

AUSOM NEWS

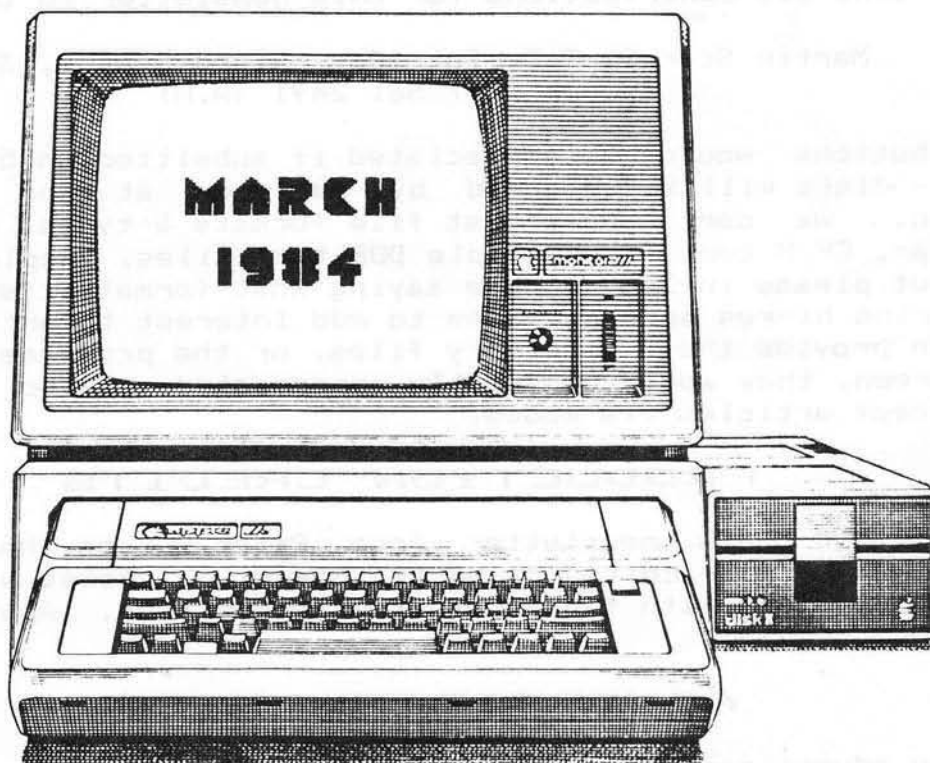
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THE NEWSLETTER OF

A.U.S.O.M

THE APPLE USERS' SOCIETY OF MELBOURNE

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CONFERENCE REPORT

1st AUSTRALASIAN SOFTWARE DEVELOPER'S CONFERENCE REPORT

By: Peter Watson

Due to a lucky set of circumstances, I found myself in Sydney at the beginning of February attending the first Australasian Software Developer's Conference, sponsored by Apple Australia. I was formally representing AUSOM since the club had made a contribution toward the cost of attending (\$300 plus fares to Sydney please!). This sponsorship was provided for several reasons. Firstly, so that the club could be seen to be a serious presence in the Apple world. Secondly, to meet with representatives from the user's groups in other states, and lastly to keep you, the members, informed with details of the latest Apple hardware and software releases, as well as details of future developments by the company whose fortunes directly affect us all as Apple users. The reason the club thought a "software developer's" conference worth attending is because it was believed that the sessions would be aimed more at providing technical information than the pure 'Sell More Apples' approach taken at dealer meetings, or the dancing girls and disco music of the press releases (mind you, the videotape of the Sydney press release of the Macintosh provided 'interesting' viewing to say the least!)

Over the next few months I will be writing several articles describing in detail the conference, the attendees, and most importantly, the information made available. As I have recordings of the majority of the sessions as well as written notes, I am confident of being able to provide fairly accurate information (at least as accurate as was given to me, in any case!)

In remainder of this article I will talk about some of the items which are currently news, in particular about the hardware and software announcements for the Apple][+ and //e machines.

Before I do that however, I must make comment on the 'Mac'. The Macintosh (the name derives from a type of apple, the Macintosh apple), is the machine that Apple is relying on to keep the company from becoming 'just one more home computer supplier'. Have they succeeded? Apple believes the first 100 days after the release will tell them, but for my part, if it is not a success I will want to know why.

Imagine an Apple Lisa for half the price, running 60% faster and transportable to boot. Imagine that 100 of the leading software houses are already writing software for the machine - names like Microsoft (who expect 50% of their sales revenue in 1984/85 to come from 'Mac' software!), Lotus (of 1-2-3 fame), and Software Publishing Corp (PFS: series). Even companies such as Infocom (Zork) and Sirtech (Wizardry) are busy converting their games software - and for a machine that even Apple is not targeting as a 'home computer'. (The theory is that executives will bring their 'Mac's home from the office to do some extra work and will then want some relaxation).

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bus! (a 65000??) Alternatively, Apple is well aware of the 65C02 processor — the ProDOS assembler can assemble 65C02 instructions!.

The Apple //e is now being bundled with hardware such that the effective price is dropping somewhat — it is interesting to note that a 'Business System' (including an extra drive and 64K of extended memory) is only \$300 more than a 'Starter System'. For this reason, Apple expects most people to buy the 'Business System', implying that most new Apple owners will have 128K available. This means you can expect to see most new software written to take advantage of the extra memory if present.

There are many new additions to the Apple // family of accessories. The Profile drive can now be used (under ProDOS), giving 5 Mb of online storage. The Duofile drive is a single box containing two Disk II (equivalent) drives with a single cable to the back of the Apple — where at long last there is plug leading from the interface card. No more opening the lid to disconnect the drives! (The interface card still uses the same boot ROMs, but has otherwise been redesigned). The cost of a Duofile should be about two-thirds the cost of two single drives, ie. just under a \$1000. While we're talking about new drives, Rana has produced a twin 360K drive box containing an 8086 processor and 256K of RAM. This box allows the Apple to read and write IBM format disks, and to run MS-DOS software!

Other third party hardware includes 3 Mb floppies, 40 Mb hard disks (with tape streaming backup), several 68000 processor boards, and a 1 Mb memory board! Other miscellaneous Apple products include the Imagewriter dot matrix printer, a 4 pen color plotter, the Australian designed Netcomm board for communicating with IBM mainframes and a 300-1200 baud auto-answer, auto-dial modem (currently for the U.S. market only — an Australian version is out to tender at present).

The most exciting piece of news for the Apple // series is, of course, the announcement of the "Mouse". The hardware consists of an identical mouse to that used on the 'Mac', connected to an interface board that plugs into any slot on the //s motherboard. The mouse can be used from BASIC as well as from machine language, and is interrupt driven. Since the mouse card can detect if a key has been pressed, the Apple // can effectively have an interrupt driven keyboard at last. (To those sceptics who wonder what all the fuss is about, I can only say that the best argument for a mouse is to use it for while!)

The 'catch' with using a mouse on the Apple // is that 'everyone knows' that you can't implement Lisa style screen management on the // that takes full advantage of a mouse — a graphics package maybe, but text manipulation — never! The reason for this conclusion is that a little calculation quickly shows that in graphics mode (the only way to implement the mixture of graphic 'icons' and text), it takes around -8 microseconds (virtual microseconds?) to move each character if you are scrolling a page of text at any reasonable rate. Oh well, better buy a 'Mac'! But wait, is there a ray of hope on the horizon? All would be well if we could use 'plain text' scrolling instead of graphics.

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The Apple //e has two character sets. The first is almost identical to the II+ character set, the second has allowance for inverse lowercase characters. A 'fringe benefit' of this alternate character set is that there are two sets of inverse uppercase letters - the set from \$40 to \$5F is unused. Someone in Apple noticed this, and one weekend later emerged with 'Mousetext' - a new character set ROM (at this stage for the //e only) including icons as 'characters'. Apparently included in the ROM upgrade will be a new set of Monitor ROMs with support for 'Mousetext', as well as some bug fixes. (Apple will be upgrading software more often now, since they expect new software to rigidly follow published entry points to Apple software, allowing 'behind the scenes' changes to be made. In fact, with parts of ProDOS, Apple PROMISES to change the code!). The new 'characters' include icons for open-apple, closed-apple, the 'broken arrow' RETURN key on the //e and the other arrow keys, as well as approximations to the Lisa 'window' icons.

The mouse and Mousetext are taken full advantage of by a new integrated software package from Apple called, 'Apple Works' (available in June). This package includes a spreadsheet, word processor and database program. (It will also be available on the /// as '3 Easy Pieces'). The mouse comes packaged with 'Mousepaint', an adaptation by Bill Budge of 'Macpaint'. It is slightly less powerful than Macpaint, but on the other hand it has color! The price for the mouse packaged with Mousepaint should be \$265.

Other software for the // includes ProDOS (more later), the Apple Workbench series (which encompasses things such as the ProDOS equivalent of the DOS Toolkit and a Pascal debugger), Pascal 1.2 (with support for the //e with 128K and the Profile), Backup // (for backing up the Profile), and Catalyst // (which allows protected programs to run on a hard disk).

The old Apple /// has been given a facelift in the ///plus, which has a new double density hires mode and a new keyboard, but is otherwise mostly a simplified set of internals such as the //e received.

To leave something for next time, I won't say much about ProDOS other than to say it is the operating system for the future for the //. It is currently being shipped with new drives (along with DOS 3.3) and should be generally available in the next few weeks (if we're lucky!). The basic user's disk and manual should be fairly cheap (by Apple standards) at around the cost of the manual itself. The Assembler Development Tools disk will not be available for a few months, which is a pity as it contains some excellent programs. Before anybody panics, I should mention that DOS 3.3 will be supported for at least another 6-7 years, although it will probably stop being shipped with drives in 12 to 18 months.

I will finish for this month with the comment that Apple have promised further announcements during the coming months, so it could prove to be the most interesting year in Apple's history!

MEETING PLACE AND TIME

Ausom meetings for 1984

TIMES AND PLACES

All meetings of AUSOM will be on the first Saturday of the month.

The meeting hall opens at 1.30 p.m. and the formal meeting commences at 2 p.m. After the formal meeting is informal discussions with other Apple owners and demonstrations of Apple hardware and software. Meetings usually include a 'question time' when anyone can ask a question about the Apple - answers will either be given directly or the questioner referred to someone who can help.

MEETING DATES FOR 1984

March 3rd	April 7th	May 5th	June 2nd	
July 7th	August 4th	September 1st	October 6th	November 3rd
December 1st				



MEETING PLACE

All meetings will be held at the Burwood Regional Community Education Centre (Building E on the map).

There is ample parking for cars at various places.