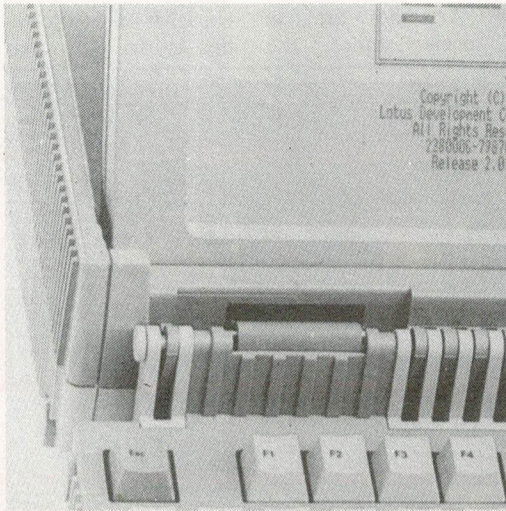
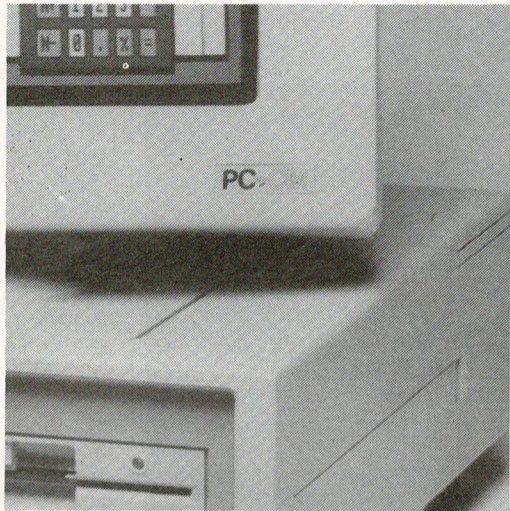
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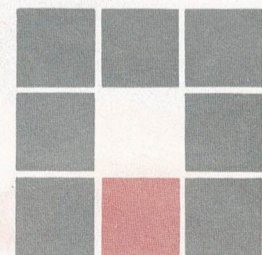
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THE FINE ART OF SURFACING

Rainbow Arts has always been something of an invisible entity in the UK, with its games being published here through other firms — usually US Gold. But just lately Germany's biggest homegrown games firm has been in the news in its own right. DAVE ROBERTS spoke to boss Marc Ullrich about copyright, Gold, coin-ops, Rushware and its UK profile . . .

The Rainbow Arts story is something of a cliché. It's the sort of computer tale so beloved of all soaraway tabloids sniffing for stories to fit their preconceived 'computer whizz-kid makes a mint' headlines.

The whizz-kid in this case is Marc Ullrich. He established Rainbow Arts four years ago in

his home town of Gutersloh when he was just 18. The firm now has Dusseldorf offices, and is the largest leisure publisher in Germany with a turnover last year of around £6 million.

According to Ullrich the start of the rainbow was a response to a "stupid situation" in Germany. "There were no

home based software houses then. People were playing games but they were all American or British imports. I knew we had programmers who could do the job, so I set up the first German firm."

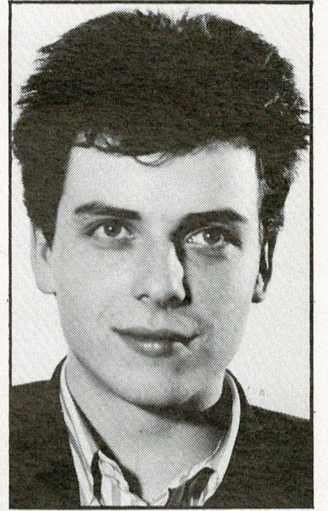
The first became the biggest and now as well as the original Rainbow Arts there are five other labels under the

umbrella. They are Time Warp, Reline, Soft Gold, Digital Artwork and Rainbow Games — the latter being the firm's venture into the coin-op market.

In Germany all the firm's products are distributed exclusively by Rushware. But Ullrich is keen to point out that this is the only connection.

Indeed, there are slight traces of annoyance at the commonly held belief in this country that the ties between the two companies go somewhat deeper.

He does, however, offer a comment on the recent Mirror group acquisition of the German distribution giant: "The whole thing could be a



ULLRICH: Thoughts on a new UK approach

good situation for us. There will obviously be more money, more facilities and better UK connections. I know Microdealer and I know Lee Ginty, and I like the way they work."

Rainbow Arts' other UK connection is US Gold which has first refusal on British rights to all the firm's games. Recently though the relationship has been hitting the headlines for some rather unpleasant reasons and subsequently rumours of a split have been rife.

Brothers and sisters

Firstly, Rainbow Arts' *Great Giana Sisters* was withdrawn from this country due to some striking similarities to Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers*. Then US Gold rejected five more of the firm's titles due to worries about copyright infringements.

"Quite simply they decide title by title whether they want to distribute our games or not and they decided no on those games. But we are happy with US Gold, they do a good job for us and it is silly to talk of a split."

The whole episode did, however, add fuel to accusations that Rainbow Arts is little more than a clone factory and originality is not exactly the firm's strong point.

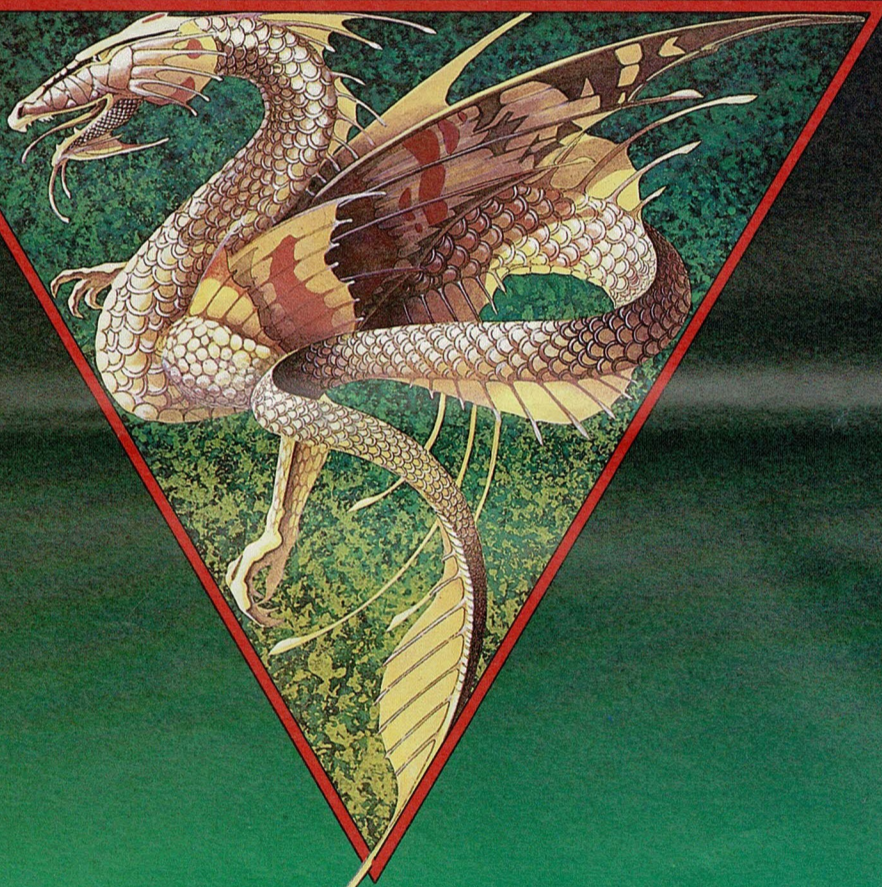
Ullrich admits that his company does get 'inspired' by certain games, but denies that these influences show so clearly as to constitute an offence. "A few years ago everyone was doing this sort of thing and no-one complained then. Anyway basically there are only four types of games so there are bound to be similarities."

He has a point of course. But this is certainly not a simple case of victimisation. Other publishers do tend to make more of an effort to disguise any common ground as well as adding sundry features to detract from the inherent similarities of any particular genre.

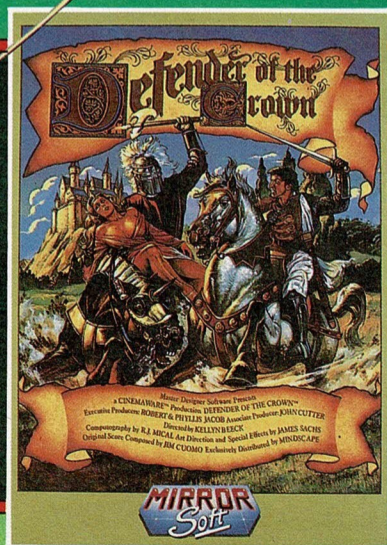
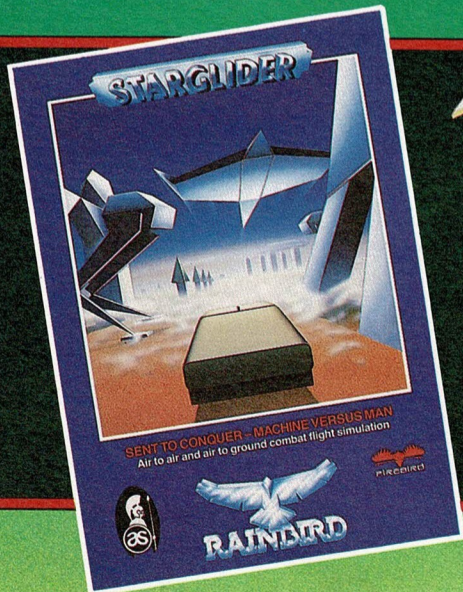
Ullrich is currently negotiating with Nintendo's lawyers in an attempt to find a "constructive solution". No doubt the two sides definition of a "constructive solution" differ wildly, but to Ullrich it is safe to assume that getting

Continued on page 25

T'R I A 'D



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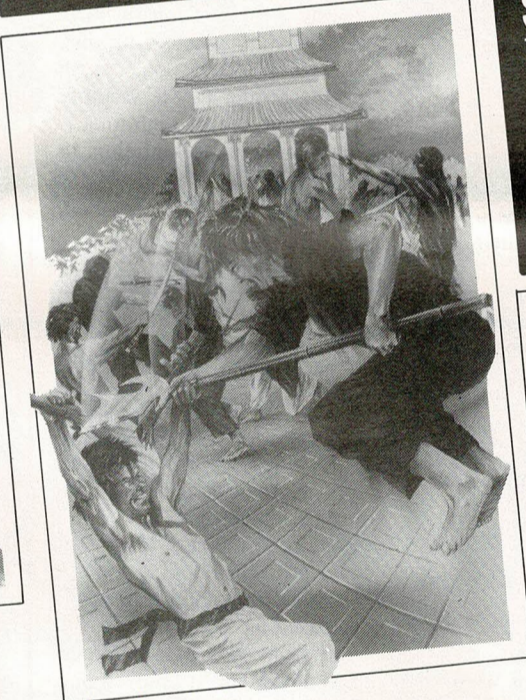
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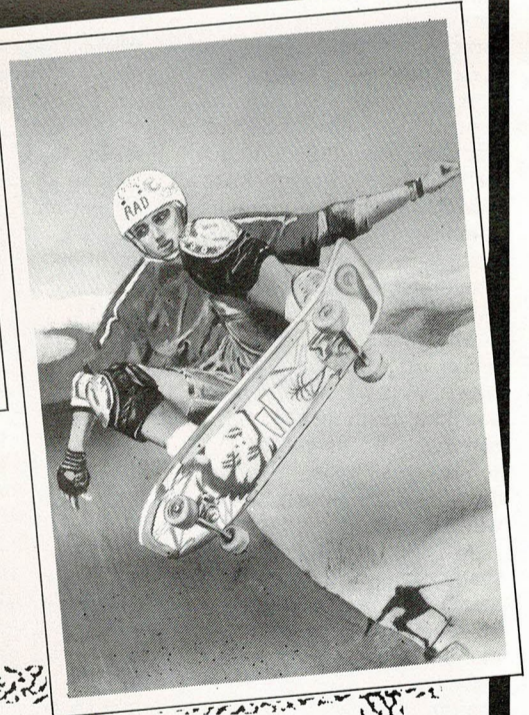
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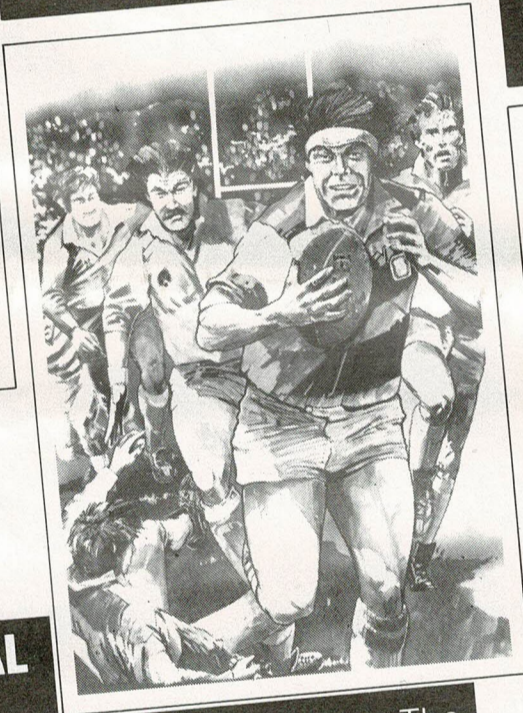
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ARE YOU GEARED UP FOR GREMLINS LATEST SMASHER...

HIGHLAND HARD REIGN

Scottish dealers are fed-up. Claims of neglect and shoddy treatment have gone unheeded by the industry for too long. KELLY BESWICK listens to the gallic grumbles of a lonely clan...

The North/South divide is nothing new. For centuries Scotland has been part of, yet distinctly separate from Great Britain. It is a country that has retained its unique culture and strong, identity, a country that is proud of its origins.

Unfortunately, the Scots people have rarely had the benefits of both worlds, and whilst being part of Great Britain it is often neglected in matters of politics and industry. The computer industry appears to be following this traditional pattern, much to the annoyance of many Scottish retailers.

In an attempt to give themselves a stronger and more united identity, a band of independent Scottish dealers got together back in 1986 to form a Scottish retailers association called MICROS.

As the association approaches its second birthday, many dealers do not feel that there is an awful lot to celebrate, with continuing complaints of neglect resulting from a lack of service and commitment from the industry.

MICROS has had its successes, particularly in the case of piracy. But it has been unable to really penetrate the majority of manufacturers, software houses and distributors - nearly all of which are based in the south.

MICROS got off to a rather shaky start, and unrest among members caused the body to be reorganised after just six months. He has since found stability in the form of chairman Walter Taylor, who runs the Cumbernauld outlet Megabyte.

The body now has nine active members with 14 on the books, and holds regular monthly meetings in which

retailers air complaints, attempt to increase buying power and forge closer links with the industry.

Taylor admits that the organisation has been slow in taking off. "We are all extremely busy people and there cannot always be enough continuous pressure from us. Initially we thought MICROS could make an impression overnight, but we now realise it is going to take a lot longer to do it right".

Taylor believes that the problem for Scottish retailers is not so much one of distance. And as several dealers have pointed out, the US can hardly be considered a neighbouring country, but the support and commitment offered by American companies often far exceeds that of their English counterparts.

Many dealers see the problem as being purely one of sales. Companies are simply not prepared to make an investment of both time and money in an area which they believe cannot, through the size and location of its population, return the investment in volume of sales.

Taking the lone road

This leaves the Scottish dealer in an awkward position, one of essentially going it alone. POS material is a particular sore point and tends to highlight the situation. According to Taylor, point of sale material and the various literature that comes with a product very rarely makes its way to the small Scottish dealer.

"When it comes down to it if you want to promote a particular brand of product then you have to make a trip to the printers. I'm not talking about high powered advertising, just simple things

like posters."

The MICROS association has made inroads into this problem and has been active in developing ways of mounting united campaigns on products so that the manufacturers' backing is forthcoming rather than latent. This Christmas MICROS plans a seven product promotion for its members, which will be advertised in main Scottish newspapers.

Distributor Lightning recently held a Scottish sales presentation in a bid to push the Commodore range north of the border (CTW October 17th), and whilst Lightning is claiming the presentation to have been a success Taylor disagrees. "Since the visit they have let us down badly, all the promises of literature etc. have so far not materialised. Scottish dealers are simply not considered enough."

This view is reiterated by Lorraine Stewart of the Micro Shop, Glasgow: "Some companies are now making trips up to dealers in Scotland, but basically it is a short-lived exercise to increase sales with very little back-up."

Neil Cappleman of Comsoft is based in Coldstream, one mile from the English border, and notes that "if I moved one mile in the right direction, I've no doubt that I would get a lot more stuff".

"The only way to find anything out is to go to the shows, but even there most of the firms don't want to know you unless you're placing £30,000 worth of orders. When a regular customer comes along they turn their backs and ignore you. They just don't think there are many customers in Scotland worth bothering about."

The Amiga Centre Scotland



is one of the few distributors based north of the border, and being a retail outlet as well boss Martin Lowe is well aware of the problems that Scottish dealers face. But as a member of MICROS he feels that the organisation will not have much affect.

"Most companies have neither bases, depots or sales reps in Scotland and you end up being treated like you're on

the other side of the planet," comments Lowe.

Rep neglect

Lowe feels that the neglect dealers are experiencing is caused by a lack of understanding in many parts of the industry. "A number of companies have appointed sales teams for the north, but this encompassed Manchester

right up to Scotland and few calls will bring the rep across the border."

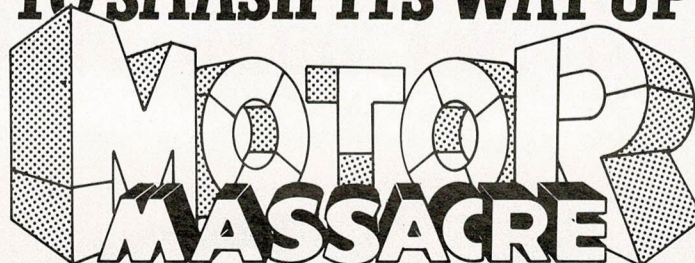
Stewart finds the whole situation very frustrating. "I resent the fact that they send a rep up on a one-off, who sells you a product along with the service and then vanishes."

"In practical terms you're constantly dealing with people on the phone. I end up

Continued on page 26

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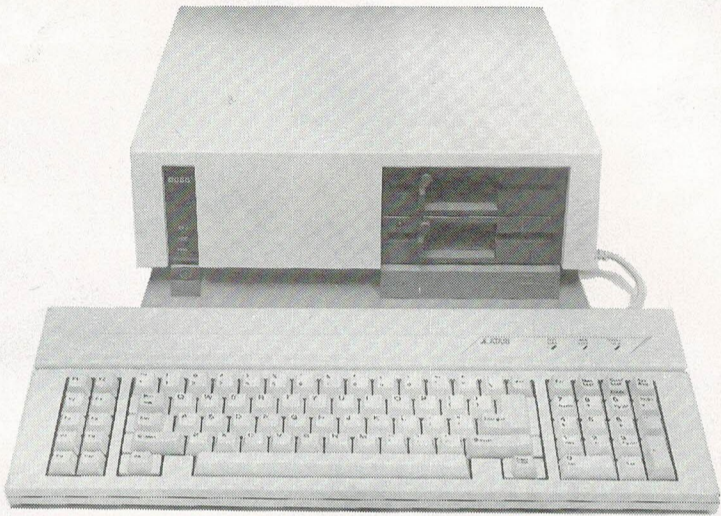


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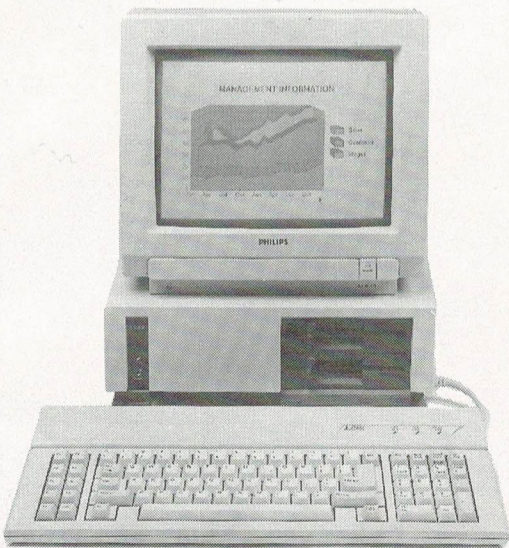
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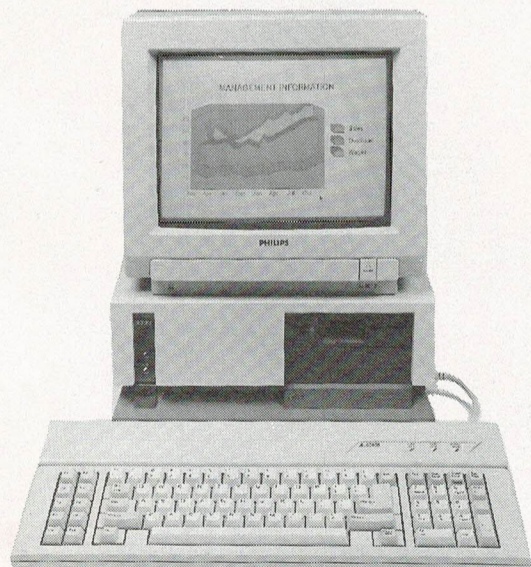
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SOFTWARE: NOW IS THE WINTER OF THIS CONTENT

A smattering of the big autumn leisure titles have already appeared and a long, long list of other hopefuls will be appearing within the next month. MIKE SCIALOM sits amongst a pile of games and tries to pick the essential shelf-space takers . . .

The computer games market is now geared up for the annual Christmas dash. With each successive year, those in the retail and distribution trades must tap in to what the customer really wants, and then buy products that meet expectations and are available at the right time.

This year, based on observing six successive Christmases before this one, I'm going to make a rough guess at what is going to happen saleswise and list some of the products that should end up in the charts in December.

The thing is, the whole ball-game is becoming incredibly tense. Too many products being released means that, inevitably, the survival of the fittest results in some titles getting lost, though they would have fared differently in other circumstances.

This responsibility is the publishers, and the main one to recognise it is Rainbird - which has wisely held back many of its bigger titles until January.

I see Rainbird as the most evolved publisher in the UK at the moment, with a superb summer performance that produced titles that sold and still sell months later, including *UMS*, *Carrier Command*, *Corruption*, *Elite* and *Starglider II*.

Its success suggests users know what they want, and sales can be made throughout the year because there is always demand for good product. In other words, original programs that set you up for a good few weeks entertainment rather than a make-a-buck coin-op conversion that will only ever be a largely fashion-influenced market.

It's easy to spot the latter category, they're the ones that

end up on a compilation within the year, like *Platoon* this year and *Rambo III* probably next.

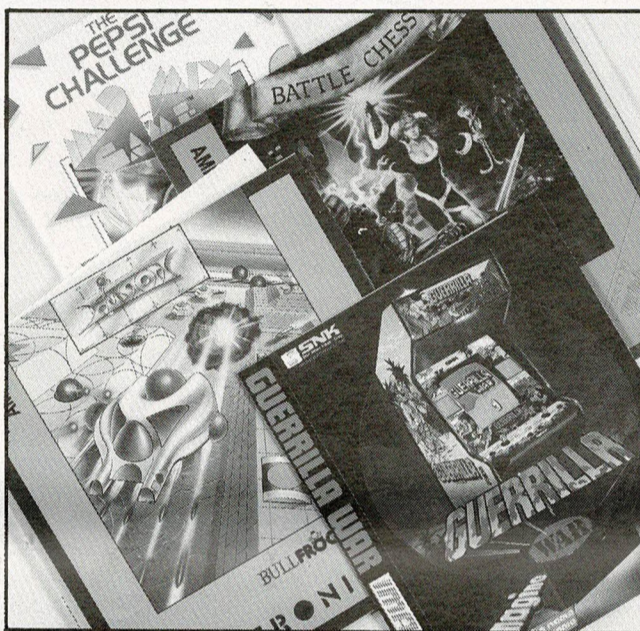
That said, it looks as though the biggest sellers this Christmas will be coin-op conversions, because they sell across both the 8-bit formats (Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad) and the 16-bit successes (the ST, Amiga and to a lesser extent - this year - the PC). The 16-bit versions we can expect to be amazing, with the 8-bit versions selling because they are marketed so well. Sales are swinging towards the ST and Amiga, but even so the by volume split is about 75% 8-bit and 25% 16-bit, although sales by value are much nearer the 50-50 mark.

This year looks like a close race between Ocean's *Operation Wolf* and Activision's *Afterburner*, with US Gold's *Thunderblade* a close third. Pre-launch hype is already at fever pitch. Activision claims pre-shipment sales of 250,000 units for *Afterburner*, which along with *R-type* and *SDI* are getting TV advertising.

However, the current credibility of the software house itself is hugely important and in this respect the public can't be fooled. Thus I recommend software houses before individual product, with Rainbird/Firebird (what is the difference anyway?) and Ocean at the top of the heap, followed by US Gold (too many missed release dates in the last few weeks), Mirrorsoft, Electronic Arts, Activision and Logotron.

Nor can one ignore Incentive, Hewson and Elite. Domark somehow defies analysis, both to its credit and its detriment, and I'll let you decide where it appears.

BT first. Firebird has got



The Christmas surge begins....

Savage on the 8-bits, *Elite* on the Amiga, *Star Trek* ('funnily enough I don't think it will fall flat on its face') on the C64, Amstrad and PC and a three-player *Exploding Fist Plus* on C64 and Spectrum all due out in November. Rainbird has a 'rave conversion' with *Carrier Command* on the Spectrum out in early December (all December releases are out in the first ten days of that month). *Verminator* on the ST and a new Magnetic Scrolls adventure called *Fish!* on the three 16-bit formats complete the label's 'quiet time' this Christmas.

Crowded out

Ocean has Taito's *Operation Wolf* (20th November) and *Dragon Ninja* (December), followed up by the less likely *WEC Le Mans* and *Robocop*. Weighing in with what must be the biggie compilation, Ocean rehashes *Platoon*, *Gryzor*, *Predator*, *Karnov*, *Barbarian*,

Target Renegade, *Crazy Cars* (*Last Ninja* on the C64) and *Combat School*. Called *In-Crowd*'s on all 8-bits at £12.95 tape and £17.95 disk. Don't ignore a 'totally new version' of *Batman* by Special Effects either (all six formats).

US Gold has *Thunderblade* out in December, with 'ten front covers lined up'. *Heroes of the Lance* and *Pools of Radiance* might make *Dungeons and Dragons* a big new market. Its compilations - *Giants*, *History in the Making*, *Command Performance* and *Sportsworld '88* - isn't that impressive. The *Pepsi Challenge* concept sounds like a restless maze game - a marketing concept without substance.

Mirrorsoft looks strong with *F16 Falcon* just out on EGA MS-DOS machine. ST and Amiga versions are out late November. *Bombuzal* has already won great reviews. It's an abstract puzzle game of more than 120 levels written by

Tony Crowther and David Bishop with some 'guest levels' by Jeff Minter. That's for the Amiga, ST and C64, released 15th November.

Mirrorsoft is also touting Cinemaware's *Rocket Ranger* and *TV Sports Football*. *Rocket Ranger* (Amiga version out now, C64 in mid November and ST/PC early next year) is an interactive movie built around a great plot - a 'message back from the future saying the Nazis won World War 2 using Lunarium'. No one anywhere has apparently won the final shoot-'em-up sequence on the Moon yet.

TV Sports is just for the Amiga in December at £29.99, so it sounds marginal. *Speedball* from the Bitmap Brothers on the Imageworks label is a 16-bit game being heavily pushed. That's a 'future sports arcade strategy game' which probably won't do as well as *Bombuzal*.

Electronic Arts weighs in with a small selection headed up by the thoroughbred *Powerdrome* on the ST. It's a futuristic racing simulation. *Fusion* on the Amiga (out now) and ST (November) are supported by *Battle Chess* for the Amiga ('October/November'), plus *Grand Prix Circuit* from Accolade. EA is also pushing Ubi Soft's range, starting with *IronLord* for the ST, Amiga, C64 and Amstrad this year (Spectrum and PC next). *Puffy's Saga* is its 'arcade strategy' maze game of the moment on C64, Amstrad, Amiga and PC.

Also from Ubi Soft is *Skateball*, the death soccer in space age ice rink game will be out on five machines in November.

Activision is gambling on

Afterburner and *SDI* (both Sega arcade conversions). In all formats except CPC for *SDI* ('it's going down and down'). Its affiliate label Electric Dreams is pushing *R-type*, a horizontal scrolling shoot-em-up, and has also extended its interest in System 3 software which has *Ninja 2* on 8-bit (16-bit next year) and *IK+* on the ST.

Word up

There are squillions of buzzwords surrounding Logotron's very exciting *Star-Ray* - a 'horizontal-parallax-scrolling shoot-'em-up' out already on Amiga, ST and C64, with a PC version in November. *Star Goose* and *Quadralien* are still selling and Logotron is looking very strong as a 16-bit publisher at the moment.

Incentive has *Dark Side* doing well now and *Total Eclipse* out on 22nd November on 8-bit formats only. Total Eclipse is a Freescape-based game set in the pyramids of ancient Egypt.

Hewson looks strong with *Nebulus* and *Exolon*, Elite has had a quiet time, but 16-bit *Space Harrier* is good. As for Domark, what is going on? What can we expect of *Return of the Jedi* after the very mixed reception, that greeted *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*? The dapper duo appears very busy with a full licence for *Spitting Image*, plus 'a new beginning' for *Trivial Pursuit*, then *Live and Let Die* as written by Elite and finally the *PC Daily Telegraph X Word Challenge*. Everything but a new Jeffrey Archer potboiler has been thrown in.

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THE PERILOUS JOURNEY WEST

Selling UK leisure software into the US is still largely achieved via distribution deals with established US publishers. Elite, however, is planning its own US base whilst Telecomsoft — after some readjustments following the disappointing performance of Firebird Licensees Inc — still controls its own destiny Stateside. CIARAN BRENNAN looks at the prospects and the pitfalls of Elite's American dream . . .

They're overpaid, they're overstaffed — but at least they're over here.

American software companies never seem to have had much trouble in moving to Britain, waving dollars under noses, setting up shop and settling down to take part in a market that may be smaller than the one they're used to, but is nevertheless lively and lucrative.

On the flip side however, British companies have a great deal of difficulty in breaking into the American market.

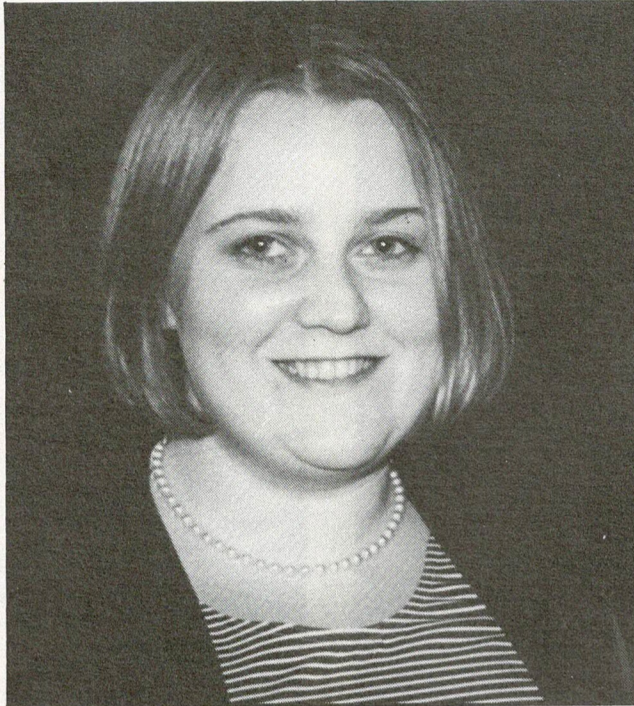
The Stateside sector is not only larger than its British counterpart (some estimates claim that a total in excess of \$250 million per annum is spent on software in the US), it also has an unusual hardware mix to be taken into account and a much older and arguably more sophisticated games player to be catered for.

While the C64 is a big selling machine on both sides of the Atlantic, the Atari ST is virtually unheard of. The most popular US games machine, the PC-compatible, is mostly unseen outside of the office environment in Britain. And things are going to stay that way here for quite a while — despite any words to the contrary from Amstrad and Comet.

Another difference which could cause problems for the prospective Anglo-American businessman is the fact that even the most popular game on these shores could turn out to be a thanksgiving turkey in the States. Also the litigious nature of American corporations could keep many a British company's legal department burning the midnight oil.

Many people were surprised, therefore, by Elite's recent announcement that it was to set up its own marketing operation in the US. This surprise was due mostly to the fact that the Midlands based operation has lately been enjoying a lower profile than usual in the British marketplace, but also because larger companies such as US Gold and Ocean have studied the American market and decided against having their own office (opting instead for product licensing deals with large American corporations).

However, when pressed on this 'low profile', Elite's Brian Wilcox pointed out that despite its relatively small press coverage over the last year or so the company is doing better than ever. In fact both August and September of this year yielded the company's best ever results for that period. Also, on the



BYRNE: Re-styled US operation performing better

question of whether the selling of its own product in the US is a better route to take than the more usual licensing deal, Wilcox pointed out that Elite is already involved in such deals, and if these were proving to be the most successful option then there would be no need for a change.

Coasting along

Elite may be sure that it is definitely going to open an

American office, but that's just about all that it is sure of. Marketing manager Bernard Dugdale, present in the US investigating the move, and although it seems likely that the office will be based on the East coast, and that there will be a workforce of at least four people, no site has yet been found and no appointments have been made.

This decision to base the office on the East coast is

largely based on a desire to minimise the time difference between the two offices. However, there are disadvantages encountered when a company chooses to base its US offices anywhere other than California, as Telecomsoft's managing director Paula Byrne found when dealing with the now defunct Firebird Licensees Incorporated.

"I wasn't able to get good people," Byrne complains. "Those that I wanted would show an interest in joining the company until they learned that the offices were based in New Jersey. It wasn't until I made the decision to move the operation to California that I was able to attract the right people."

FLI has now been shut down and replaced by a smaller set-up, based in Mediagenic's West coast offices and employing a marketing team of four Americans as opposed to FLI's larger team of 15 UK nationals. And although FLI wasn't strictly speaking an American division of Telecomsoft (it was originally set up as a subsidiary of British Telecom, whereas Telecomsoft is a division of that company), the two companies did have close links and Byrne was able

to learn from the mistakes made by the original operation.

"The first thing I learned was that you can't be successful by simply taking what you sold successfully in Europe and converting it to run on an IBM or a Macintosh," she says.

"Furthermore, people expect much higher standards for customer services, quality and packaging." These expectations are apparently so much higher that Telecom feels the need to employ a customer services manager as part of its US team, a position which would be a luxury to most British operations of a comparative size.

Born twee

When it comes to presentation, the American public aren't the only ones who demand special consideration by an overseas operation. Software buyers for the major retail chains also expect European packaging to be redesigned along more American lines. In fact, there's a policy practiced by at least one major chain whereby they will not buy any product if its title is not visible on the

Continued on page 25



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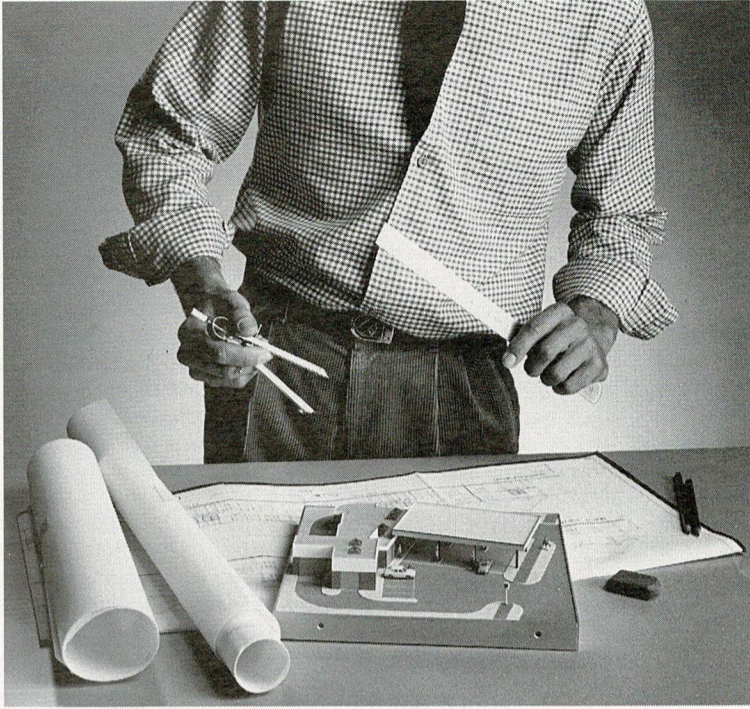
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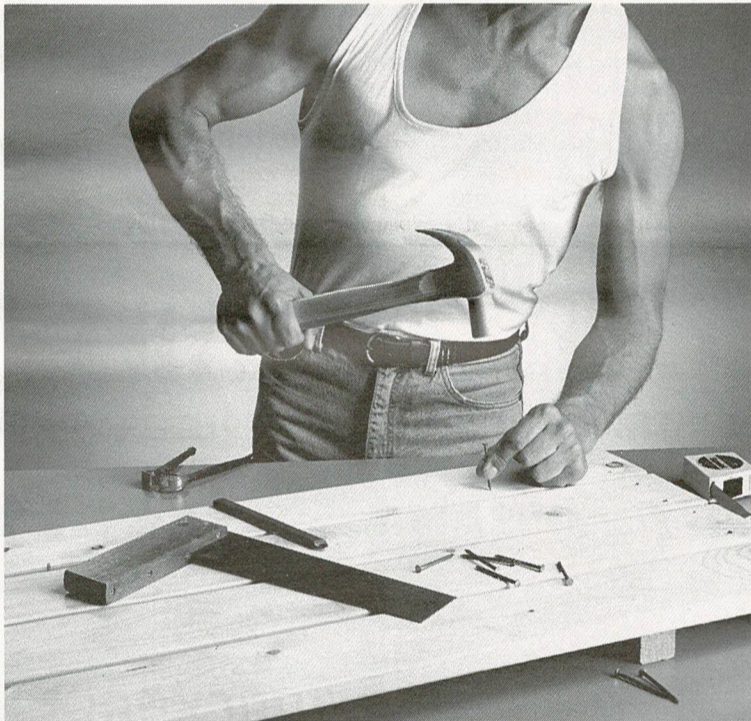
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THE NEW SWISS ROLE

The current state of play on the continent is attracting Euro software publishers to attempt to cream it in the UK. Some have come over with half baked ideas and have palpably failed to rise to the occasion. BARNABY PAGE talks to the latest — Linel — which reckons it can have its cake and eat it...

You can't kill them by just hitting them. You have to hit them at certain places." Linel managing director Markus Grimmer is talking about Dragonslayer, the arcade adventure set to be one of the firm's first UK releases in its new Sales Curvey form.

But it might as well be offering an observation on the blood 'n' thunder business of selling Swiss leisuressoft into Britain, a business where a small but perfectly formed stand at last month's PC Show Euroghetto had to be smart to compete with the veritable supermalls of Ocean and US Gold.

With the establishment of the Linel Magic label, represented by the Sales Curve, Microdeal has lost its UK licensing deal. Grimmer won't be drawn on whether he was happy or unhappy about Microdeal, but the motivation seems to be measured in pounds, shillings and francs: "Microdeal is a company which wants to earn money. We are that kind of company too..."

Linel's latest move could easily be pitched as 'the Swiss invasion' — after all we've al-

ready had one from the US, and are currently in the midst of yet another from France. But please forget the cliches of gold, vaults, cheese, clocks, alphorns, fondues, navies and early-to-bed-early-to-rise efficiency.

Beyond the natural desire to trim intermediaries' margins all round, Grimmer's UK bid has come as a result of outgrowing Switzerland, a nation of six million where there are "more distributors than people buying software". Indeed, it can only find enough Swiss programmers to form a quarter of its development team.

Earning a crust

Established as a distributor in 1983, Linel transferred its attentions to the sexier business of software development in 1986. Its 25 'artists' concentrate almost entirely on 16-bit product like its first UK release *Insanity Fight* (already out).

"We feel Britain is the main market," he says, explaining the decision to colonise this brave island before West Germany, the Netherlands and Spain.

While Grimmer shows the obligatory enthusiasm for 1992, an import/export odyssey, he seems to recognise that

in the software market its fire will be dampened by different user bases and different tastes. (The impact on hardware pricing and on Nintendo's attempts at segmentation of national markets will be much more interesting, but that's a different story.)

But this games without frontiers idea isn't exactly a novel one. Over the past year Loricel, Ubi Soft, France Image Logiciel, EA, Mindscape and Dinamic have all variously made their way into the UK market — or at least talked about it.

Meanwhile, UK firms increasingly look to go in the opposite direction. Everyone is looking for bigger markets no matter where they are or where a firm's traditional stamping ground has been.

To Linel's advantage, Britain is surprisingly similar to Switzerland where software is concerned.

Mindful of the stated decision by Loricel to hold back some excessively French-style product, Grimmer says: "French product is quite different from the English market. But Switzerland is close to England in what they like in games, though I



Quaint countryside, serious intent

wouldn't say the general mentality is the same."

The distribution set-up is similar, too, with the UK's tripartite structure of software house/distributor/retailer, whereas in Spain (for

instance) direct sales to retailer are more common.

Bap to the future
So, familiar with the pitfalls, Linel will be releasing all the next year's 15-20 products

in the UK. It has some 50 in development altogether.

The Champ (Amiga, end October) is a boxing simulation of the kind made famous by, well, all those other boxing sims; Continued on page 25

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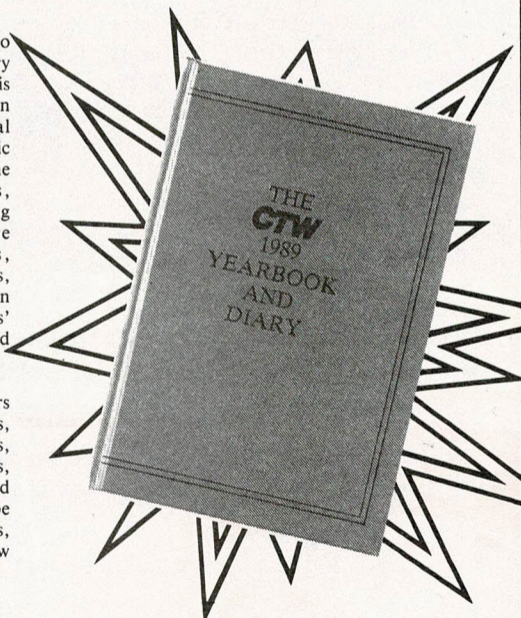
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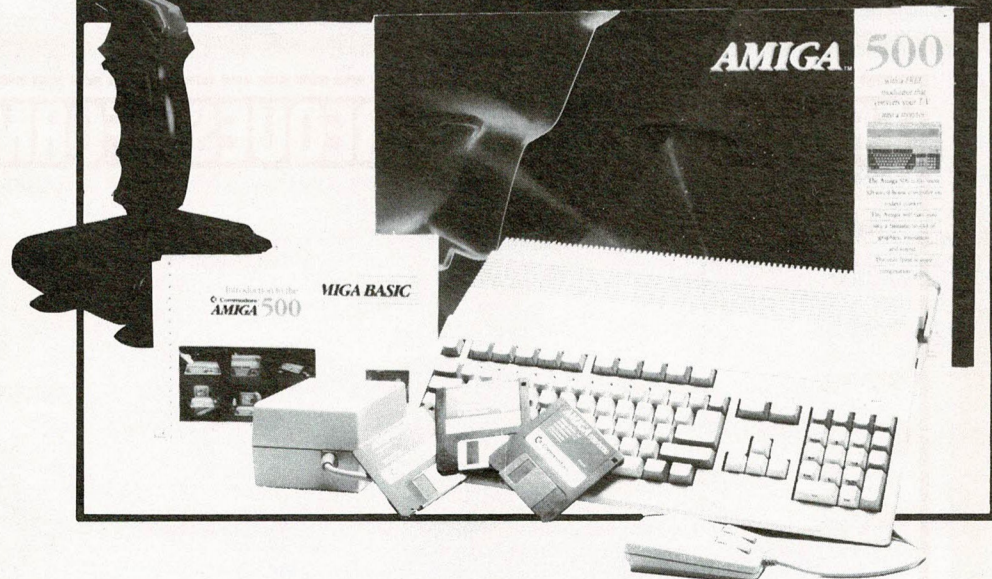
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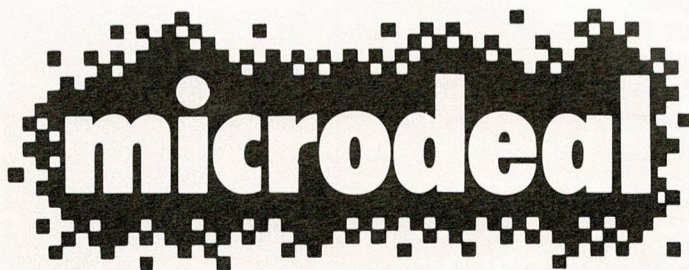
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THE FINE ART OF SURFACING

Continued from page 10

away with paying as little damages as possible would be a good, constructive start.

Whatever the outcome Ullrich promises that from January things will be different. "From then on our games will have no similarity to other products." Quite how he intends to achieve this minor miracle is unclear and indeed one interpretation put on such a boast could well be that the firm will continue to play the game - only slightly more cleverly.

Of course the Arts/Gold/Nintendo wrangle is just one of the events in the German market to affect the British industry. There has also been the Ariola buy-out, the Mirror Group's Rushware acquisition and vague talk of some sort of link up between the German distributor and Microdealer. In all, the profile of the German Market has never been higher.

Sweet sixteen

In many ways that market is more mature than our own. 16-bit is dominant and 8-bit is on its death bed - exactly the sort of scenario constantly predicted for Britain. Ironically, one of the reasons for this increased advancement may well be the later establishment of a German computer market, which means there is not the enormous 8-bit base to cope with.

"There is no doubt that 16-bit is really very, very strong over here and it may well be the biggest market in the world for the Amiga. The ST does OK but it is not as important."

According to Ullrich the reason for the disparity between the two major 16-bit players is down to marketing: "The Amiga is now much cheaper and Commodore are selling it as a games machine, before they were saying how you could do word processing or accounting on it, but in my opinion it is no good as a



The Rainbow spectrum business machine. It is just a good games machine."

"The ST was big in '87 but the situation has changed and it is now pretty weak. Atari have made the mistake of selling it as a business machine. We sell three times more Amiga software than ST software."

His words on 8-bit are even less encouraging: "We now only produce for the C64. US Gold do their own conversions for the Amstrad and Spectrum. I think in Germany 8-bit will just about manage to survive for two more years then it will die out."

But even though Ullrich has found his crock of gold so young he is not about to end the Rainbow. With Rainbow Games he is soon to launch an attack on the arcade market. He knows the risks but is confident of success. "We have the manpower, we have the resources so why shouldn't we do well in the arcades?"

Even more significantly it seems Ullrich is tired of anonymous success in Britain. He wants some recognition. No details are finalised as yet, but Ullrich is determined that in late '89/early '90 Rainbow

Arts will have an increased UK presence.

"We will definitely be changing our activities in the UK, we want to get a lot stronger and more involved in the marketing. The main target is to have games on our own Rainbow Arts UK label."

This does not however mean a split from US Gold is on the cards: "Obviously we would need the good connections of an established UK company like US gold and it could well be a joint venture."

And Ullrich will not necessarily confine his UK connections to US Gold. He admits that he is talking to "some major British companies" to help with the venture, but insists that it is too early to name names. It does however put an interesting and possibly significant new light on the Rushware Microdealer connection and Ullrich's complimentary comments about Lee Ginty and his firm.

Pure speculation of course. But whatever channels, methods and partners are chosen. Ullrich is determined that Rainbow Arts will become more than just the name behind the games.

THE PERILOUS JOURNEY WEST

Continued from page 18

packaging from a distance of at least 20 feet!

It is also arguable whether a company's 'Britishness' can be exploited when selling to the American public. Mastertronic's Rachael Davis, who is now permanently based in San Francisco and attempting to establish the Sega console, claims that making a point of asking for tea when coffee is offered and emphasising other such

'quaint' national differences can give her a strong identity and therefore a considerable advantage over her American rivals.

Byrne on the other hand points out that the American gamesplayer has traditionally looked down on British software, regarding it as being some sort of descendant from a Spectrum cassette.

Ultimately, a strong back-catalogue and a European-

inspired idea of what constitutes a good game are not enough to succeed on the other side of the Atlantic. Software should be developed with the American market in mind, and employees with a good working knowledge of their own market are essential.

Elite may feel that its taking five years of experience into a comparable market but, in truth, the US is a whole new ball game.

THE NEW SWISS ROLE

Continued from page 20

Dragonslayer (Amiga, end November) is the sort of game where the scenario begins "for many a long year, a terrible curse has afflicted the beautiful countryside". Still, it's a beautiful piece of 3-D *Barbarian*-style schlock.

Also set for pre-Christmas release are *Kaiser* (Amiga and ST, November), an eight-player strategy title with graphics you'd frame and hang on the wall; and the self-explanatory *Sound FX Sound Creation Program* (Amiga, November).

Ice and Fire (Amiga and ST

this autumn, PC one day) is a graphic adventure, again with apparent emphasis on the 'graphic'; *Crown* (Amiga and ST, February) is a conquering-hero strategy game with, surprise surprise, extraordinarily detailed graphics.

As one of the few overseas firms which has not signed on the dotted line beneath the Eleetronic Arts logo, Linel is presumably going for double or nothing. And the question that particular cliché always prompts is 'which will it be?' All sales, marketing and dis-

tribution is in the hands of Jane Cavanagh's *The Sales Curve*, which despite its impressive credentials is not exactly tried and tested.

Yet the UK chart success of *Insanity Fight* - recently number four in the 16-bit charts - is some encouragement. Linel's plans to sign a US licensing contract by the end of October should inject some cash, too, and as Grimmer says "we're not looking for millions of turnover. We're looking for a niche where we can establish ourselves."

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Audiogenic Software Ltd.

HIGHLAND HARD REIGN

Continued from page 12

spending 2-3 days a week sorting out problems because there is no rep around."

Taylor considers the lack of reps in Scotland to be the direct result of companies not willing to invest in the area. "Every now and then a company will take on a fresh faced new boy who gets a bee in his bonnet and makes a trip to Scotland. But you rarely see them more than once because then they go back with large expenses, the volume of sales doesn't

warrant it as far as the company is concerned."

Another problem is that many Scottish outlets, because of their size, are simply not in a position to take advantage of bulk-buying discounts as offered by the likes of US Gold and Mediagenic. This is one area that MICROS has had limited success with - members joining forces to purchase larger quantities of product.

"Software houses are not interested unless you're buying

50-60 of one item. Apart from the back-up you don't get the discount and there's no way you can compete with mail order firms," claims Cappleman.

So, how can the claims of neglect on the part of Scottish dealers be rectified? Clearly a small body like MICROS cannot tackle the problem single-handed.

Several dealers believe that their plight would be lessened if Scotland had greater coverage within the computer

industry, with suggestions that a well organised and respected showcase could provide the answer.

At the moment Scotland boasts just one show held at the Glasgow Exhibition Centre. This caters more for the large corporate business end of the market, with few dealers thrown in for good measure.

Taylor was one such exhibitor at this year's show, and with Megabytes being an authorised CBM stockist he decided to go to the company for assistance in setting up his stand. "I went to Commodore

to ask for signs saying that we are an authorised dealer, and they didn't even know that the show existed."

Lowe echoes this view claiming that, "the Scottish Computer Show has very little help from English based distributors and manufacturers, and really the quality of the exhibitors goes from two extremes".

Scot a problem

Many dealers would like to see more done with the Show, and claim that there is in fact room for a separate showcase for the lower end of the market. William Kerr from Glasgow based Comcal is one such retailer who would like to see another show, and considers Edinburgh to be an ideal venue.

Other retailers would like to see more distributors and manufacturers setting up in Scotland, and claim that they would certainly prefer to deal with a Scots based company if available. Even an office or a regular representative would certainly go a long way to staving off growing feelings of resentment.

For the time being, however, the situation does not look set to change. As in politics Scotland is increasingly becoming a separate entity left very much to its own devices.

In reality dealers must tackle the situation as best they can, but can such a small body as MICROS really make the industry sit up and recognise Scottish potential?

After two years it looks unlikely.

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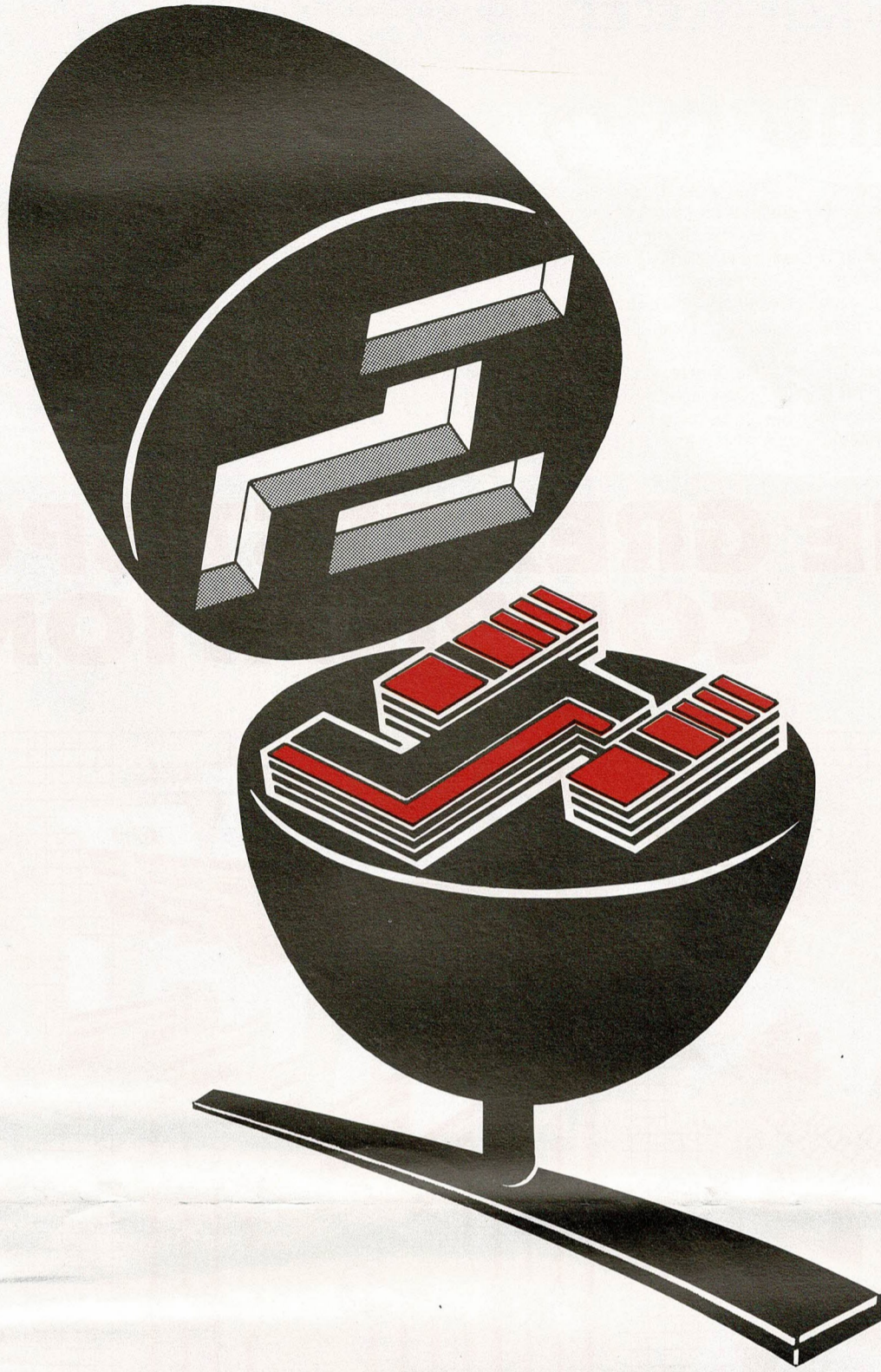
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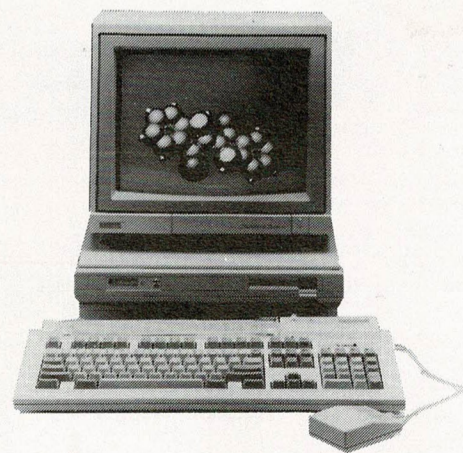
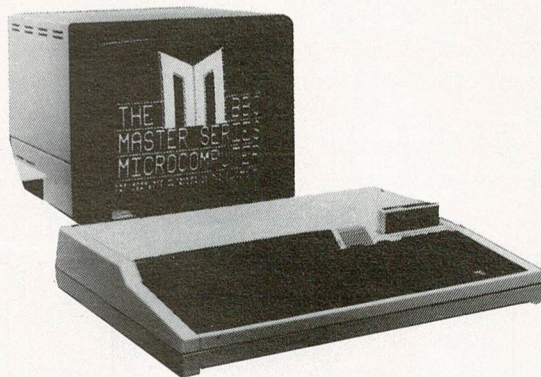
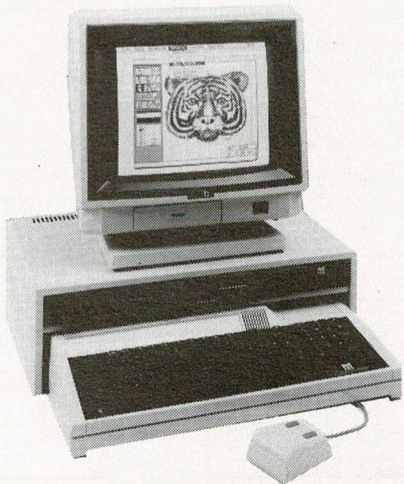
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Amiga ads backed by demos and POS

Commodore has announced full details of its soon to come Amiga TV ad campaign, which is due to be backed by extensive dealer POS material.

The first CBM TV ads for several years will break on November 15th running through to the middle of December.

The firm is boasting an overall ratecard spend of £1.7 million.

Distributors are currently nominating their best Commodore dealers, who will each receive a specially designed Amiga window dressing featuring scenes from the ad plus a video of the ad itself. This is expected to be offered to around 300 stores nationwide.

"We want to get the best high street stores because we want the highest visibility, which will tie in nicely with the advertising," commented Commodore's UK marketing manager Dean Barrett to CTW.

The Amiga ads will run as 20 or 50 second spots carrying the ultimate tag line 'we'll help you see things differently' -

which has been used for all Commodore's advertising for the past few months. The campaign has been created by Evans Hunt Scott.

On ITV regions the ads will run during *News At Ten*, *The Match* (due to the Chelsea sponsorship link), *The City Programme*, *World In Action*, *Rumpole of the Bailey*, *Executive Stress* and *Spitting Image*.

Channel 4 spots include *Hill Street Blues*, *Golden Girls*, *The Last Resort*, *Channel 4 News* and *American Football*.

"These are all good ABCI type programmes. We're pitching it at parents who want to buy the computer for their kids," added Barrett.



AMIGA: City Programme to Spitting Image

Boots ban

Continued from front page

out because they think it's dangerous, but it's really up to them," commented Richard Steele, sales director at Centresoft - which supplies both Boots and independents.

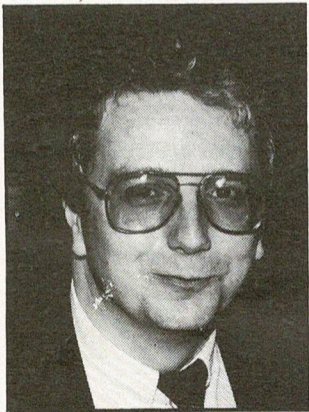
Many dealers are opting to put their own warning about the star on the *Ninja* box rather than take it out - as this could cause further problems due to the packaging already proclaiming the game's contents.

"I'm not paranoid but our initial reaction was that this was lethal. We're putting a sticker on the box saying that it contains a plastic star that should be used with care and under supervision," commented Stuart Garrett of GB Microland in Portsmouth.

Dave Perrett, software manager at the Virgin Games Centre, Oxford Street, was also worried although his store is continuing to sell the original pack. "It's a tricky one, but the star is quite bendy and we've decided it's not that bad," he told CTW.

Nobody at System 3 was available for comment, but Rod Cousens at Mediagenic - which handles the firm's sales and distribution - shrugged off retailers' anxiety.

"I don't think it's necessarily a matter of Boots turning it down. They expressed a preference not to be supplied the limited edition and we acted on that," he told CTW.



COUSENS: Unworried by anxiety

"You must realise that this product is being sold to 14 year olds and upwards rather than eight year-olds, so you can't sit in judgement that much. There must be a degree of responsibility attached to that age bracket. It's not something designed to injure."

Ironically, *Last Ninja 2* boasts possibly the best all-round promotion of any game this year. The limited edition features the free star, a muslin Ninjitsu fighting mask and map - and is backed by some striking in-store POS material.

Boots is retailing the non-limited edition packages of the game, which is currently only available on the C64. The plain packages, however, still command a higher than average price of £12.99.

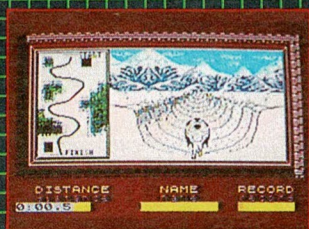
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