

TV GAMER

JANUARY 1985 85p

THE PLAYER'S GUIDE TO CASSETTE AND CARTRIDGE GAMES

HOUSE OF DRAGON

DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN

New games from top sci-fi cult

THE LAST STARFIGHTER

Amazing special effects by computer

WIN A MEMOTECH!

See competition inside this issue

IN DEPTH REVIEWS

For Amstrad, Atari, BBC, C64, Spectrum

AND MORE...

**YOUR
BEST GUIDE TO
HOME COMPUTER GAMES**

Chances are that you haven't heard of the Memotech range of computers and peripherals. The reason for this is lack of publicity - plus the fact that the system has been overshadowed by the arrival of both the QL and MSX.

Despite its rather candid entry into the UK market, the Memotech has a highly commendable specification. It comes in two models: the MTX 550 which costs £199 and sports a 49k memory, and the MTX 510 which costs £275 and features an 80k RAM.

Both look very similar in appearance. They are both compact C8804-size computers in a black-brushed metal finish. The first thing you notice on opening the box is the sturdy construction of the main. The whole thing is made of tough, durable metal as opposed to the customary plastic casing we have grown used to. This is good news for any parents with hyperactive kids who are likely to kick it about a bit.

The keyboard, too, is of a very high quality. It gives a professional feel to the home micro, which is unusual. The layout is simple yet comprehensive. The eight function keys (seven if you use the Shift key) are positioned separately from the QWERTY keyboard and the space/sortkey key pad.

Another nice feature of the keyboard is the 'break' key arrangement. Here, two buttons - on either side of the space bar - must be pressed together to obtain a full system reset. This prevents a lot of accidental memory wipes, which we have all caused at least once.

Yet another nice feature of the Memotech is the wide range of input/output sockets, situated on the rear and side of the machine. There are provisions for two Atari-style joysticks, TV, monitor (composite video), external audio to link the micro to your hi-fi or stereo blaster. Centronics printer, cassette recorder, and RS 232. Finally, there is an expansion port, not unlike the Spectrum, on the side.

A comprehensive 280-page A4 instruction manual comes with the MTX series of computers. This is concerned mainly with the use and care of Basic programming. Programming Memotech is a little different to most other computers, in that the graphics are handled by a

separate language: MTX graphics. This works independently of MTX Basic and the Z80 assembly.

In addition to these three internal languages, there is one entitled Noddy. This new language is best described as a text version of Logo. It acts as a simple word processor that anyone can use. Thirteen pages of the user manual are devoted to Noddy, so there should be no problem with the initial stages.

Software. Despite its low key appearance, a surprisingly large number of software houses are producing games, utilities and languages for this system. On the game side, there are companies such as Micro Power, Level 8, MC Lottions and Continental Software, to name but a few. According to Memotech, there are well over fifty games available for this system.

There is undoubtedly a reasonable supply of games. But the Memotech needs the support of some of the biggest manufacturers - like Activision - before it gains the street credibility it needs to be a popular choice among gamers. Memotech, however, is caught in the hardware/software vicious circle whereby software companies won't produce games for systems with only a few owners, and the number of owners won't increase until there is enough software. Some of the big boys must be prepared to stick their neck out if the system is to be the hit it deserves to be.

The games software available is of a reasonable quality, with nice graphics and sound. The game ideas do leave a little to be desired in the originality department. Much of what is available is purely arcade rip-offs and under rather fancy displays - Kilpicks by Continental Software is one such. Hopefully, standards of game originality will improve as more computers are sold.

Peripherals. The MTX series of computers are among the best home systems around to date for their number and quality of peripherals.

Tape recorders can be of any type. There is no official recorder that has to be bought, which is one of the Commodore and Amstrad drawbacks. Virtually any recorder will work, even the battered old re-



THE UNS

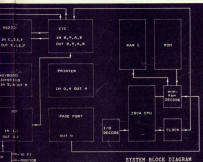
Darrin Willison





NSUNG HERO

Williamson looks at the Memotech MTX 512



cordons lying around in the office.

If you choose a faster means of data retrieval, you are spoilt for choice. Thanks to the two independent RS 232 ports and the handy disc drive bus, you can connect up to four 5.25 and/or eight-inch floppy disc drives, Memotech slimline discs (not unlike Zipmat), or even Winchester-style hard discs. These give you up to ten megabytes of instant information on tap.

Internal BASIC can be added, rather like the BBC micro. So you can use additional languages such as Pascal, or powerful word processors such as MTX New Word. More ROMs should be available fairly soon.

Internal RAM shouldn't be a problem, either. The MTX 512 comes with 80K memory, which is more than most home micros give you. Of that, 44K is accessible by the humble user. What's more, user RAM can be expanded to 512K in increments of 64K, 128K or 256K: do you see not without expensive possibilities.

The MTX screen has quite impressive graphics and sound capabilities, as well. The machine sport a 256 x 192 pixel resolution, thirty-two user-definable sprites and sixteen colours which are fairly similar to those of the Commodore 64. There are also eight user-definable graphical windows, 128 user-definable characters, and 40 x 24 character text display.

Sound, too, is well catered for, with a four-voice sound generation second only to Commodore's SID chip (and the Yamaha CDM, of course).

Compatibility is yet another good point on the side of this machine. It is CP/M compatible, thanks to the Z80A control processor. Consequently, it is possible to develop those with different dialects of Basic that use the Z80 CPU - for example, the Adria, SmartBasic, Spectravideo Basic, Sinclair Basic, and even MEL Basic. Pursuing this line of technology may well prove profitable. After all, wouldn't you buy a machine that could potentially run the software of all those systems?

The Memotech MTX 512 proves excellent value for money and is a good alternative to the overpriced BBC micro. It might, however, be prudent to wait a while and see how the software side of things picks up in the next few months. □