06/18/85 CES WRAP-UP

Summer CES Wrap-Up
by Arthur Leyenberger

In this article, we wrap up our CES coverage by reporting on other new
products from companies exhibiting at the semi-annual electronics show. In
past years, each show typically had a theme. Usually informal, and
definitely not announced, it was obvious what the latest fad, trend or new
products were that year. Previously games or educational software were the
themes.

This year no one theme emerged except that several major software companies
decided to to attend the show. But looking at the products from the various
manufacturers, two central ideas were present: more value for your computer
purchase and more mature entertainment products. Also, everywhere you
looked, software for Apple, Commodore and Atari computers all used some
form of pull down menus, windows and icons. And these techniques were used
on 8-bit computers. Here then is what's new from the rest of the 1985
Summer Consumer ELectronics Show.

Activision had several new programs for the Atari. Garry Kitchen's
Gamemaker: The Computer Game Design Kit is a programming tool for the
creation of your own computer games. Using only a joystick, you select from
various menus to choose the different aspects of a game you wish to create.
Pre-programmed characters such as an airplane, rocket ship, flying saucer,
ducks and a running man are included. The program also lets you select the
speed of movement and direction of the characters, background scenes, sound
effects and even music.

The Game Design Kit also lets you save your game creations on a separate disk so that you can give them to your friends. Saved games do not require the Design kit in order to run.

Another new Activision game is called Fast Tracks: The Computer Slot Car Construction kit. This is also a do-it-yourself program in which you can create, edit and save slot car tracks and then race on them. The program is joystick controlled whereby you select from a menu of track sections such as curves, loops and underpasses in order to assemble your track piece by piece. The track difficulty level and the slot car itself can be custom designed to whatever you want. The program also includes several pre-designed race courses to get you up and racing immediately.

Hacker is the third Activision game that was shown at CES. Much like a mystery movie, Hacker has no instructions, goal or guidelines: you simply boot the disk and the program asks you to log on. What you do after that is totally up to you. All you know when you start the game is that you have "accidently" broken into an unknown computer system and have stumbled onto a secret beyond anything you could imagine. With no rules, clues or background information you must find out whose system you have logged onto and what is going on. All Activision will say about the program is that there is a mystery to be solved and there may be several solutions to the problem.

Alter Ego is Activision's game designed for wimps. The program allows the player to vicariously experience living the life of someone else. As you are presented with situations and events, you can respond in any way you want and see how that behavior molds your personality. With Alter Ego, you can consider many different ways you might live in an entertaining and totally risk-free way. After each decision is made and entered the computer narrator explains the outcome and the possible consequences of that choice. Over time the effects of choices made early in life will affect the situations you later face.

The Game Design Kit, Fast Tracks, Hacker and Alter Ego will be available by the end of the year and each cost under $50.

Batteries Included, the Canadian firm responsible for two good programs, Paper Clip and HomePak, was showing a new 80-column cartridge for the 8-bit Atari computers. The BI-80 will work on the XL and XE computers and plugs into the cartridge slot. It is priced at about $80 and will work with a new version of Paper Clip and HomePak due out this fall.

Batteries Included announced that they would send a free BI-80 cartridge to any legitimate software developer, complete with its specifications. This open-minded attitude is refreshing in this industry and perhaps may yield a significant number of programs that will work with this product. A standard

may be created in the Atari 8-bit line which is fine with me. It would also be fine with Batteries Included.

Broderbund Software had only a few Atari related announcements. Championship Lode Runner will become available for the Atari computer this fall. Also, their new game Karetaka, will be available for the Atari. Karetaka is unique in that it is the first and only game that I know of that uses film-style cutaway views for the game screens. When approaching an enemy, for example, the screen first shows your player, then it cuts to a view of the opponent approaching, then back to you again. This technique is used effectively in this karate-combat-adventure game.

Another new game shown by Broderbund was Lode Runner's Rescue. This game follows in the footsteps of Lode Runner in that your character must traverse a series of 46 mazes on the way to your goal. You are Alexandra, the daughter of the famous Lode Runner, trying to reach your father's prison cell. Naturally you must pick up keys and avoid the hostile guards on your journey. The game also features a game editor in which you can create your own screens containing elevators, trap doors, enemy guards and rushing rivers. Lode Runner's Rescue will be available for the ATari this fall and cost $30.

Broderbund also announced the Print Shop Graphics Library Disk Two. This $25 disk, available this fall, provides 120 additional designs, symbols and pictures for use with your Print Shop graphic creations. Images in six new categories consist of such items as a tractor, jukebox, microscope, whale and cross. The Print Shop lets you easily write, design and print your own greeting cards, letterheads, banners and signs.

Computer Magic was showing an interesting product that will appeal to robot lovers of all ages. Called Robot Link, this program runs on any Atari 8-bit computer and lets you control Tomy Omnibot and Verbot robots. This software is unusual in that you do not need to actually walk the robot through its series of steps in order to train it to do something. Various sequences can be saved to disk and later reloaded.

The software package also comes with several games that take advantage of the program's unique ability to make one of the Tomy robots move in a random fashion. In addition, Robot Link allows you to have more precise control over the maneuverability of your robot. Robot Link will sell for approximately $40.

A small Oregon company named Covox had an intriguing product at the show. They were exhibiting a voice recognition and voice synthesis unit for Apple, Commodore and Atari computers. Called the Voice Master, it lets you record words in any language using your own pitch and accent and have the program later recognize and speak the words. Included in the $90 price is another program called the Voice Harp. This program lets you perform,

compose and write music simply by humming or whistling into the microphone. Seeing (and hearing) it in action is truly uncanny.

The Voice Harp lets you produce various tone qualities, different keys and multi-note harmonies. You can even see the notes scrolling on the screen on a musical staff as you hum or whistle. The results of your composition can be edited, saved and even printed. I look forward to obtaining a Voice Master in the near future in order to do a full-scale review.

Datasoft was showing something old, something new and something borrowed. The borrowed titles shown were licensed originals from other companies. From Atari, Datasoft is now marketing Pole Position, Pac-Man and Dig Dug. They are also marketing Zaxxon from Sega. In the something old category, Datasoft is continuing to sell the Conan, Mancopter and Bruce Lee games. For something new, Datasoft announced several games for the Atari computer. Mr. Do and Pole Position II have been around for a while but are now making their debut on the Atari computer. Mr. Do is similar to the popular arcade game. Pole Position II is also an arcade translation, complete with four tracks and the ability to create your own track. Another acquired arcade license is Elevator Action by Taito. Elevator Action and Pole Position II will be available in the fall and retail for about $30.

Three entirely new game were previewed by Datasoft. Zorro, based on the famous character created by Johnston McCulley in 1919, has appeared in the movies, on TV and in comics. Now the computer game arrives with the same villain that we all hate: Sergeant Garcia. The game begins with the abduction of a fair maiden by Garcia's soldiers. Zorro's pursuit takes him through 15 increasingly more difficult screens, including four in the catacombs beneath the mission graveyard. As Zorro, you leap from rooftops, trampoline your way from one floor to another and engage Garcia and his soldiers in duels.

Another new title from Datasoft has a movie tie-in with the new Spielberg film: Goonies. Following the adventures of the Goonie kids in the film, each screen is an elaborate Rube Goldberg type maze. Your goal is to obtain the pirate's treasure while avoiding the evil Mama Fratelli.

Datasoft's third new game is called Alternate Reality. It is a fantasy role-playing game in which you have been abducted by an alien spacecraft and transported to another time and place. In the first episode, "the city", you must learn basic survival skills such as finding food, shelter and money. The goal: return to Earth or seek revenge on your abducters.

Zorro, Goonies and Alternate Reality will be available for the Atari computer this fall. Alternate Reality will sell for $40 while Goonies and Zorro will sell for $30. Datasoft has not been very strong in the Atari market lately but we wish them the best of success with their line-up of highly recognizable titles.

Electronic Arts was not at the show but had a hotel suite in downtown Chicago. They were showing nothing new for the Atari computer at this time but told me that Skyfox, Adventure Construction Set and Road Racing Destruction Set would probably become available for the Atari 8-bit computer line by the end of the year. They have purchased the rights to the arcade hit, Marble Madness and mentioned that a version may appear for the Atari ST computers. Also, an enhanced Financial Cookbook, may become their first ST product.

Epyx Software, the folks who brought you Rescue on Fractalus and Ballblazer, two great Lucasfilm games, were proudly showing two additional Lucasfilm games. The Eidolon, one of the two new games, allows you to become an adventurer on a magical journey. In a kind of inverted Fractalus, you roam throughout caverns populated by trolls, greps and dragons. Your goal is to find the inventor of a 19th century time machine and learn the secrets of its use.

The other new Lucasfilm game is called Koronis Rift. This is really a strategy game in action game clothing. You play the role of a futuristic techno-scavenger who discovers the Koronis Rift: the legendary weapons testing grounds for an ancient race of beings. Unfortunately for you, this neat technology is guarded by a genetically engineered race of creatures who have outlived their creators. It's up to you to decide what weapons and technology to recover in order to survive.

Both Eidolon and Rift employ Lucasfilm's fractal generators to create ever-changing 3-D landscapes and caverns. These techniques appear to be even better than those used on the first two Lucasfilm games. Explosions look more realistic, objects seem lighter in the distance and more colorful objects appear on the screen. These games will be available in the fall and will sell for about $30.

The latest in the series of sports games from Epyx is The World's Greatest Football Game. As a computer coach, you can play against the computer or another opponent with up to 120 different plays, choosing either offense or defense. The game will sell for about $30 and be available by the time you read this.

Epyx also announced that a new enhanced version of Temple of Apshai will be available for the Atari computer soon. Called The Trilogy, this dungeons and dragons type of adventure role-playing game features 1400 separate chambers, multiple dungeon levels, improved graphics and faster action play. The game will cost $30 and includes the original Temple of Apshai, Curse of Ra and Upper Reaches of Apshai.

A company called Enhanced Technology Associates was demonstrating some interesting products in the back of the Atari booth. They have a product

called Virtuoso that allows you to create and edit sounds on the Atari computer. What is unique about their program is that you do not need to read music in order to use it effectively. The program is primarily joystick controlled and you simply draw the melody on the screen. Once this is done, note names can be displayed, timing may be changed and sections cut and pasted for future use.

Virtuoso requires an Atari 130XE computer and will sell for under $50. It will be available by the time you read this. Another of ETA's products is Virtuoso MIDI. This is a two-part product: An enhancement to the original Virtuoso program and a hardware interface. The company says that existing owners of Virtuoso can upgrade to the new product for the difference in price. ETA's MIDI interface will sell for under $150 and the program will cost $50. The MIDI Virtuoso requires an Atari 130XE computer and will be available by January.

Joseph Lyons, one of the partners of ETA told me that they will also be coming out with MIDI Virtuoso for the Atari ST computer by summer 1986. Few details are available now but they are committed to supporting the ST computer.

ICD, makers of SpartaDOS, were showing some interesting products. Their new SpartaDOS Construction Set appears to be the most sophisticated and powerful DOS for the 8-bit Atari computer. The program sells for $40 and offers an amazing array of features including many utilities. When used on the 130XE computer, a RAMdisk is created which can be configured as drive 1-8. Directories can be used, batch files created, individual files or entire disks locked (protected) and drive speed checked.

SpartaDOS also time and date stamps files and even lets you change these parameters. A disk can be given a volume name and changed at any time. Their are just to many features to mention here.

Another product shown by ICD is their R-Time 8 Cartridge. This is a real-time clock for the Atari computer. Using SpartaDOS without this cartridge allows you to time and date stamp your files but you must enter the time and date each time you power up your computer. With the R-Time cart, time and date information is automatically kept for you. Also, continuous time/date information can be displayed on the screen and is easily accessible from Basic and other languages. The cartridge uses a 5-year battery, sells for $70 and has its own expansion port. That way you can keep this cartridge in your computer at all times and plug other cartridges into it.

Microbits Peripheral Products (MPP) has supported Atari owners for years and is one of the few "oldtimers" in this young computer business. At CES they were showing everything from hard disks to inexpensive 1200 baud modems. MPP has two hard disks, a 5 megabyte and a 10 megabyte system. The

5 MB system will sell for under $1000 and includes the hard disk interface, hard disk and software. The 10MB system will probably sell for under $1200. If you already have a hard disk, then you can buy the hard disk interface for under $250. I saw the 10MB system working with and 800XL and loading files is fast.

MPP will also be introducing a 1200 baud modem for the Atari that will sell for under $200. That price will include terminal software. MPP is also currently working on a brand new telecommunications program that will run on everything from Atari STs to IBM PCs to Atari 800s. The hard disk systems and modem will be available by the time you read this.

Another new product from MPP is the Micronet networking system. This net will handle up to eight Atari computers running off of one set of peripherals. Standard Atari SIO peripherals may be used for a very cost-effective multi-station Atari setup. An eight-workstation arrangement with Atari XL computers, color monitors, one set of peripherals and Micronet would cost roughly $3500, about one-third the cots of similar Apple setup.

A piece of hardware, appealing mostly to hackers and hardware buffs, is a product called Microport. This is a breadboard which interfaces from the Atari computer to the real world. It plugs into the parallel port on either an XL computer or a 130XE and gives you eight control channels. It will sell for $50 and be available by the time you read this.

Mindscape announced that their only new product for the Atari, The Halley Project: A Mission in Our Solar System, is available now. This is a real-time space adventure simulation written by Tom Snyder. Every planet, star or moon depicted in this program moves at the same rate of speed and in the same orbit as they actually do in our solar system.

The Halley Project uses high resolution graphics and attention to detail in what looks like a very good simulation of outer space. Players must qualify for the top secret "Halley Project" by completing a series of navigational tests. Through the tests and obstacles the program helps the players master facts about our solar system, including Halley's Comet and its orbit. An understanding of gravity, atmospheric conditions, orbital motion, relative size, position and orbits of planets and moons, location of constellation and how eclipses work are all provided. The Halley Project will sell for $45.

Synapse Software, now owned by Broderbund, is reported to be in healthy financial condition. This is evident by their introduction of several new products for the 8-bit Atari computer line. Mindwheel and Essex are two new text adventures announced by Synapse. Billed as ELectronic Novels, these two novels are said to pick up were the printed word leaves off. What is interesting is that you begin these adventures by reading a hard-bound book that sets the stage and describes the characters. Then, you begin the text

adventure on your computer as a continuation of what you have just read.

The parser used in these text adventure games is as good as that used by other text adventure publishers. Mindwheel is a journey into the minds of four deceased people of extraordinary power. Off-the-wall humor is used throughout the adventure which adds to its unique quality. Essex is the story of an intergalactic search and rescue mission.

Synapse also announced new versions of SYNCalc and SYNFile+ that will take advantage of the extra memory in the Atari 130XE computer. If you already own either of these excellent products, Synapse is offering a $10 upgrade policy. For $10 and your current disk, Synapse will send you the new improved version of the program. This offer is being done through their customer service department.

Synapse has also announced the SYNCalc Template Disk. Available by the time you read this, this product features 22 different templates for use with the SYNCalc spreadsheet program. Spreadsheet formats and formulas in such areas as stock/bond evaluation, expense reporting, mortgage payment analysis, personal net worth and conversion tables are offered on this $19.95 disk. These templates make an already excellent and useful program even more worthwhile.

Another new product was announced by Synapse. Called Letterhead, this program integrates word processing, an address file and a graphics capability. Using windows and drop down menus, Letterhead allows you to create and save letter formats, create letterheads using multiple fonts and use a tickler-style address file for keeping track of your data. A keyboard, joystick, touch tablet or mouse can be used with this program. Letterhead will be available in late fall and sell for under $50.