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APPLE II
GAMES REVIEWED

AUSTRALIA'S TOP SELLING COMPUTER MAGAZINE



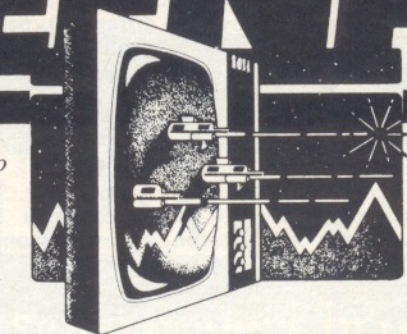
**DRIVING YOUR COMPUTING DOLLAR FURTHER:
SHARP'S POCKET PC 1500 BREAKS THE SCREEN BARRIER**

SCREENPLAY

This month Dick Olney & co

review games for the Apple II.

This month I've been playing some of the games available for the Apple II microcomputer. Although this machine is rather different from most of those I've previously covered, and is not marketed as a games machine, there is a considerable volume of such software available for it. Apple itself produces very little in this area, but this is made up for by dozens of (mostly American) software publishers. The configuration I used was a 48k Apple II Europlus with a single mini disk drive and the Applesoft ROM with an automatic boot feature. The machine was fitted with a colour card and UHF

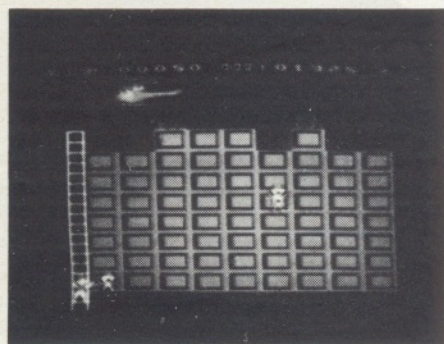


modulator so that I could plug it directly into my television.

Apple will supply a set of games paddles for \$35, but for most of the games I used a sort of universal joystick with dual buttons and paddle-emulating slide switches as well as the stick itself. This is manufactured in Texas by TG Products, and is undoubtedly the best-designed games controller I've used. The price of the system would be \$2490 (incl. Sales Tax) for the machine and

extras with an additional \$60 for the joystick. This is clearly more than most people would be willing to pay just to play games, but I'm sure there are plenty of people with Apples who spend at least some of the time doing just that.

All of the games were of course supplied on 5¼in disks. Although I have concentrated here on real time arcade-type games I should point out that this machine is also notable for the many Adventure games available for it. Note that star ratings are based on a maximum of eight and reflect those qualities most appropriate to the nature of the game.



GAME: Firebird

PRICE: \$39.95

SUPPLIER: Gebelli Software

Although this game has a very familiar feel about it I can't actually remember seeing anything quite like it. The scenario is a building, made up of 72 rectangular rooms, which is under attack from a firebird racing through

the sky and dropping incendiary eggs at random. The latter set fire to a room, eventually destroying it and forcing its occupant to leap from the building. You can put the fire out (if you're quick enough) by positioning 'Piggo the fire-fighting pig' next to the room and dousing it with water; failing this you must attempt to catch the unfortunate occupant before he falls to his death. Moving Piggo and his ladder and squirting water are all controlled by the keyboard, and specific keys can be re-defined to best suit your play.

If you manage to catch one of the falling victims you must take him to the top of the ladder where he will eventually be rescued by a circling helicopter. You should do this quickly since Piggo can only carry one person at a time, and cannot squirt water with his hands full. For each person saved the helicopter will replace one room; dropping it onto the top of the smallest column. The only hazard you encounter

is if one of the people falls directly on top of Piggo, in which case he will topple off the ladder. He has three lives and the game ends when these have been used up or (more often the case) when two complete columns of rooms have been destroyed. If you manage to save the entire bottom row when all other rooms have burnt down you start a new frame.

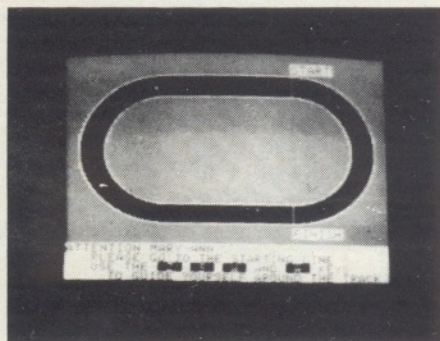
It takes some time to get used to this game, though it is well worth the effort. Firebird is well thought out and professionally presented, and should certainly provide plenty of entertainment. It is a little surprising that there is no joystick option, though the keyboard controls are satisfactory (they give incremental rather than continuous motion) so this shouldn't put you off.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****

ADDICTIVE QUALITY: *****

RESPONSE TIMES: ***

VALUE FOR MONEY: *****



GAME: Olympic Decathlon

PRICE: \$29.95

SUPPLIER: Microsoft

This glossy athletics simulator from Microsoft is likely to receive a mixed welcome from gamers. The manual

insists that paddles or a joystick are necessary — these are in fact only used in two of the events; the shot put and the hurdles (neither of which were exactly my forte!). Mostly the game demands rapid finger movement over the keyboard, often literally using two fingers as legs as if running. Up to six players can take part, each entering their names into the computer, and there is the opportunity for unlimited practice before the decathlon proper. Each event is heralded by a little fanfare, and full instructions are displayed throughout with the option to look at the scoreboard at any time. The graphics and presentation are flawless, but the general pace of the game is rather slow because of the low percentage of the playing time during which you are active. The long and high jumps were my favourite events, closely fol-

lowed by the pole vault. I must admit I found the frantic finger pumping in the track events rather boring and tending to cause severe knuckle cramp; but I suppose this mirrors reality in some ways! Essentially this is ten quite simple games neatly compiled into an exclusive games package (they are even accessed from disk individually). Although the actual 'events' are, in themselves, rather trivial and unlikely to stimulate the hyperactive Defender freak or intrepid Star Trekker, Olympic Decathlon should appeal to the family audience where it would undoubtedly provide many hours of amusement.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****

ADDICTIVE QUALITY: ***

PRESENTATION: *****

VALUE FOR MONEY: *****



GAME: Epoch
PRICE: \$37.50
SUPPLIER: Sirius Software

Written by Harry Miller (not THE H. Miller), this game is a true real time interpretation of Star Trek in which all movement and firing is controlled by the joystick or games paddles. Though it lacks the complexity found in more traditional games of this genre (there are no charts, scans or textual commands) the excellent use of graphics and control

precision made it a joy to behold. You are under attack by four different types of enemy craft which can only be destroyed by a direct hit at the centre of their mass. To achieve this you position the crosshair sights over the alien ship before firing your missiles. These crosshairs dictate direction of motion as well as aim, and though of course they actually always remain in the centre of the screen, the impression of three-dimensional movement is surprisingly effective. One of the controller buttons gives acceleration and the other deceleration, and pressing them both together achieves self-repeating fire power. As well as alien ships there are stationary enemy bases which can again only be destroyed by accurate central hits.

The constraints upon your degree of destruction are fuel, ammunition and time — the game ends if any one of these runs out. The amount of fuel decreases steadily during any change of speed (though not while in stable motion) and also drops if you are hit by alien fire. Ammunition level, of course,

depends on how many shots you fire. Both of these can be completely replenished by driving through the porthole of a friendly base, requiring careful navigation. Time is lost at a steady rate whatever you do and can only be regained by travelling through the centre of a time portal. These are great fun, involving steering the ship through a colourful corridor of gateways.

The fundamental principles of this game resemble the real time section of Atari's Star Raiders, though saying this does not do it justice. It is certainly one of the best games of this type that I've come across. If you've got an Apple II with a colour set up then you need Epoch.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: *****
RESPONSE TIMES: *****
VALUE FOR MONEY: *****



GAME: International Grand Prix
PRICE: \$32.95
SUPPLIER: Riverbank Software

Given the front view from a racing car your task in this game is to use the paddle or joystick to drive as quickly as possible around a racetrack (no surprises there!). The interesting thing about this game is the number of options. Firstly there are five international circuits to choose from, each of which has all the elements of its real life counterpart. You can choose the number of laps, amount of fuel on board and difficulty level (zero to seven determines road surface skid potential) as well as manual or automatic transmission. The button on your paddle or joystick is used to accelerate the car. For manual transmission, taking your finger off the button for a second changes gear and

with automatic you can stabilise your speed using the cruise control (space bar). The array of options and crisp presentation cannot however conceal the uninspired and rather dull nature of this game.

USE OF GRAPHICS: ****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: **
RESPONSE TIMES: *****
VALUE FOR MONEY: ***

GAME: Fly Wars
PRICE: \$21.79
SUPPLIER: Sirius Software

It's you (the spider) against the flies (unfair advantage to you), caterpillars which appear as each fly is eaten (a slight advantage to you — they drop bombs, of a substance I don't care to think about) and cocoons which appear as each caterpillar is destroyed (an easy target for any spider) and bug spray,

which is a most unfair weapon to bring into what is otherwise a good, clean ecological game. The bug spray is instant death to the spider.

The game is best played with joysticks although the keyboard will do. It involves moving the spider around the screen to form a web which entraps as many flies as possible. Having captured its victims, the spider must then chase flies and caterpillars and eat them. As cocoons appear they must be pushed to the top of the screen where they explode and it is during this

effort that the bug spray appears more frequently.

I'm not a great fan of this type of game, but personal preferences differ and if you're looking for something quite different from the normal shoot-them-before-they-shoot-you game then this would certainly be worthwhile.

USE OF GRAPHICS: ****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: ***
RESPONSE TIMES: ****
VALUE FOR MONEY: ****

GAME: Jellyfish
PRICE: \$21.79
SUPPLIER: Sirius Software

Another game which really requires joysticks, Jellyfish can be played by two people against each other or one against the computer. The object of the game is to guide a submarine over a nuclear waste canister (obviously left there by an inconsiderate twentieth

century society) while avoiding collision with giant jellyfish, octopi and squid and taking pot shots at your opponent who should also be attempting to recover canisters.

It is interesting that your primary mission is supposed to be to recover canisters, which has a score value of 1,000 points, while 5,000 points are awarded to bumping off your opponent. The games I played quickly degraded into a hide and kill match among the

giant jellyfish.

Jellyfish has good graphics and colour and is good value for money. It's really two games in one: if you're playing against an opponent, canisters are left rotting on the seabed while submarines fight it out.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: *****
RESPONSE TIMES: ***
VALUE FOR MONEY: ****



GAME: STAR BLAZER
PRICE: \$35.78
SUPPLIER: BRODERBUND SOFTWARE

The name of this game is slightly inaccurate in that all play takes place within several hundred feet of the ground, moving up and down and from left to right in an attempt to bomb enemy installations.

The WWII aircraft fires "pulse

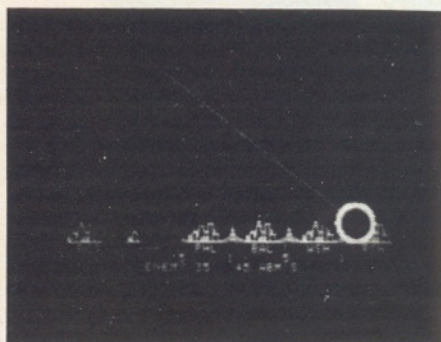
cannons" at oncoming missiles in levels beyond the initial scenario in which the aircraft has to destroy enemy radar installations in order to proceed to the next level. One possible criticism is a feeling of some lack of control because the firing button shoots either the "pulse cannons" or bombs, depending on the aircraft's altitude. This prevents the aircraft from conducting a bombing raid at high altitudes during lulls in enemy attack.

Five scenarios are provided with successively increasing levels of

difficulty. The last mission is to wipe out the "Bungeling headquarters". This proved to be extremely difficult so the game certainly offers a challenge.

In summary: very good response time and excellent graphics, but should only be played with a joystick.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: *****
RESPONSE TIMES: *****
VALUE FOR MONEY: *****



GAME: ABM
PRICE: \$29.95
SUPPLIER: Muse Software

As you may have guessed, this is a variant of the popular Missile Command, Atari's version of which I covered in April. It is in fact virtually identical except that you have five missile bases firing two different sizes of missile. Your task is, of course, to shoot down approaching nuclear warheads in an attempt to protect the east coast of the USA from its impending (and indeed inevitable) demise. Paddles or the joystick are used to guide the target sight and ABMs are sent ploughing towards its position at the press of a button. The precise action of the control unit can be customised at beginning of play, though apparently only once. In the original game the sight would leave

a marker immediately you fired, whilst remaining active, allowing you to launch missiles as frequently as you wished. In ABM, however, the sight disappears while your missile is in flight and thus you can only launch them one at a time, a serious defect as it entirely changes the nature of play. The bombers and formidable 'smart missiles' seen in Missile Command are also sadly lacking in this game. I must admit that I like it anyway, so although I rate this 'cover version' a poor copy I should add that it's a good substitute.

USE OF GRAPHICS: *****
ADDICTIVE QUALITY: *****
RESPONSE TIMES: *****
VALUE FOR MONEY: *****

Conclusion.

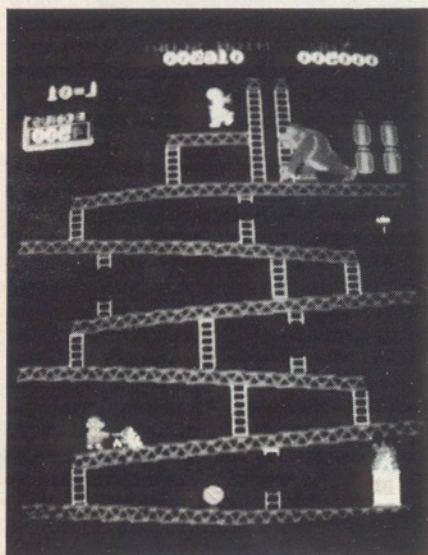
As I mentioned in the introduction, the Apple II is neither designed nor marketed as a games machine. Despite this, the quality of the graphics and lack of memory limitations make it an admir-

able instrument for such pursuits. The games I have seen are varied and colourful and often of a quality much closer to that of their dedicated arcade peers than on smaller machines. Any Apple II users currently restricting their machine to more serious pursuits would be well advised to investigate its leisure potential.

Our thanks to Bob Shattock of ComputerLand South Melbourne (37 Albert Road, Ph: (03) 266 8647) for the loan of the Apple computer and joystick.

All software reviewed this month is distributed in Australia by Imagineering (Ph: (02) 358 3011) and is available from all Apple dealers.

ARCADE ACE



This month I have chosen a game whose variety has always impressed me, despite my inability to really master it. The oddly named Donkey Kong sets you the task of rescuing a maiden from an enraged gorilla. At the outset the gorilla carries his victim to the top of the screen and, using a four-way joystick, you control a little 'jumpman' who must ascend the various levels to save her. The problem is that our oversized primate is not too happy about your presence and spends his time rolling heavy barrels down at you. Luckily you have the ability to leap over these as they approach — but the timing of this is critical. There are a couple of mallets dotted around and if you manage to grab one of these you have a limited period of time in which you can smash the barrels before they reach you. To add further to your problems, as time passes

increasing numbers of fireballs arrive to chase you.

The first frame is a simple configuration of girders and ladders with the main problems being the barrels and fireballs. If you manage to get to the top Kong makes off, carrying his reluctant victim to a new vantage point, and as the game progresses the scenarios become increasingly complex with lifts, conveyor belts and boiling vats to be negotiated. When you have successfully completed four screens the girl is finally released and the game starts again with increased ferocity. Donkey Kong combines simple controls with an interesting selection of game tasks. This, together with its colourful graphics, makes it almost as much fun to watch as to play and puts it at the forefront of the current move away from space shootouts.