COMMODORE MAILINK

NEWSLETTER OF — MEETING 64/128 USERS THROUGH THE MAIL

January 1999

Meeting News

by Tom Adams, President

Happy New Year everyone!!! A big welcome to Alan Burk, Jack Cheldin, Larry Holiday, Richard LaMunyon, David Serfass and K. Dale Sidebottom. Their bios appear elsewhere in the newsletter.

I need to remind all members that the next issue is the March issue and the membership list. Please look over your "bio" from last year and send any changes to Brian Vaughan by mid February at the very latest. If you would like to volunteer to be a "friendly correspondent" again please notify Brian by mid February. Do you have any expertise with a particular program or a piece of hardware? Please volunteer as a "Resource" person by writing to Linda Tanner. I am begging you to offer to share your knowledge of any software or hardware with other members. Remember that the membership list and the resource/information list is provided just twice a year, March and September.

-- Tom Adams, President Meeting 64/128 Users Through the Mail

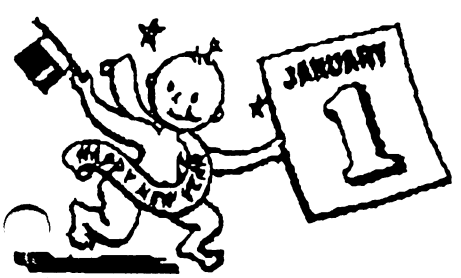
TREASURER'S REPORT

From: Rolf L. Miller, Treasurer

Following is a summary of the trust account as of November 30, 1998.

Balance 9-30-98	$1272.62	1-1-98	$2507.80
Credits	806.00		1881.75
Debits	350.00		2660.93
11-30-98	1728.62	11-30-98	1728.62

The Credits include all dues and donations received during the period. The Debit is the advance during the period which covered the cost of printing and mailing the November MaiLink.



A large THANK YOU to all who renewed by the December 10th deadline. Another thank you to those who enclosed notes along with their checks. And examples of printing are always enjoyed.

MEETING 64/128 USERS THROUGH THE MAIL - OFFICERS

TOM ADAMS. President. 4427 39th St., Brentwood, MD 20722-1022. Ph. (301) 927-8826. email tomadams@sysnet.net. ORGANIZATION BUSINESS AND MEMBERSHIP. ALSO NEWSLETTER PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION.

FRANCIS REDMOND, Vice-president. Rt 7, Box 7614, Palestine, TX 75801.

ROLF L. MILLER, Treasurer. 492 Anacapa St., Ventura, CA 83001. DUES AND DONATIONS. (Checks to the trust account must be made out to Rolf L. Miller).

BRIAN VAUGHAN, 2101 Shoreline Dr. 352, Alameda, CA 94501-6245. MEMBERSHIP ADDRESSES AND BIOGRAPHIES; CORRECTIONS AND CHANGES

JEAN NANCE. 1109 Briarcliff Dr., Urbana, IL 61801. NEWSLETTER MANAGING EDITOR.

FRED KNERR. P.O. Box 2., New Tripoli, PA 18066-0002. EDITOR, "Mailink on Disk"

JOSEPH F. FENN. 3612 Puuku Makai Drive, Honolulu, HI 96818. EMAIL ADDRESSES AND CHANGES

LINDA J. TANNER. RR1, Box 120T, Black, MO 63625-9702. EDITOR "Information". VOLUNTEERS FOR "RESOURCES".

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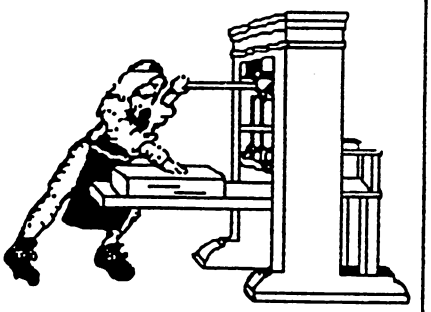
EDITORS ARE NEEDED FOR JULY, SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER.
IF INTERESTED, CONTACT JEAN NANCE

Editor's Desk



HOW DID I GET HERE?

For the last couple of years, I've been telling my follow Commodore club members that the best publication currently available for the average C64/128 user is the MaiLink.

This is not to put down Loadstar Letter or Commodore World, both of which deserve our thanks and support for continuing to serve this small market. But both are heavy on programming, telecommunications and advanced technical matters that just don't appeal to the average user.

This is the person I define as using the Commodore for word processing, maybe keeping a budget or other simple records on a spreadsheet, and using some kind of graphics-oriented program such as Print Shop, Fun Graphics Machine or GEOS. People like you and me, in other words.

Therefore I'm proud and happy to be showing my support for this great newsletter by taking a turn at editing. I'm fitting this job in between two other newsletter projects, a family newsletter that comes out every so often but is more or less overdue; and our club newsletter, which I've edited for about five years in two separate stints.

Now I must make a confession. I love my Commodore and have owned one since 1987. However, for the last two years I have been doing more and more on a PC, and leaving the Commodore turned off more. But not today. This issue was produced using The Write Stuff on a Commodore 128 equipped with a 40 meg hard drive, which is used for loading the program, and saving all articles. The front page header and other graphics were printed with GEOS, with a lot of careful measurement and running the pages through the printer twice.

For the text, I used my Epson Stylus Color 600 ink jet. This printer understood and carried out every needed command from TWS with no changes from the codes I have used for years (good thing, because it takes an act of Congress and a note from Ken Starr to get control codes for new printers these days). Since the Epson is notoriously unfriendly to GEOS, I printed the graphics on my Star NX1020 Rainbow. In a test with the Epson, graphics were elongated as is common with ink jet printers. The printout was also very light (using the Epson8pin3pass drive that I normally use for GEOS with the Star).

I cheated only once, printing the digital grandfather clock from the PC, because it would not convert to a usable GEOS file.

--Dick Estel

MARCH EDITOR

Rolf Miller will be the editor of the March MaiLink. His plan is to put together the issue with a collection of pages produced by members from a Commodore 64 or 128 ready for copying. Within the page(s), include your name and what you used to produce it. The page(s) may contain graphics. A page may be less than full (the editor will fill it up). Use at least a half inch margin around the page. The top line of each page should be a page header containing the words COMMODORE MAILINK MARCH 1999,

followed by a space line. Use no page numbers. Send the page(s) flat, protected by two cardboard inserts, along with a disk containing a TWS or sequential text file of the page(s) (for the MaiLink on disk) and any graphics used. In the event that pages received do not copy well or are otherwise unusable, they may be edited and reprinted by the editor. Send to: Rolf Miller, 492 Anacapa St., Ventura, CA 93001. Other submissions may be sent on disk. Send e-mail to: ba100@lafn (no attachments). Deadline is Feb. 15, 1999.

A WORD ABOUT PRODUCING A MAILINK PAGE

The purpose of the MaiLink is to inform members and further Commodore 64 and 128 computer use, which is the reason for Meeting 64/128 Users Through The Mail. To accomplish that purpose requires readable articles, the content of which meets that objective. One without the other is useless. A well-done page containing gobbledegook is the same as a good article printed in an unreadable manner. Therefore, the invitation to produce one or two pages for the March MaiLink is to write and print a legible article which will aid other members in their use of the Commodore 64 and/or 128.

To write an article, choose a subject. The theme of the issue is Know-How: what you do, and how you do it. However, you are free to choose any Commodore related subject. Ask: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, and HOW regarding the chosen subject. Some questions will not apply. Write (type) out the answers to those that do apply, then ask the same questions of the answers. Repeat the process until there is enough to write the article.

As for the actual writing, remember that it is just speaking made readable. Punctuation is simply marks to indicate the pauses and inflections characteristic of speaking. So, write about the subject in a make-sense manner just as if talking about it and use punctuation as if speaking the words. When the writing is complete, print out the page(s) using an easy to read font. Don't let the equipment you use discourage you. If it can produce readable results suitable for photo-copying, it's good enough. After all, the value of a readable article resides in its content.

--Rolf Miller

SOLVING PROBLEMS

by Larry Schafer

One thing I use my Commodore for is solving puzzles. In her weekly column, Marilyn Vos Savant proposed the three-door problem. It has generated some heated discussion as to the proper answer.

To put the problem very briefly, imagine a room with three doors. Behind one of the doors is a valuable prize. You are asked to select a door, but, before it is opened, a door you didn't select is opened, showing no prize. Now you are faced with two unopened doors. Are your chances better if you switch your choice?

The problem wasn't hard to simulate. In part, the computer had to generate a random number between 1 and 3. When I looked into generating it, I used

```
RN = INT ( RND(0)*3 )+1)
```

which worked well, but was slightly biased. RND(TI) works a lot better.

Oh, yes. I can now prove that your chances are twice as good if you switch.

Jim Butterfield and The Commodore Myth

Jim Butterfield, Official Commodore Guru, was a featured speaker at the Chicago Expo in October. Raymond Day of Michigan captured his talk on videotape, and K. Dale Sidebottom edited it for publication.

I noticed on the website that I was expected to talk a little bit about Commodore history. Now this is more like Commodore mythology. Nobody knows the real stories, but the ones they're telling seem to get better over the years. I would like to see if I could call up from my memory some of the better Commodore myths, some of which might be true, but don't make any bets on it.

Item number one. Where the heck did Commodore computers come from? Well, way back around 1975 or maybe a bit earlier, there were a bunch of engineers on the west coast making a chip for Motorola, a chip called the 6800. Heck of a lot better than the Intel chips! But Motorola just wanted those to show, well, they were doing the business. So they the engineers finished the 6800 chip and said, "We've got a wonderful new idea for a new souped-up 6800! We are going to do great stuff with it!"

Motorola said, "We've been thinking about this and you're fired because, first, we only wanted to have a processor chip and we have one now and don't see why you guys are hanging around anyway, and secondly, why pay you for a better chip when we have one working now?" So these guys wondered East and found somebody on the east coast near Pennsylvania, somewhere around the Valley Forge center, who was into the micro-chip business. What they were making was mostly chips for watches and display chips. Their name was MOS Technology, Inc., not to be confused with Mostech. That's a different company.

And this little group of ex-Motorola people came in and said, "We're going to make you rich. You're going to make a microprocessor. That's where it's at!" And they said, "What's a microprocessor?" I have no idea what those guys said but it must have been good, because they got to set up their own microprocessor department and started building the chip they wanted to do at Motorola, the 6501.

Now the 6501 was like a 6800. It had the same pins with the same designations, but it was a heck of a lot faster, and they decided to do something else that was amazing. Not only did they have a better chip, but they were going to sell it at a lower price! The price of any 8-bit microprocessor chip back then was about a hundred bucks in quantities of 300 or more. They were going to sell this new 6501 chip for $25, and eventually they did. Except Motorola sued them for copying their pin layout. So they had retire the 6501.

That left them with the 6502, which had an internal clock circuit. It had a different pin layout, too. So they launched this 6502 thing for far less than the general industry price and immediately people started saying it can't be very good if it is so cheap. Well, it was fantastically good! But it took awhile to prove it. The first thing they did was they built an engineering prototyping board call the KIM-1[1]. That was really a very interesting development in the micro-computer field. Until then, if you wanted a micro-computer system, you sent away mail order and got back a bag of chips and a circuit board. You had to put them all together, and you found out that 10% of the chips were defective. Folks had a real good time

chasing these things down. So suddenly they're selling a KIM-1 as a completely fabricated board. It's got all the chips on it. Its a complete system. It's wave soldered so that it costs practically nothing to actually make at the factory. And it sold for, gosh, I think about $300 including the process server, the ROM and the RAM, and so on. It had a wonderful set of RAM on there. It had about one K (kilobyte), and you could play chess, by the way. I have done it, and some of you may recall the Micro-Chess program.

What I perceive as a fantastic user group grew up around it because, for once, everybody had the same micro-computer system. Before that, everybody had a different system. Suddenly we all had the same system, and suddenly with the KIM-1, you could swap programs. This is about where I came in. Together with a couple of other people, I put together a publication called The First Book of KIM. Effectively, it was the first time we got to share notes on a single computer.

About the time that we were doing that job, MOS Technology, Inc. was being viewed with interest by a guy whose name was Jack Tramiel. You may know that name. He was the head of an outfit called Commodore, a typewriter company, and they built watches and calculators, too. And they were running a little short on watch chips, especially the display chips, so they were looking around for someone to acquire.

Now, Jack Tramiel is rumored to have very interesting ways of doing business. He would go up to a company and say, "I think we should do business. I think I'd like to buy your company for 10 million dollars." And that company says, "Gosh, that's pretty good. I think we can do something here." So they sign the papers and everything else, and the acquired company says, "Where's my 10 million bucks?" Then Jack said, "Oh! Here's twenty thousand shares of my company." He never had the money! A lot of people were upset by this, but Jack had a way of upsetting people. So he acquired MOS Technology mostly to get the watch display chips. About that time, one of the people from California, who had been involved in the production of the KIM-1, came up to Jack and said, "What you ought to be doing is selling the personal computer." Jack said, "What's a personal computer?" The guy said, "Let me explain it." And Jack said, "No. Will it make money?" And the guy said, "Oh yeah! It will make you rich!" So immediately Jack said, "Let's get into production on this thing."

So he set up a new machine called the PET. When the PET first came out, it was a nice little machine in some ways. They originally wanted to do it with 4 K, but in fact it turned out that 4 K wasn't terribly good for anything, so they settled mostly on 8K. The first machines came in a wooden case. They looked very pretty. I'm not sure, but if your computer has termites, maybe you have one of those things. So they made this wonderful thing called the PET. Mind you, if you wanted a printer, you waited a year. If you wanted a disk drive, you had to wait a year. Because all you could do back then was to have a little cassette device reading your programs in and sending them out. But again, it may or may not have been the first personal computer. There has always been an argument about that. I don't think we can solve it here.

Commodore was probably the first to announce a fully made computer. They weren't necessarily the first to ship. The idea was, if you wanted one of these computers, you put $800 in small unmarked bills in an envelope and addressed it to Jack Tramiel and sent it there. Eventually, if you didn't get a computer in four months, then you had the right to ask for your money back. Many people did get their computer in four months. One guy, I know, actually found it on his back porch, sort of loose in a box, right after a trade

show. But they got their computers and it was very nice.

Back to who made the first personal computer. Well, Commodore announced theirs first. Apple did make an earlier computer called the Apple I[2], but it was a kit. So if they want to claim first, they can claim that in certain ways. Radio Shack put the Tandy together in one heck of a big hurry and had it on the shelves before Commodore had these things on the store shelves. Commodore was shipping before that and they were showing before that, but Radio Shack's were actually in where you could buy them in you local store earlier. So they can argue forever, but we were up there pretty early. We had a pretty good machine back then. Even then, we had a good language and we had a good system. Some of the things that we did, the industry is still only just discovering! Do you know what the hot new term today is on PCs, just coming in? It's called the serial bus. Guess what we had way back then twenty years ago. We had a serial bus to which we can connect something up!

There was some very good thought, some very good engineering, and occasionally some misfiring in those days. But I'll tell you one thing and then I will conclude. That is, that regardless of some of the sheer computing power that you have on computers today, you still can't have anywhere near as much fun on those computers as we have had and continue to have on these 8-bit Commodore machines!

[1]The KIM-1 was almost the first computer to be offered assembled and in a standardized form. Earlier micro-computers were kits which were put together (usually wire-wrapped) by users; depending on funds and resources, things like memory and input/output varied widely among the user base (teletypes, CRTs, LED clusters, etc.). The significant thing about the KIM-1 is: fully assembled at little extra cost; everybody had the same machine. Thus, a user community could spring up.

[2]Apple may claim that they made the first home computer...but the Apple I was a kit. The Apple][was fully made (as we all know), but Commodore announced first with the Pet 2001, a 4 K machine in the beginning, although most of them were equipped with 8K.

LONG TIME MEMBERS

Jean Nance

"Meeting 64/128 Users Through the Mail" started in 1986. Here are the dates of membership of those who joined in the first 6 years. These members were all still on the September, 1998 membership list; we hope all of them are still with us in 1999. If I missed anybody, please let me know. Records this far back are not as complete and well organized as they might be.

Joined in 1987 - Eloise Carey, Jean Nance.
Joined in 1988 - Jolene Ehret, Brian Vaughan, Richard Fernandez, John Shaver.
Joined in 1989 - Frank Redmond, Elva Brinson, O.B. (Bev) Harvey, Csaba Csaszar.
Joined in 1990 - Ken Bronson, Ed Duffy, Fred Knerr, Maurice Jones, Joe Garrison, Charles Andrazyk, Karen Crosby, Bob Estand, Jim Green, Emil Volcheck, Jess Wyder, Melvin Baral, James Caldwell, Michael Beverage, John (Zeb) Larry, Robert Mullady, Donald Squire, Suzanne Miller, Dick Pattinson.
Joined in 1991 - Hugh McMenamin, Mary Spink, Grace and Robert Peppard, Tom Adams, Scott Merrill, Tom Grimm.
Joined in 1992 - Keith Keller, Dan Haney, James Denning, Wendell Welper, William (Bill) Kennedy, Thomas Powell, George Hoke, Andrew Schwartz.

Rebuttal to Why I Don't Like GEOS

by Roger Detaille, Larry Schafer & Dick Estel

In the November 1998 MaiLink, W.R. Kennedy shared his thoughts on the negative side of GEOS. Three members submitted articles offering a different view. We have combined their ideas into one article.

Certainly GEOS is not for everyone. Having experienced a lot of frustration with our own first attempts with GEOS, we understand his points. His comments indicate that he has not used GEOS with the hardware that allow it to perform to its fullest capabilities. On the other hand, if you're not going to use GEOS, you may not have much use for that hardware for other programs.

Now to his points and our comments:

1. 2 or 3 disks are required: What program do you have that allows you to create signs and newsletters using only one disk? With a hard drive, you can usually put everything needed into one partition (disk equivalent). With Wheels, you can put EVERYTHING into one partition.

2. Takes too long to load: What Commodore program loads quickly? GEOS takes about a minute to load, but so does TWS. I am using a battery-backed RAM and GEOS boots in eight seconds.

3. Time must be reset: Not if you use a device with a clock (Smart Mouse, hard drive, RAM Link). You can also use a utility program that asks for the time when you boot, making it easier to remember and to enter. And you don't HAVE to set the time and date unless you want to date-stamp your files.

4. Word processor does not indicate cursor location: I almost never use this feature on the word processors that have it. Columns don't count as such in GEOS since it uses proportional fonts. Narrow characters and small fonts take up less room and you could have more than 80 characters over the width of the sheet.

5. There is no convenient way to change page length: The page length is set to full page. Why change the page length, use page breaks instead when the page is to satisfaction.

6. No indication of how many lines a given printer will use in a printout: How many lines does a printer print? It can all be seen in geoWrite. I have been using GEOS since 1987 and had no problems what so ever with this. What you see on the screen on a given page is what will print.

7. Margin setting and paragraph setting is nerve-wracking and time-consuming: Margins are the easiest to set, just take the M-slider on the ruler and move it where you want it. The same for the P-slider for the paragraph. I think nerve-wracking is a bit of an overstatement. Using the program develops skill.

8. Highlighting is not simple and straight-forward: Click, move mouse, release. What could be more simple? If you want to keep certain text highlighted, you definitely are out of luck. Use underline, or italics, instead. Or bold.

9. File must be named before creating: GEOS makes sure that you get your document saved under a name you specify ahead of the actual writing. Then while you work, the program performs automatic saves. And you have to enter a title sometime if you want to save your work. If not, just dump your data file icon in the trash!

10. Copying some files is not possible: Files that need to be copied are easily copied. System files have no use unless by themselves. Why would you want to copy them?

11. Updating the system is almost impossible and at best cumbersome: Actually, updating the system requires carefully reading and following directions.

12. Second hand copies won't work without the original: True. The GEOS copy-protection system is so effective, it frustrates legal owners. I have found that the Trojan and Maverick programs make things easier.

13. Old GEOS 2.0 will not recognize newer REU equipment: All RAM expansion devices that came after the Commodore 1764 and 1750 came with the required GEOS configure files. Of course, if you got them second-hand, there's no guarantee you got the software that came with the hardware.

14. Can't send printer codes to the printer: This can be done to a limited extent with some add-on programs. But remember, GEOS produces graphics, not text; it's not intended to be used like other word processors. My friends can tailor printer drivers to do what they want, but the technique is still beyond me.

15. Preview is worthless: The preview is to give you an idea what the printed page looks like, it is not meant to be read. What other Commodore program gives a full-page, legible preview?

16. Printer files must be on every disk: True in GEOS 64, but only on work disks you want to print from. And not with the 128 version. I load the one I want into the REU as part of the start-up procedure.

17. Pointing and clicking requires a mouse or joy stick. They take up room on your desk. The mouse even requires a clean desk! Geos without a mouse?? THERE'S why you don't like Geos. I yield to no one in desk messiness, but I find the 9"x10" mouse pad adequate.

18. Icons may please some people but having to go through a window to get what you want is time consuming and cumbersome: You can use the viewing option to see the files listed in several different ways. I love icons. They are colorful and tell you what the thing is. Obviously we'll never lose Mr. Kennedy to the PC world!

Using The Write Stuff is faster and easier. YES! A thousand times yes. There is no Commodore word processor better than TWS. GEOS is for other purposes.

But for what GEOS is really designed to do, put text and graphics together, I submit that there is no better program for the Commodore. And to really enjoy it and get the most use out of it, you need the proper equipment. A bare bones computer/disk drive system is not the proper equipment for GEOS. Remember, if you don't like it, you ain't trying!

Email Updates

Email updates (some are new, some are confirmations of addresses that had previously had mail returned).

Cheldon, Jack: ricerdicer@aol.com
Harler, Ed: edharler@netcarrier.com
Harbron, Robin: macbeth@tbaytel.net
Holiday, Larry: nfn00856@naplex.net
Serfass, David: dserfass@cris.com
(new)
Sidebottom, K. Dale:
luckykds@iglou.com
Redmond, Frank: redco@flash.net
Veatch, David:
david.veatch@eastpointe.com
(change)
(alternate): davidveatch@webtv.net
(last resort addr)

REPORT ADDITIONS, CANCELLATIONS, OR CORRECTIONS TO: jfenn@lava.net

MaiLink Index - How I Did It

by Paul Berry

Part two: Assembly, Editing and Printing

NOTE: I always put a non-printing "Save" command at the top of important documents which makes saving and resaving them easy. Several times during this assembly and editing process, I had to stop for one reason or another, and I just pressed CONTROL then "s" to save (or resave) the document as of the time I had to stop.

Assembly

Having entered, sorted and saved the data for each year of MaiLink since 1993, I now have six index files each containing 125-150 data lines. In order to prepare a six year index these files must be combined into a single 6-year file. At first I thought I would just combine the six files using the "Load/Merge/Append" command then sort the 6-year file, but quickly learned that the "Eat Text" buffer is not large enough to hold the 6-year file.

Following a suggestion from Eric Lee, who wrote TWS in the first place, I divided each yearly file into four parts (according to category codes): ax#-hm#, hp#-px#, sa#-sx# and tx#-xx#. I used the "Load/Merge/Append" command to combine all 6 of the ax#-hm# portions, then sorted and saved the 6-year ax#-hm# file. I repeated this process for each of the other three portions, and ended up with four sorted 6-year file portions. These portions were then combined using the "Load/Merge/Append" command into a single 6-year file which was completely sorted in the same manner as the yearly files. Obviously I quickly saved this large file (130 blocks of disk space). The entire process took about 30 minutes to assemble and sort the 6-year index file which is now ready for editing.

Editing

Now I had to get the index organized and ready to print so it would fit onto printed pages and look reasonably presentable.

First I went through this rather large index file and placed two carriage returns at the beginning of the file and between each of the 17 groups of coded data lines. This made subsequent identification of the categories and subcategories much easier.

Then, using the familiar TWS editing techniques, I put titles at the beginning of each category and subcategory.

With all the titles in place the category codes became unnecessary, so I replaced them with spaces using the "Search and Replace" commands.

Printing

I used the "Odd/Even" printing command to put the ten pages of the index on five sheets of paper printed on both sides and the "Offset" command to move the text 5 spaces right on the odd pages to make room to punch holes. The top of the file looked like this (letters enclosed in [ ] are in reverse video; ie, commands; "z" is defined as the [RETURN] character):

```
[n]@0:-6 yr mailink
[n]Formatted for 10 cpi and 6 lines per
inch
[oe]0[oF]5
[lm]5[rm]5[tm]5[bm]7
[he]1;[c]Six Year MaiLink Index[cZ]
[Z]

Author                Issue/Page
[fo]5;[c#]
```

The TWS manual provides a good explanation of the commands.

(Continued)

Availability

If you would like a copy of this MaiLink 6-Year Index, send me $1.50 to cover the cost of printing and postage, together with your name and address, and I will send one to you by return mail.

The Last Commodore

In the March 1998 issue of the MaiLink, Jean Nance asks, when will the last Commodore die?

In June, 1990, Lee Pasborg, editor of The Town Cryer, Heartland Users Group, Cape Girardeau MO, wrote an article titled The Orphan Computer, pointing out that while Commodores were about to become orphans, they would be vital, healthy orphans that could survive for years with the right care and planning. He correctly predicted that we would see Amigas sold at yard sales by 1995.

Also in the early 90's, I wrote a similar article for The Interface, newsletter of Fresno Commodore User Group. My theme was that while the sunset of Commodore was in view, it would be a long and glowing sunset.

While Lee and I both realized that a working Commodore eight years hence would do everything it could do back then, we both were concerned that a Commodore of 1990 would not be satisfactory for most users in 1998. Indeed, many Commodore users have abandoned their machines for PC's, Mac's and Amigas, but many continue to use the older machine along side a new one.

What we did not foresee was that a few talented programmers and engineers saw opportunity where we saw limits. They put their brains and skill and effort to the task of making Commodore nearly equal to the newer and faster machines. Because of this, Commodore has survived in a more vital form than Lee and I expected.

Thanks to these often unsung heroes, we have large hard drives, improved 3.5" drives, and add-on equipment to increase not only disk access, but operating speed. Its true that many users are satisfied with their machine just as it was in 1990. Others felt that these improvements were still not enough. But enough Commodore users to support several dozen small companies and individuals have taken advantage of these new products to keep their machines at an acceptable level into the 21st century.

The last Commodore will die only when no one is willing and able to make repairs, because as long as they work, there will be people who will keep them running. With a few million around for spare parts, there's no reason why we can't have a small but world-wide group of Commodore devotees a dozen years into the next millennium.

--Dick Estel

The Best and the Worst Programs

by Chris Fite

Over the years I have discovered some unusually good programs, as well as some programs that were disappointing. It may be good because it is used often, or is easy to use, or is unique and unusual, or a classic, or the program flow and controls are perfect. It may be bad because it is seldom used, or is difficult to use, or there is a better way to do something, or the flow or controls are awkward. For every outstanding good program, there are perhaps twenty not so good programs. So, for the record, here is my simple list of the good and the bad.

THE GOOD PROGRAMS:

SPEEDSCRIPT word processor because of its compact size and simplicity.

Any good commercial word processor like The Write Stuff because of its fancy capabilities like expanded titles, double columns, and ease of making tables and charts. Used often.

OMEGA RACE space shoot out game. One of the original video machine games. I wore out my paddles on this game. This is a good classic.

SKY TRAVEL astronomy program. A program that allows you to do things that traditional astronomy star books can't do, like go anywhere on the Earth to any past or future time and see what the sky looks like (stars, moon, planets, and sun). A unique program.

SUPER SNAPSHOT utility cartridge. It adds all the things that you wish were built into the C-64 operating system, but weren't, like easily scratching unwanted files from a disk, copying files to another disk, printing to paper or saving to disk a graphic displayed on the screen, and fast disk operations. Used often.

STAR TREK (a good version),a shoot out game. A classic.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR II. This is the most accurate flight simulator for the C-64, with a view out the window of real scenery like Chicago and Lake Michigan.

JET flight simulator. This one covers the entire U.S.A. and the speed of the jet permits reasonably short journeys all over the USA.

LEGACY OF THE ANCIENTS graphic adventure game. Unusually good graphics and sound and play, lots of different things to do.

FLEXIDRAW version 5.5 (can use a mouse) black and white drawing program. Easiest graphic program that I know of. I use it to trace pictures (digitize images) either from flat pictures or from a video camera, and to add lettering (descriptions, titles) to pre-existing digitized graphics.

TIME TUNNEL graphic adventure game. You go back into time to various places and hunt around for special items. Plays well.

THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT, a graphic adventure game. A medieval war game, but with a huge 3-D wire frame world to travel thru. Unique.

SONGWRITER, a music writing and playing program. This is the only good music composing program I know of, and I have tried many others. Uses a piano-scroll to record your music, works much better than the traditional music score with notes. Unique.

AND THE BAD PROGRAMS

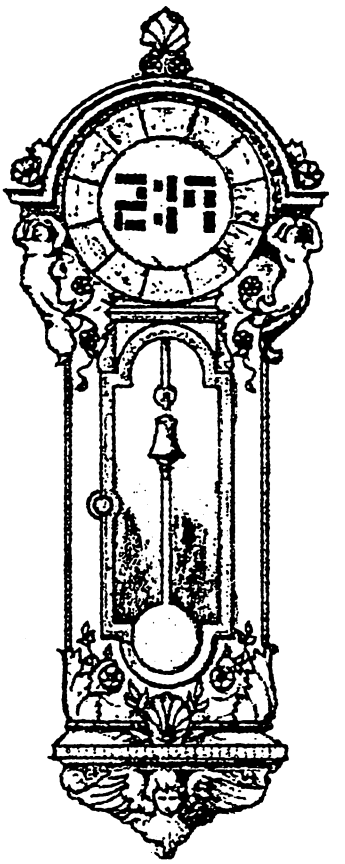
The overly fast, continuous action games, with no letup. Almost all the the shoot-out games I dislike, too much simple physical joystick action.

3-D drawing programs. I have two commercial C-64 programs, both big disappointments. Difficult, slow to use, low resolution. You can do the job much faster and easier with a pencil and paper. Big disappointment, because I like to look at 3-D stuff.

Desktop publishing programs. Big disappointment, mainly because no provision to put in real photos like a real magazine or newspaper has. Usually, all you can do is use a simple generic "clip art" image. Better to use a wordprocessor and figure out another way to add "real" graphics.

I dislike all text adventure games (no graphics), and I dislike most graphic adventure games (to much waiting and wear and tear on the disk drive), or awkward or difficult controls.

Video digitizers are a big disappointment. C-64 doesn't have enough pixel resolution for good grey scale pictures.



"Computer Wimp:" An Oldie But Goodie

by Dick Estel

The best computer book I ever read is obsolete. But then, most folks think our Commodores are obsolete, along with many of us who use them! In fact, we and our machines have a lot of life left, and so does "Computer Wimp (166 Things I Wish I Had Known Before I Bought My First Computer)" by John Bear.

Being a backward sort of guy, I bought my computer before I bought this book, so it contained some things I wished I had known before I bought the computer. But the value of this book lies not in its technical advice, which is still 40% valid, but in the style of writing, which is humorous and entertaining.

Recently I was clearing out some old Commodore equipment and other things, and I planned to put this book in the "yard sale" box. Then I started glancing through it, and finally re-read it completely, and put it back on the shelf to keep.

The book has a 1983 copyright, so much of the advice is contemporary with the earliest days of the Commodore 64. Re-reading it in the late 90's, one sees some parts of it as "quaint." But it still offers solid advice, as well as more entertainment than ten years of RUN, Compute Gazette and Commodore World combined. And some comments make John look like a visionary.

As entertaining as the text itself are a collection of humorous or pithy quotes, and apparently antique drawings with appropriate captions which appear in the margins throughout the book. Some of these are quoted at the end of this article.

I made several attempts to contact the author, without success. The quotes below are used without permission, but probably fit under the "fair use" concept for a review.

THE PRESCIENT JOHN BEAR:

"Many...prognosticators in the technical fields have been predicting that small computers will follow the same marketing pattern seen with calculators, digital watches, CB radios and other 'high tech' small items: a tremendous proliferation of manufacturers, continuing decline in prices, and ultimately a relatively small number of manufacturers surviving and prospering...Computers...are likely to appear in our lives in more and more ways, if not necessarily in the free-standing units now accounting for most small computer sales."

"Making your printer decision...wait: Low-cost ink jet printers that combine the best features of both [dot matrix and letter quality printers] are said to be just around the corner."

"Prices are changing in the electronics world at a rate unprecedented in history. Sixty years ago, it cost about 200 days salary to buy a Model T Ford--and today it

costs about 200 days salary to buy a new Ford...but less than ten years after the first electronic four-function calculator went on sale for $800, you can walk into any drugstore or supermarket and buy, for under $20, a pocket device that can do more than the huge million-dollar 'automatic brains' of the 1940's."

THE QUAINT JOHN BEAR:

"Virtually all small computer programs require 64,000 or fewer [bytes]...The 2,000 bytes of the Timex- Sinclair is almost certainly two small for all but the simplest uses. The 1 million bytes (1 megabyte) of the Apple Lisa is almost certainly more than small computer users will ever require."

"Major brands [of disks] at this writing have a retail price of around $5 for a 5.25" floppy disk. In quantity, the price can come down to $3.50 to $4 each. But it is not uncommon to find these disks at $$2 to $2.50 at discount houses, and often under $2 at computer shows."

"Hard disks are sealed units that...can hold from one million to ten million bytes...the price range is from $2,000 to $5,000 depending on capacity."

Mr. Bear spends a few pages lamenting the proliferation of various kinds of operating systems, disk sizes, disk speeds, etc. "It's as if long playing phonograph records were made in 100 different sizes and 100 different speeds...a 42 5/8 RPM 9 3/4" disk might play on a 43 1/4 RPM 9 1/4" turntable, or it might not, and even if it did, it might sound funny...will there ever be industry-wide standards? Don't hold your breath. It's on the list right after 27 RPM 11" records."

"The original title of this book was going to have been, 'How I went from a $35,000 Digital computer to a $15,000 Micromation computer to a $10,000 Northstar computer to a $3,000 Apple computer to a $600 Radio Shack computer to a 10 cent Eberhard Faber pencil.'"

(Editor's comment: He shoulda got a Commodore!)

JOHN BEAR QUOTES OTHER PEOPLE:

"It is said that one machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine, however, can do the work of one extraordinary man." --Elbert Hubbard

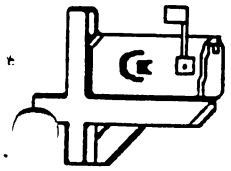
"The presence of humans in a system containing high-speed electronic computers and high speed, accurate communications, is quite inhibiting. Every means possible should be employed to eliminate humans in the data-processing chain." --Stuart Seaton, 1958

"Shopping at home with your television and home computer is just as much fun as shopping at a Russian department store. The available merchandise is limited, and you can neither touch it nor examine it until after you have bought and paid for it." --Arthur Elmont

"The computer can, in a fraction of a second, work out the shortest of 10,000 alternate routes between Windsor Castle and St. Paul's, but it can never say that if a detour is made through a garden in the spring, this is one of the things that make a journey seem shorter." --John Hargreaves

Editor's comment: However, today's mapping programs can determine the shortest route, the fastest route, or the scenic route between two points; of course, there is no attempt to quantify the added benefits of the scenic route, nor to guarantee that any one individual will enjoy that scenery.

The book is surely out of print--but if you see "Computer Wimp..." at a yard sale, snap it up. You won't be disappointed.



MaiLink Q & A

Q. Can ink-jet or laser printers print in draft mode? (to save money on ink or toner). (Chris Fite)

A. They can certainly print in draft mode on a PC. It is a function of the program, in conjunction with the printer driver. Word processors, at least, have the ability to select draft mode for printing. Therefore there is no reason they could not print in draft on a Commodore, as long as the correct codes are sent. (Dick Estel)

Q. Some say that using the second side of a floppy disk is bad because the dust catching felt cloth fibers inside orient themselves depending on which way the disk turns, flipping the disk over will cause the fibers to drop their load of dust back onto the floppy disk. Is this true? Does anybody really know? (Chris Fite)

Q. Does anybody know where I can buy that special smooth paper for the Okimate 10 printer. It is called "thermal transfer" paper (not "thermal" paper). I can buy "kits" of the special paper plus ink ribbon, but I just want the paper because I already have ribbons. Long ago, this paper was sold in department stores, but no longer. (Chris Fite)

Q. Does anybody know how to get around having to unplug a Super Graphix Jr. in order to change drive numbers on a hard drive? (Stanley Weintraub)

A. It sounds like a lot of information is missing here. I should know about all there is to know about Xetec hardware since I have all the schematics from Xetec and parts to build several more printer interfaces and have built quite a few in the past. I have not had occasion to use a SG Jr. with a hard drive though, but I have used the regular SuperGraphix with a Lt. Kernal hard drive and I've had no problem changing the device number of the hard drive while the printer interface was attached. The hard drive connects through the parallel port and the printer interface connects to the serial port and I've not seen any interference between them. Possibly this person was using an ICT hard drive? I have one of those but have not experimented with it. (Ron Fick)

VENDOR REPORT

If you don't know them - try MEI-Micro Center - 1100 Steelwood Rd., - Columbus, Ohio 43212, Phone 1-800-634-3478. Yet to find a ribbon they can't provide - plus -5.25 & 3.5 DS/DD (1581) disks - write protect tabs - mailers - etc. All listed in their December 98 catalog. Ribbons only sold in 6-packs, but the price is right.
--Robert Bennett

Just a short note in reference to the UPWEGO COMPUTER SUPPLY COMPANY. Being from Chicago and after reading the MaiLink article in the November issue, I called this morning to see if it was true they are out of business. It is NOT. They are still at the address given before which is:

Upwego Computer Supply Company 120 West Madison Street Chicago Illinois 60602 Telephone 312-372-6692
--Roger Hoyer

(Editor's note: I sent mail to Upwego to ask about their current status and the availability of the Ebonizer product. At press time (December 26), no response had been received.)

Another source for Commodore MPS 803 printer ribbons: Lyben Computer Systems, 2801 John R Road, Troy, MI 48083; 800-493-54777. Price is $3.25 each, $2.75 each for over twelve.
--Roger Hoyer

BUY...SELL...TRADE

C64 w/power pack and cables.
1541-II Disk Drive w/power pack, manual & cables.
FD-2000 Disk Drive w/power pack, manual, disk & cables.
Amiga monitor w/cables
Super Snapshot V-5 Cartridge w/disk
Star NX1000C Printer W/stand and extra ribbons
Wico Joystick
1351 Mouse w/pad
Ketek Command Center
Epyx Fast Load Cartridge w/manual
SX64 Computer

All in good working condition.

Contact Bob Sams for prices at 504-764-6728 - Email bsams@mobiletel.com or snail mail (In Bio).

Large list of programs on 5-1/4" and 3-1/2" disks as well as hardware. Send SASE for current list.
Steve Barcena, 7311 Sandy Lane, Mechanicsville, Va. 23111; stevebarcena@yahoo.com

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Commodore hardware, software, accessories and books, on individual lists. Send SASE for copies of the lsits to Roger Hoyer, 31 Potowatomie Trail, Milford OH 45150. Roger also is the contact for many Commodore items being offered by the Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club. Send a self-addressed floppy mailer with return postage for a sequential file listing the items.

Write Stuff package including speller and Illustrator II, $12. Earl Spicer, 109 Chapman Street, Watertown MA 02472; 617-926-0186. (Earl didn't mention whether this was 64 or 128, but he lists only the 64 among his equipment in his bio.)

Ribbon re-inking machine with three bottles of inking fluids, instructions and extra parts, $35 in U.S. Designed and built by member Chris Fite (see bio)

Commodore 64C in box, with reset switches for computer and drive; switchable Jiffy-DOS, $20 with standard power supply; (shipping extra)
C128 (non-working) $5 without power supply (shipping extra)
(These 2 are already packaged together; take both and the 128 is free)
OCP/Advanced OCP Art Studio $20*
PAF Personal Ancestral File genealogy program, CP/M, $15*
Q-Link 1990-91 PD Software Directory Free plus shipping
Commodore 64 User's Guide $3*
Commodore 64 Programmer's Reference Guide $7*
The Elementary Commodore 64 $3*
*includes shipping
Dick Estel (address in bio, but Email DickEstel@worldnet.att.net is easier for negotiating and figuring shipping costs)

WANTED:

A detailed book that tells how to translate stuff between different dialects of BASIC and old multi-machine magazines like Creative Computing.
Keith Keller (address in Bio)

REPAIRS:

ROLF MILLER will repair a 64 or a 1541 with used parts for $25 plus return shipping. If the problem is not obvious, give details. Inquire regarding other equipment.

LT. KERNAL HARD DRIVE

Ron Fick continues to build, repair and support the Xetec Lt. Kernal hard drive. Ron offers set-up help with clubs wanting to set up a BBS on a LtK. Ron is in the process of moving to California; watch for a new address. The current EMail address remains in effect till further notice.

Welcome New Members

ALAN W. BURK, 403 Cornell Ave., Calumet City, IL 60409-2138 Alan is currently unemployed. Hobbies: Writing, indoor/outdoor gardening, reading westerns (L. L'Amour), horror (S. King), science fiction, chess, conservative politics, tropical fish, religions, and the Chicago Cubs, Bulls & Bears. System: C-128, C-128D & C-64, 1571, FD-2000 & five 1541 disk drives, two RAMLinks, CMD 40 Meg. hard drive, datasette, Samsung SP-2412 & two 1525 printers, two 1702 & three 1902A monitors, Boca modem V.34, and SwiftLink with Dialogue 128. Interests: GEOS, adventure & baseball 'stat' based games, and word processing.

JACK CHELDIN, 23512 Collins St., Woodland Hills, CA 91367-3016 Jack is retired. Hobbies: None given. System: C-64 & SX-64, two 1541 disk drives, Star NX-1000C printer, 1702 monitor, and a Final Cartridge III. Interests: Collecting & trading software, and telcommunications, E-mail, (ricerdicer@aol.com).

LARRY HOLIDAY, 5400-C Golden Gate Parkway, Naples, FL 34116-7551 Larry is retired. Hobbies: None listed. System: C-128, 1541-II, 1571, 1581 & FD-2000 disk drives, RAMLink, CMD hard drive, Star NX-2480 & NX-1000C printers, and a 1902 monitor. Interests: Desterm128, TWS, Cosmi Swift-Calc64, member and Webmaster of his local C= users group, and telecommunications, E-mail, (nfn00856@naples.net).

RICHARD A. LA MUNYON, 3130 Centennial Rd. Lot 20, Sylvania, OH 43560-9689 Richard is retired. Hobbies: Golf, and bowling. System: C-64 & Amiga 2000, 1571 disk drive, 1526 printer, and a 1702 monitor. Interests: None given.

DAVID SERFASS, 977 N. 23rd St., Camden, NJ 08105-3717 Dave is a cook. Hobbies: Reading Asimov, Clancy, King & McCaffery, and photography. System: C-64, 1541 & FD-2000 disk drives, RAMLink + 16 Megs., Samsung SP-2412 printer, 1902 monitor, Turbo 232 interface, and a USR Sportster 33.6K Fax/modem. Interests: C= news groups, and telecommunications, E-mail, (dserfass@cris.com).

K. DALE SIDEBOTTOM, P. O. Box 303, New Albany, IN 47151-0303 Dale is a postal carrier. Interests: None listed. System: C-128, C-64, C-64C, Timex-Sinclair & Dell 386 notebook, 1541, 1571, 1581 & FD-2000 disk drives, RAMLink with 16 Megs., CMD-40 hard drive, SuperCPU-128 with 16 Megs., Star NX-1000 & 24 pin, HP LaserJet IIP & CopyJet M printers, Boca 14.5 modem, SwiftLink cartridge, and a HandyScanner 64. Interests: GEOS using Wheels, PostScript printing, desktop publishing, being president of his local users group, and telecommunications, E-mail, (luckykds@iglou.com).

ADDRESS CHANGES

Melvin Baral, 200 Dylan Dr., Atlantic City, NJ 08401-5558

Gordon Kjer, 3208 W. King Arthurs Ct., Greenfield, WI 53221

Robert Meyer, 20 Summer St. #1, Pennacook, NH 03303

DOING TAXES FOR THE FIRST TIME

by Rolf L. Miller

If you had your taxes done by a preparer last year, how much did it cost you? It may be more than just his or her fee. It could be that you paid more taxes than you should have. The preparers may not be to blame. They work with what you give them. They don't know your situation. So, they don't know particulars that might change things in your favor. On the other hand, you don't know the tax code. Hence, neither do you know particulars that might work in your favor. Furthermore, you can't check out the preparer's work.

Doing your own taxes is actually not difficult. The instructions written by the tax folks are at least as understandable as most program manuals. And you should have a copy of last year's returns. With those, the manuals, and the forms, it can be figured out as easily as learning a new program. Is it worth the effort? Well, how much did having it done by someone else cost you last year? And what will be learned this first time will simplify the task next year. More important, though, is that you will learn the rules. This in turn will guide next year's record keeping, and could very well open the door to adjustments in your financial activities to best fit the rules for further savings.

The first step, then, is to get the tax forms necessary, along with the instruction booklets. These can be ordered by phone (the phone book contains numbers for both federal and state tax information). The next step is to gather up all the records which contain tax related information that you were supposed to accumulate during the past year. Add to this any information returns received, like W2's, 1099's, etc. Now the task can begin.

The key to filling out a federal tax return is form 1040 and its accompanying instruction booklet. (Publication 17 is also recommended.) This is a pencil and eraser effort. And some use a set of forms as work sheets which they not only fill in, but write notations as reminders for next year's effort. Some lines ask only for an entry. Others require filling out schedules to determine the entry. And some of these schedules need additional forms. In other words, filling out each line of form 1040 as it applies to your situation guides you in what information is needed, along with directions to any other required forms and schedules. The state forms are done in the same way. This first-time effort will reveal ways to simplify the task in the future.

Many find it helpful to use the tax return as a blueprint to set up a spreadsheet. A spreadsheet is able to emulate the task because the calculation procedures required by tax forms can be imitated on the sheet: amounts can be entered, formulas written to utilize them, and the results used in other calculations. Thus, after a spreadsheet is set up, the raw numbers can be entered and then calculation is accomplished in one step.

EBONIZER 1st TRIAL

by Robert Bennett

1. Read Frank Redmond articles & thought it the thing for me. 2. After 3 unsuccessful phone calls - wrote them - 30 days - NADA. (See also Vendor Report) 3. Wrote Frank for the skinny - guess they're out of business but he sent me a can and asked for a writeup

RESULTS & COMMENTS

1. The ribbon I chose was a poor choice for a fair trial - it was a solid plastic-back (cheap) ribbon; probably

much better results had it been a nylon backed ribbon. 2. Directions say "spray lightly" - my sprayer probably sprayed too lightly - if you have breathing problems get someone else to spray (its LOUD). 3. Results - ribbon is much better - no splatters, but comes lighter in places. (probably 1 & 2 above)

I would say OK for in-house use, but not for publication. Clean-up was simple - wipe cassette with Kleenex. Suggest if you have plastic, you buy nylon if you wish to spray later.

COMPUTER TIPS

(compiled by Chris Fite from experience and other newsletters)

Monitor not as bright and clear as you expect? Wipe your finger across its glass front, if you find dust then clean it off the monitor screen. I have to do this every few months.

Have difficulty seeing where the perforation is when the paper comes out of the printer? On a stack of fanfold paper, run a magic marker up and down each corner of the stack (this won't mark the paper, only the perforated border). Now, every perforation line will be marked with a small black dot on each side.

Tired of having to buy new ink ribbons? Don't throw them away, they have many lifetimes left in them. Just save all those old worn out ribbons. Later you may be able to re-ink them, saving you a lot of money.

Are your programs and floppy disks scattered about? You can go to variety stores (maybe more than one) with a floppy disk in hand, find a general purpose plastic storage box (with snap on lid) that has the proper width (for either one or two rows of disks) and height to hold the floppies.

Are your programs disorganized? Just think up many subject headings, label new disks with each subject heading, then copy all those programs to the disk with the appropriate subject heading. Arrange all those disks with subject headings in alphabetical order. If a program can be classified under more than one subject heading, then copy it to multiple subject-headed disks. That way, no matter what subject you look under, you will find the right disk it is on.

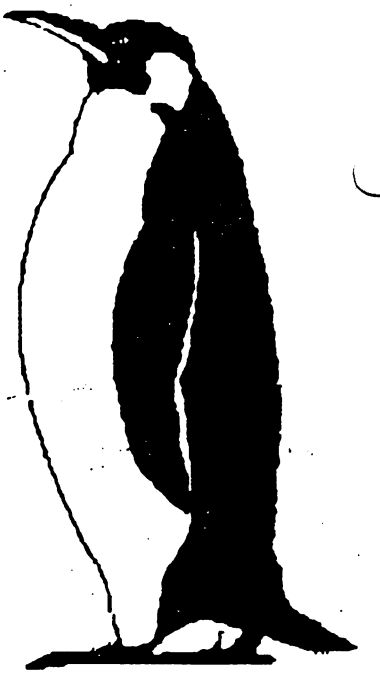
Always store floppy disks vertically. I have bought old collections stacked horizontally, and about 1/3 of them wouldn't work, the edges had been smashed down by the weight of the disks piled on top of them, and the disk inside the plastic outer sleeve wouldn't turn because it was pinched.

Buy spare computers for insurance against your computer breaking down. Prices are so low for used Commodore equipment, that the cheapest way to fix any future breakdown is to buy used equipment now and stash it away until you need it. My worst and most common breakdowns are floppy disk drives, I have had four fail on me. So I just pull out a good spare drive and plug it in.

Do you have two disk drives stacked on top of one another? To prevent blocking the air circulation slots in the drives, either plug stubby pencils into the four bottom corner holes or buy one inch plastic tubing at the hardware store cut into one inch lengths and position them under each foot of the second drive. Either way, this will raise the second drive up away from the first drive.

Do you have lots of used extra computer paper? Use it for scribbling notes. Or you can stack up your scrap paper, then cut them down to 3 X 4 inch smaller size, so each sheet of scrap paper becomes eight sheets of note paper.

What's Cool in This Issue



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