Powerful Atari strikes a balance

NOT long ago the Atari 1040ST would have been classified as a super (as in huge) computer, but the 1986 model fits under your arm.

In standard form the basic package includes the computer with 1024K of RAM, a now standard 800K double-sided micro disk drive, either color or monochrome color monitor, Basic and Logo computer languages, and GEM desk top utilities.

It can't really be compared directly to other pseudo 16-32 bit computers, such as Commodore's Amiga and Apple's Macintosh. It has made its own niche in the market because it has a number of unique features.

It is an exceedingly powerful machine which is hard to pigeon hole in the computing world. It tries to be all things to all men. It appeals to both the business man and the home enthusiast. And in trying to reach both markets, in my opinion, is doing more harm than good.

Its graphics are powerful — not as powerful as the Amiga's yet far greater than the Macintosh. But on the other hand it is better suited to business than the Amiga. But it doesn't have the vast range of software already available for the Macintosh.

So where does the Atari 1040ST find fit in?

It is mainly a business machine, which can be used for hobbyist purposes such as education, games and music. The Atari has its disk drive built in to the side of the keyboard making it a genuine transportable computer. Only one external disk drive can be added, whether it is micro or standard size floppy disk is up to the user. The standard floppy are cheaper, as are the disks that one uses in it.

Buttons

It has a two button mouse, which confuses all Macintosh users as they only have one, and with the GEM desk top in operation it works almost identically to that of the Macintosh.

The monochrome monitor is brilliant. It is the best I have seen, especially for its price.

But the color monitor is disappointing. It does the job of producing the color displays, but it is difficult to do serious work on it.

In low resolution mode the screen looks too stretched and primitive. In medium resolution the screen looks too compacted and is difficult to read.

The color monitor is a pretty add-on which is aimed at the hobbyist rather than the businessman. It is fine for games, education, music and even business graphs, but not good for word processing, spreadsheets, and data base.
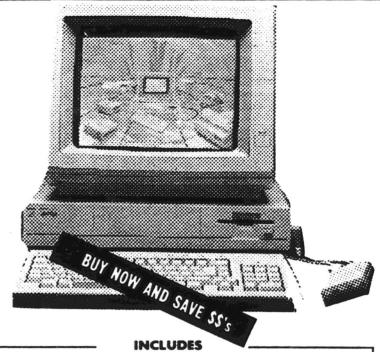
Software

But a good machine is not made by hardware alone. It requires good software. And for the Atari there is plenty of software available, although you do have to look for it.

There is software for all types of applications, and the Public Domain software is very interesting, including three dimensional graphics packages.

The Atari 1040ST represents a new trend in computers. It deserves to do well and I hope it does, although it has to fight against the Apple Macintosh and the Commodore Amiga.

These two machines have more advertising and promotional support and so have gained more public awareness than the Atari, which to date has not been widely promoted — *By our computer writer.*

TV set used as Atari monitor

ATARI has released a new machine it hopes will pick up a number of Christmas sales.

The Atari 520STM is a 16-bit system that can use a television set as a monitor.
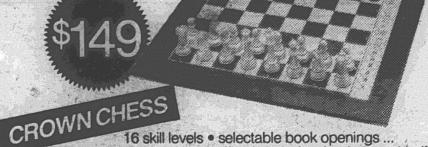
The complete package includes a computer, mouse control unit with RF modulation, a disk drive and the following software: First Word (word processing), Neochrome, a color graphics drawing package and Basic and Logo languages.

Australian distributor of Atari, Mobex, says the new machine processes information four time faster, has four times the memory, twice the disk drive capacity and over one hundred times the access speed of its closest competitor.

Additional standard features include RS232, Centronics, MIDI, disk and joystick ports and the ability to connect to three different types of display monitors — RF composite, video and RGB.

These benefits, along with the ability to use icons and pull-down windows, make the 520STM an ideal system for the home computer enthusiast, Mobex stated.

Recommended retail is $1495. A wide range of software is available, including entertainment programs.