

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Magazine

CASTLEVANIA

SPECTRAL INTERLUDE

FROGGER SHOOTOUT

WHICH IS THE BEST CLONE?

FLASHBACK 86

GAME REVIEWS

HARDWARE

SPECIAL FEATURES



Includes material
not in the video
show!

RAMWRITE RAMPRINT

Printer interface and word
processor reviewed.



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Welcome to issue eleven, we are still here and churning out material for you to download and read free of charge. The whole charging issue has been mentioned to me several times in the light of several other high profile retro game video channels now accepting not only adverts but also Patreon.

I have conflicting views on charging. Firstly I produce content for me, because I enjoy it, it's a hobby. On the other hand it does take a lot of my time to produce the show and this magazine. Is it worth asking money for? Is it worth monetising the video?

From a personal point of view, I hate ads when I view videos. I hate ads when I go to websites, they just get in the way, not to mention the possible security implications. So would I force this onto my viewers?

Patreon is another way to get paid for the material I produce, but this involves people setting up regular payments, and I can't guarantee my content will continue to be produced on a regular basis.

I have been doing the show for over three years now, consistently putting out new episodes every month. I have no reason to stop, but no one knows what the future holds. A friend of mine has recently passed away and he was not much older than me.

Moving on to more positive things...

I have changed the style of the magazine very slightly, you probably might not even notice. The size has been changed to the normal magazine size and the main font has been swapped.

After a lot of work I have finally managed to get a professional company to duplicate and print complete DVD sets. Initially series two was done, but a few weeks later and series one quickly followed. So, if you want to own the videos on DVD, now is your chance. There is very little profit in it for me, but that wasn't point. I just wanted a professional product that will (hopefully) outlive me.

The DVD's can be purchased via my blog and my brand new website...

Yes, I have a brand new website, brought about by Virgin Media messing about and ceasing all hosting capabilities. This meant I had nowhere to store all the games, magazines and other stuff available via my blog. I had a choice at this point, take the free 1 year package offered by GoDaddy (offered by Virgin) or do my own thing. After discovering that GoDaddy would expect over

fifty pounds to continue after the first year, the choice was easy.

I quickly purchased the domain name and bought some cheap hosting and set about building a new website. Because I do this kind of thing for a living (kind of) the whole site was built in about 14 days.

I moved over all the content from the blog and improved a few things at the same time. The blog will continue (at least for a while) but the majority of my updates will now be via the website.

www.thespectrumshow.co.uk

With all this going on I almost forgot about my new game, Deep Core Raider. Some of you may recall I discovered it a while ago in an almost completed state. Un-released due to similarities with another new game at the time, many months later it just needed a few tweaks to finish it.

Admission time! I think I may have released version 0.9 of the game by mistake. The landscapes were from the un-tweaked version along with a few other adjustments. This was pointed out by someone in the forums and I quickly fixed and re-released.

If you downloaded the first version, please grab the 1.1 release. Sadly the game map had already been published showing the original (and incorrect) version.

At this point I could have a rant about early publishing of pokes and maps for new games. After all, shouldn't the players have a chance to play the game as it was supposed to be? To discover for themselves the levels, and to get some satisfaction and enjoyment?

I think pokes and maps should not be published for a month or so, and not the same day as the game. Just my opinion!

What do you think? Write an article about it!

SINCLAIR SELLS OUT

In a shock announcement on Monday 7th April, Amstrad announced that it is to take over Sinclair's manufacturing, marketing and brand name rights worldwide, sending shockwaves through the press.

Announced jointly by Sir Clive Sinclair and Alan Sugar, the entire deal would cost Amstrad £5m, plus a further £7m for Sinclair's stock. Sir Clive acknowledged the deal should have happened sooner, with Alan claiming Amstrad are already planning the next set of modifications to the existing Sinclair Range.

He is hoping to add a built in tape deck and joystick ports to the 128k machine before Christmas, but does not currently see any future for the QL machine. The Pandora, Sinclair's portable may still yet be delivered, but Amstrad have yet to quantify its readiness and technical specifications.

The deal was not the only one, as Sinclair's management also made an offer, that would mean Sinclair keeping its brand name, but Sir Clive thought that option was not viable.



POPEYE POPS BACK

The game based on the famous cartoon character Popeye will finally be released. Originally produced by DK Tronics, it was never properly released as the company shifted its focus from software to hardware. Leaving the title in limbo. Now the rights have been sold to MacMillian, who will give the game a full release.

128 ISSUES

With the Spectrum 128 now widely available, more and more software titles are being identified as having problems with the machine. As noted last month, several titles would not load and some had issues with Kempston joystick interfaces, but now more and more titles are emerging.



The list continues to grow and includes games such as Alien 8, Nightshade, Knight Lore, Enigma Force, Fairlight, Hypersports, Impossible Mission, Swords and Sorcery, Avalon, Dragontorc, Quazatron, Combat Lynx, Commando, Roller, Green Beret, The Hobbit and many many more.

DELAY CONCERNS

There is growing concern from the game playing public and retailers about the long delays in software titles after they had been heavily advertised in the press.

Amongst the companies at the centre of the problem are Ocean whose games Knight Rider, Street Hawk, Batman, Superbowl and V have all been given advertising space since December 1985, and were due to be released around Easter time. Melbourne House are also identified, with their games Asterix and Whitbread Yacht Race still not available despite heavy advertising.

Ocean responded by claiming Suerbowl had been released but then conceded that Knight Rider and Street Hawk were still not finished. Batman is still in progress and V should be available very soon.

Melbourne house conceded that Asterix has been postponed until June and Whitbread Yacht Racing has actually been cancelled.

With all these changes, cancellations and delays, despite large advertising campaigns, distributors are increasingly being put under pressure, and they say the problem is growing rather than getting smaller.

MICRO SHOOTOUT

Comparing other micro computers of the time, against the Sinclair Spectrum.

Atari 800XL

Memory	64kb
Screen Size	24 x 40
Resolution	320 x 192
CPU	6502 @ 1.79Mhz
Colours	256
Sound	4 voices. 3 octaves.
Joystick	2 ports
Connections	Comp. video. Expansion bus. Cartridge Port.
Games	Approx. 9000
Avg Price	£249.00



ZX Spectrum

Memory	48kb
Screen Size	22 x 32
Resolution	256 x 192
CPU	Z80 @ 3.5 Mhz
Colours	8 + 7 bright
Sound	1 bit beeper
Joystick	Via third party adapter.
Connections	Tape In/Out. Expansion bus.
Games	> 20,000
Avg Price	£175.00



Conclusion

The Atari 800XL is one of a long line of Atari 8bit machines with impressive specifications. It beats the Spectrum in almost every aspect and has a massive library of games. Sound and graphics are much better when used correctly and if you watch a few YouTube videos of 800XL games, you will see it handle scrolling much better.

The keyboard is better too, and there were available disc drives already on the market, so why was the Speccy more popular? Probably the price was a big reason, even the Spectrum was expensive in 1983 for most families.

The Atari machine was also backwards compatible with older machines meaning many games could be played from models that came before it.

A good machine then, that was popular if you had the cash.

GAME REVIEWS

RED HEAT



You can probably guess that this is a game based on the 1988 Arnold Schwarzenegger film of the same name, about two cops trying to track down a Soviet drug baron. The film wasn't the best action cop flick, and this game follows suit by not living up to the promise.

The game has several levels and a few sub levels, which for me spoil the action, and slow the pace down. There is really no need for these sub games and I think were only added because the basic game didn't stand up on it's own.

Starting off and we have Arnie walking through a Russian sauna and it isn't long before we get enemies to beat up with either punches or head butts.

Arnie's health is at the top left and soon diminishes as the men attack him as the scenery scrolls across the screen. He can replenish this by collecting the B icons though, but they are few and far between, and I usually found myself being unable to get them due to being constantly head butted.

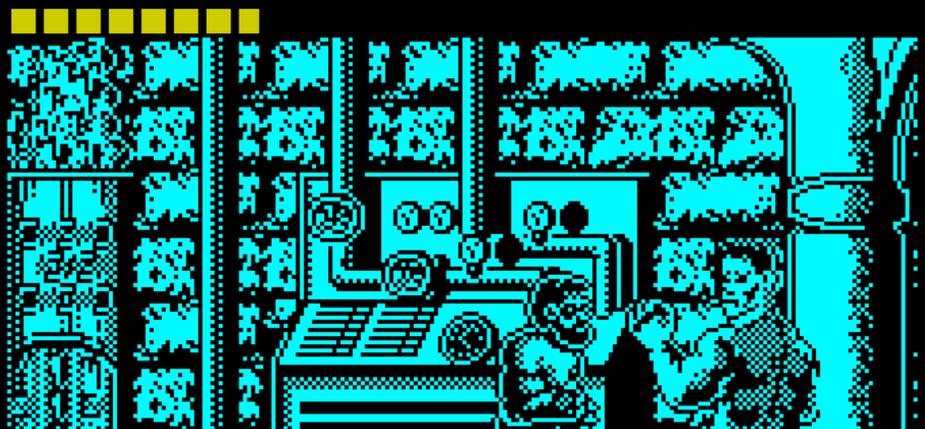
When Arnie gets hit, he falls down, and more often than not, as soon as he gets back up, a punch or head butt is waiting for him, this means he can take three of four hits in quick succession.

You can avoid this by crouching down straight after a hit, but as soon as you stand up again, there are usually about 3 or four enemies waiting to pounce. This is really frustrating and for about 20 minutes I never managed to get off the first level.

Also there are projectiles thrown at you, most of which cannot be dodged, again this loses energy and soon becomes annoying.

Occasionally I got some kind of mini-game where I had to repeatedly press left and right to try and get a bar to move up, for reasons I couldn't quiet make out.

The graphics are monochrome, large and well drawn, but are limited to



the top half of the screen. The background scrolls smoothly enough and the animation is nice.

Sound is limited to just a few punch sounds, which again is a let down.

To try and see more of the game, I had to use an infinite energy poke. This got me onto the second level which was pretty much the same as the first although you do get a gun to use.

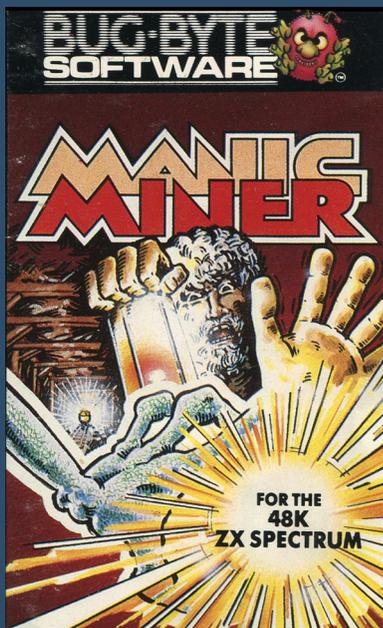
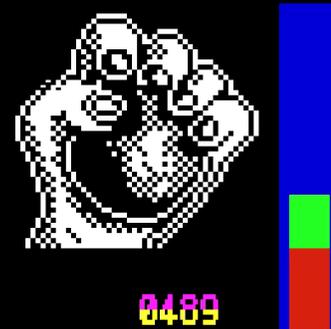
The gun has limited ammo which is replenished by the B icon again, so not much hope of keeping that fully loaded with the constant attacks from the enemy. This level is even more frustrating than the first, even with infinite energy. You continually get beaten or shot down, with very little chance to hit or fire back.

With infinite ammo I got to see the other levels and they follow pretty much the same pattern. Arnie walks from left to right or right to left, punches and shoots enemies. Eventually the level ends and the next one loads.

If you are unlucky you will get a mini-game thrown in.

It all very repetitive and all very frustrating.

Certainly not a game I enjoyed playing and one I certainly won't be recommending.



CLASSIC INLAYS

Manic Miner

The original Manic Miner inlay from Bug Byte software gave us a hint of the game inside the case. A bearded miner, deep underground with a strange alien-like hand reaching for a glowing object.

What could all this mean?

Other MM inlays were produced, but the original has a special place in history.

GAME REVIEWS

F16 FIGHTING FALCON

Codemasters 1989

F16 Fighting Falcon was released by Codemaster 1989 and was one of the games to be bundled with the Cheetah Defender lightgun.

For this review, I decided to get the Defender out now that I had procured a larger TV, and initial tests proved to be much more successful than previous attempts.

The game is, more or less, a version of the arcade game Afterburner, and uses the same engine Codemasters used for the very similar Soviet Fighter Mig 29.

You control a fighter plane and have to dodge and shoot the enemy as you fly from area to area. There isn't any more story than that so it's an out and out arcade game.

There are four levels to get through starting with the Sahara desert.

The plane takes off and lands automatically, and in the lightgun version does have some intelligence to dodge the enemy without you doing anything. There is an option to take evasive action if required, and this is achieved by shooting the plane itself. This is used mainly for the helicopter attack boss battles, but I never actually managed to beat them, as by the time I had aimed the gun, the plane had been destroyed.

As the landscape and tanks, that can't be shot, move by underneath, enemy planes come into view in the distance. As they get nearer they fire missiles. Using the lightgun, you have to take them out before they hit your plane.

Each level has a limited amount of ammo too, so you can't go in all guns blazing, even though it is tempting when you have the Defender in your hand.

The graphics are quite nice, avoiding colour clash by having just two paper colours to represent land and sky, over which is drawn everything else in black ink. Each level has a different colour scheme, to try and differentiate between sections.

Sound is a bit poor. There are weak firing sounds and explosion sounds and that's about it.



The 128k version has a nice tune between levels but no more.

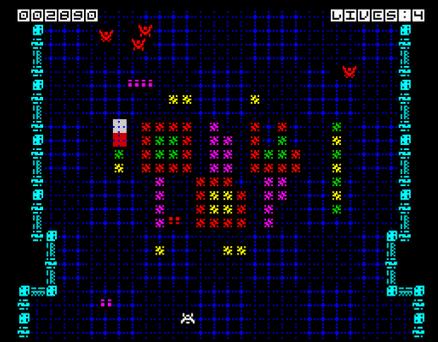
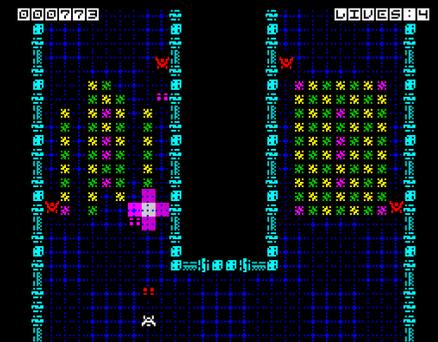
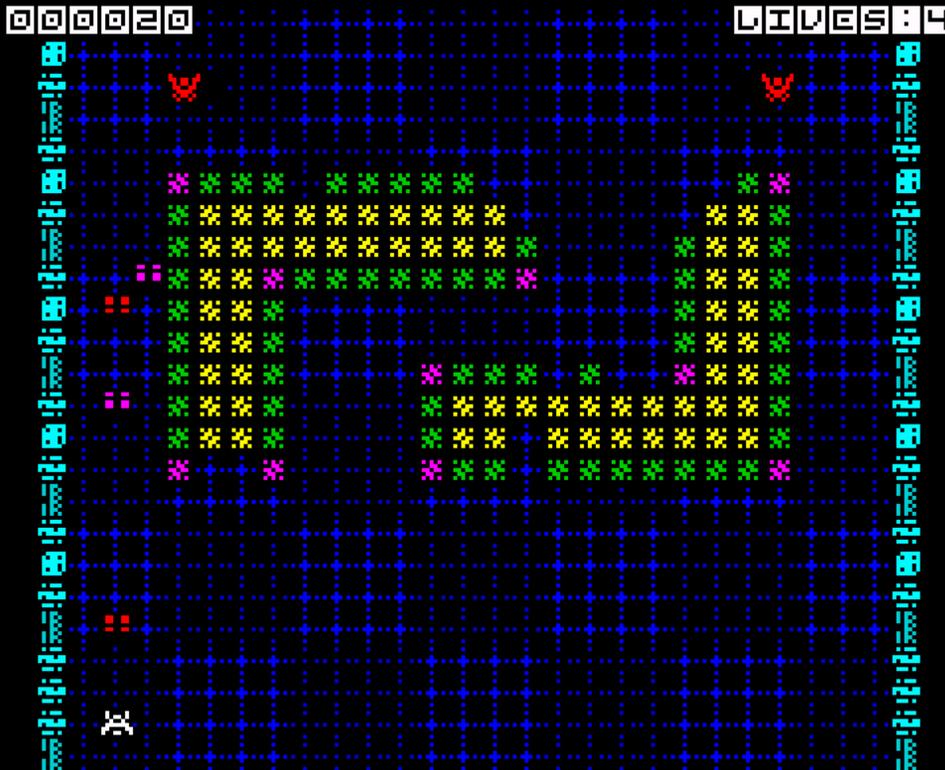
The game play is very repetitive, and there is no real urgency to get to the next level, as it's just the same thing but with different colours.

As a lightgun game, the control element is a bodge really, and detracts for the game. Playing with the keyboard or joystick provide a far better gaming experience.

A game then I think, that was quickly thrown together to go with the lightgun, and suffers because of it. If you want to play this game, use the keyboard or joystick as the lightgun actually takes away some of the better gameplay.



Denis Grachev 2014



If this game looks familiar then you are not mistaken, as it looks almost identical to one of Denis's previous games, Sector, which was reviewed in a previous issue. Although it looks like Sector, Sector Invasion plays totally differently.

Clearing each sector involves shooting the blocks. This is made more difficult by the ever-moving enemy that fire at you when they are directly above you. This though, can be used to your advantage, as their shots also destroy the blocks, and the blocks stops their shots. This means you can protect your ship by staying under the blocks and destroying the lower layers first.

As more blocks are removed, the game gets harder, and you have to dodge enemy shots while trying to clear the remaining items.

Each level is designed differently, keeping things fresh and providing a new challenge each time. Some blocks in later levels

generate further blocks that need shooting and some blocks require multiple shots. It all comes together to form a brilliant game.

The game has some great music, and the sound effects match the action very well.

The graphics, although small, work well, and give the player enough room to manoeuvre without making the game too easy.

This is a great pick-up-and-play game, with excellent playability..

Give this one a try.. I think you'll like it...

Highly recommended



PRINT AND PROCESS

WORD PROCESSOR AND PRINTER INTERFACE
FROM RAM ELECTRONICS

For people who had the urge to use their Spectrums for more than just games, probably the first thing they looked at was word processing.

There were many options open to the would-be businessman looking to do some typing, but all of them had one main problem, they were just software.

That meant that once you had bought your word processor you then had to figure out how to actually print your documents. A printer interface was the only option, unless you owned a +2 or +3, but even then there were numerous set-ups, printer codes and parameters to consider.

So what is the answer?

The RamWrite and RamPrint interface from Ram Electronics was released in 1986 at a price of £34.95. This all in one interface not only gave you a printer interface and cable for standard centronics printers, but also a built-in word processor and a joystick interface.

The unit was not much bigger than a joystick adaptor, and worked with 48, 48+ and 128k machines.

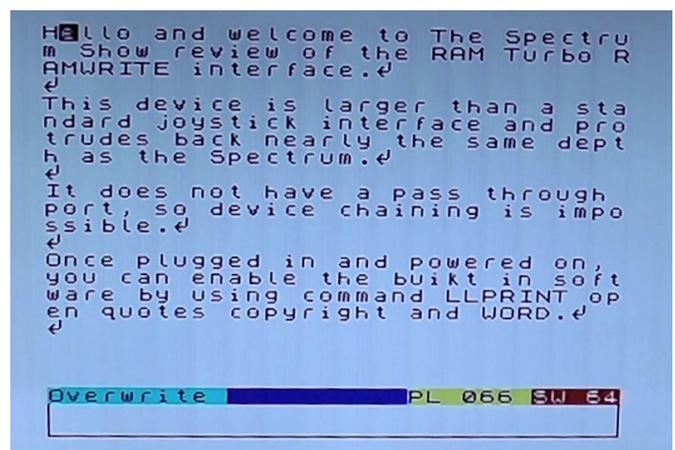
Most modern printers have long since done away with the centronics port, opting instead for USB or wireless. Tracking down an old model at a reasonable price proved tricky and it took me about a month to finally get a decent printer, and it didn't cost me anything!

The only problem, was the ink was empty, so a quick search on ebay and a new cartridge arrived and was installed.

Plugging everything in and switching on did not give you any indication that things were working, or not so I ploughed forward.

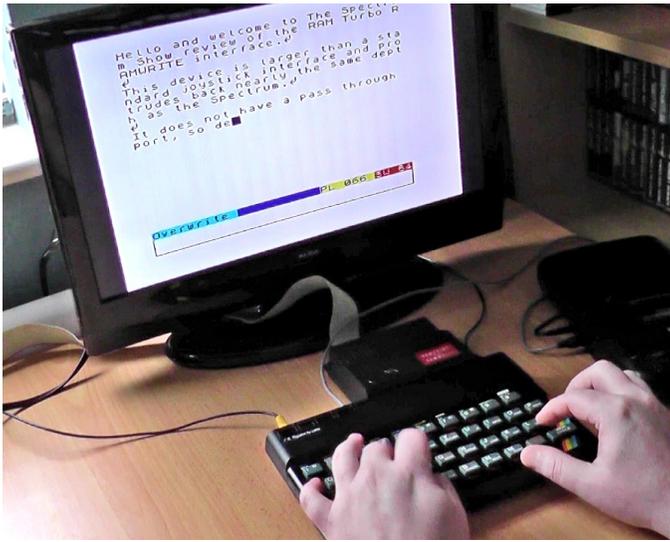
At this point you can just use the interface with other word processors, but obviously you paid for the full feature set. To activate the on-board software, you enter the command LPRINT "@WORD". This differs slightly for the Spectrum 128, but the result is the same.

You are presented with the word processor screen ready to start using, running from the interfaces on-board memory.



The bottom few lines of the screen are taken up by the options panel, and pressing various key combinations allows you to switch on or off things like insert or overwrite, 32 or 64 characters for example.

Pressing BREAK places the cursor in the panel ready to accept a whole set of single letter commands.



Pressing D will view your document in the mode selected, 32 or 64 characters, L will load a document, S will save, F will find a word, and there are others like cut and paste, replace, back to basic, and wiping the whole document and starting again. The top part of the screen is where you type your text.

The display is 32 characters, which is the default, however you can view your text in 64 characters, but in this mode you cannot edit.

The software is responsive, and although it doesn't have a massive range of features like Tasword, or The Writer, it does give you enough to write letters and print them out. Ideal for home users.

The program does support printer control codes for things like underline or double width characters, and these are added by putting the Spectrum into Extended mode, entering a single letter, for example w, followed by the PLUS sign and then the text.

The U will tell the printer to print that text with an underline. Using the Display mode, you can see how it will look before printing. These codes did not work on my printer however, more about this later.

Because the software is not loaded into the Spectrum's RAM,



you have the full memory left, which allows for document up to 6,556 words long according to the documentation, but it doesn't say how long the words can be.

For more control of the printer, you have a setup menu, accessed by typing LPRINT "@SET". Here you can set things like line feeds or tokens.

Another bonus is that the interface works with the standard BASIC commands COPY, LPRINT and LIST, the commands used for the ZX printer, so you can do BASIC code listings and screen dumps.

I tested this by loading a nice screen and executing the COPY command. The results were, shall we say, disappointing! Probably because the printer is modern compared to the ones around in 1986. Older dot matrix printers may have worked well, but all these modern fangled ink jet devices just can't cut it.

There are more issues too. There are times when the software crashes and dumps you back into BASIC. Especially if you happen to accidentally press the wrong key combinations. This has little effect on your text however, as going back into the word processor will give you your valuable document back because it's stored in ram.

There is no mail merge, headers, footers or screen formatting, but then again it wasn't designed to be a professional tool. It was designed to be a quick and easy word processing tool with a centronics interface, and it does this very well.

I'm sure this would have been top of the list for anyone wanting to just print out homework, or a letter to a family member..

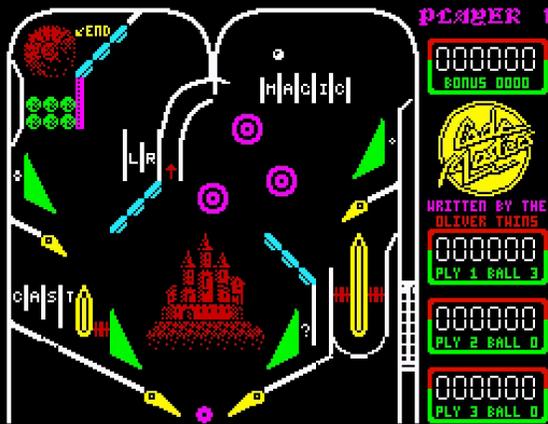
A nice piece of kit then, that does what was intended with little fuss.

QUATRO

Arcade

Codemasters released 15 compilations under the Quatro title between 1990 and 1992. Quatro Arcade was released in 1991 and contained four games. Although the compilation is named Arcade, these are not strictly arcade games, more games you might find in an arcade, there is a difference. Was this a ploy to get players buying the thing?

Advanced Pinball Simulator



There are quite a few pinball games for the Spectrum, and this is Codemasters entry into the market.

The screen layout has been modified to fit the Spectrum screen, rather than trying to limit it to the same aspect as a real pinball table. This means we get a wider table and more space, allowing for more targets and bonuses, as well as more traps.

Given the limited memory of the Spectrum, the mechanics are not too bad. The ball sometimes feels like it's rolling in treacle, but apart from that, it plays really nicely.

There are set things to hit, and if you delve into the instructions you will find a story about a wizard who is terrorising the country and you have to find the almanac

that contains a spell to destroy him.

There are side tasks that involve removing all target, hitting a range of other targets that spell out things and the usual pinball stuff.

After a few plays you soon find out what to avoid, the main one early on is the L and R markers top left. Hit these and doors open up at the bottom of the screen that allows the ball to drop out of play. This is annoying, and is easily triggered. Other markers also produce a block between the flippers, or remove the block, learn where these are and things get a little easier.

Being a fan of pinball games, both real and emulated, I found this to be a good game. The graphics are well drawn and clear, and things move smoothly.

Controls are simple, with enter to launch the ball and Z and M to operate the flippers.

There are some nice tunes in between games and before you start, but in-game sounds are a bit bland on 48k machines. 128k users get a lot more varied effects.

Fruit Machine Simulator II



Fruit machine games are multiple and varied, some even appearing as type-ins, so this is nothing new to the Spectrum.

The screen layout hits you full in the face and is packed with a lot of buttons, lights, text and a mass of other, distracting

clutter. The main things are there of course, the start and gamble buttons, the hold and nudge buttons and the three rotating wheels.

You can add varied amounts of money to play, with the highest amount of £1 giving you 10 plays. Pressing SPACE causes the wheel spin quite realistically, wobbling at the end, and I don't need to explain the rules around these types of game.

Getting two or more items in a line will take you to the collect or gamble section where you try to time your key press to earn more cash. Occasionally you can hold the wheels, and sometimes you can nudge. There are things on screen that, even after a hour of playing, never lit up or did anything, and the instructions don't mention them.

The CASH BASH that lights up after every spin seems to indicate something might happen if all of them light up. The compunudge and stake coin never lit up, although I did once get a kind of mix between nudge and hold.

The graphics are a bit in your face, blocky and confusing. Sound wise, there is a nice tune, but the in game effects are limited to beeps of varying tone, nothing too exciting.

There is little in the way of excitement, as there is no real money at stake, which is what these games are all about.

It passes a few minutes, but provides no long term play.

Grand Prix Simulator 2



Grand Prix Simulator 2 is another in the long line of Code-masters Super-Print like games, featuring anything that can move like jet skis, BMX bikes and of course racing cars.



Allowing three simultaneous players, this game is an average version of the arcade game, that provides different tracks and a good challenges.

You can choose to have any of the three cars as computer controlled, but as usual, these are always much better than you, so you spend a long time wrestling with the controls before you can complete the race within the time limit. Doing this allows you to continue to the next track.

The first track isn't too bad, and I actually managed to win the race after about 5 or 6 attempts. The second track is a bit more challenging though. One hit from the computer controlled cars, or bumping into the scenery causes your car to grind to a halt, and you will probably never recover from that. Yes, you can keep going, but the other cars are now well ahead, sometimes lapping you and crashing into you during the process. That again slows you down and makes completing the course within the time almost impossible.

The graphics are good and things move around smoothly and at a good speed. My initial problem was identifying which was my car, sometimes looking at the wrong one. To get round this I usually tapped the left or right control to see which car moved.

The control was responsive, and the cars handled fine,

QUATRO Arcade...

skidding around the corners and reacting to the keys or joystick instantly. There is damage in this game, so if you run into obstacles or get hit by the other cars, your damage increases. Too much damage and your car just stops!

There is a nice tune that plays in between races and a digitised voice counting down the start. During play there is an engine noise along with the sound when you hit something.

This is not a bad game, and I certainly enjoyed it more than Championship Jet Ski Simulator by the same company, but it can soon become frustrating when the other cars run into you time and time again, meaning there is absolutely no chance of you completed the race.

3D Starfighter



3D Starfighter, is, as much as I can tell, a slightly more modern version of Quicksilva's TimeGate.

There are multiple sectors, warping, motherships to dock with (instead of planets) and the aim is to clear each sector of aliens. There doesn't seem to be any story beyond that apart from your main task, which is to destroy a battlestar. So it's a 3D shooter with a bit of strategy thrown in, not much, it's just docking really.

You start of by selecting the first sector, and after a warp you set about shooting things. The aliens move around unconvinc-



ingly, getting larger as they get near your ship. They fire large missiles at you, which you have to shoot, rather like Star Wars.

Your ship flies at a fixed speed, so you just have to worry about up, down, left, right and fire. You do have a shield, that can be used to block aliens or alien missiles, but this has a limited time, and replenishes slowly.

Hitting the aliens is tricky as you have to try and guess where they will be by the time your own missiles reach the point you are aiming at. You end up just shooting anywhere hoping that you will get lucky and they will fly into the missile's path.

Once they have all been destroyed, you warp to the next sector and have to dock with the mothership. This is made difficult by more aliens. To dock you have to keep flying towards a red dot. If you are lucky, you will be allowed to dock and here you are given a mission. This can vary, but it just involves flying to another sector, destroying everything and docking again.

The graphics are fairly basic, with no animation but the 3D starfield is nice. Sound is limited to firing and explosions, and even they is pretty unremarkable.

I can't help but compare this to TimeGate, released 5 years before this, and sadly I much prefer Quicksilva's epic than this..

Quatro Arcade is then, four mediocre games in one compilation. For me Pinball was the best of the bunch, but I suppose for £3.99 you can't really complain.

ROAD RACE

Thorn EMI 1983

With this being a 16k game, there are no frills, no fancy intro, just a control selection at the start and straight into the game. There is no story or background, no league tables, no constructors, no track selection or driver names. It's just a driving game where you have to reach the end of the track without crashing too many times.

The screen shows you the tachometer and speedometer along with gear, points, miles and time. Gears are limited to HI or LOW and these have to be changed when the tachometer is white otherwise you blow up your engine.

You don't get a countdown to the start, so as soon as you press S to begin, you have to hit the accelerator to avoid the cars behind you crashing into you. Once in HI gear you have to deal with the other cars in front of you and the track. The corners are hardly noticeable, so you don't have to break to take them. The hardest part is judging where the other cars will move to.

The early stages limit them to where they are on the track, so you just have to go around them to the left or right, whichever has the larger gap. In later levels they move, making things much harder and causing you to use the break a lot more.

The graphics are large and well drawn and things move along smoothly. You can hit the sides of the road without doing any damage too.

Control is responsive but there is one glaring omission, sound. Yes, the game is silent, unless you crash. This is quite a major problem as playing without an engine sound reduces the overall effect. I know it's a 16k game and I know it was released in 1983, but there should have been something to listen to. The crash sound proves the author knew how to make sound and the game is just over 5k long, so plenty of room.



TACHOMETER		SPEEDOMETER	
-----		-----	
GEAR	HI	MILES	0006
POINTS	00070	TIME	0006

Anyway... leaving the sound out, the game isn't too bad. Not the best racing game on the Spectrum, but for its time, quite a playable game.

Don't expect too much from this 5k program and if it makes you feel better, make your own engine sounds.



TACHOMETER		SPEEDOMETER	
-----		-----	
GEAR	HI	MILES	0068
POINTS	00460	TIME	0049



SHOOTOUT

Frogger was released in 1981, developed by Konami and released by Sega, and was a refreshing change from the multitude of alien shooting machines flooding the arcades.

The idea, as with many early arcade games, was simple.

Guide your frog to his home at the top of the screen in a given time limit.

To get there he has to negotiate a busy road, a path and finally a river, and this is where we meet the world's only frog that dies when it comes into contact with water.

As the levels progress the road gets busier and the river becomes more treacherous with added crocodiles.

After trawling the archives I had over 20 versions, even after throwing out the type-ins, tape magazine games and 3D reincarnations.

I wanted to cover just commercial releases too, but there are some good freeware titles that I have included, just because they are worth mentioning.

FROGGER - A&F Software - 1983

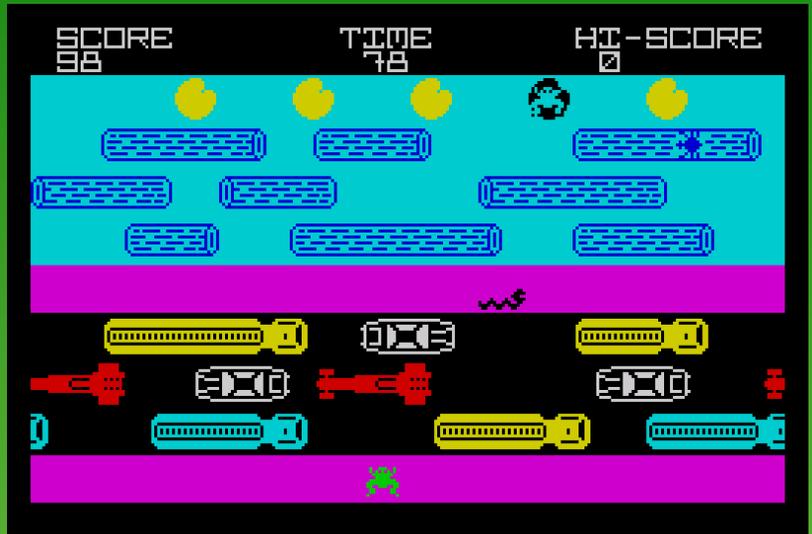
The screen layout looks good, but as soon as the game begins we get a jerk-fest of movement.

Most of the elements are present including the extra points for eating the bugs on the logs, but the response to controls is very sluggish making this version difficult to master.

Sound is used very well, especially the rebbit sound of the frog..

There are crocodiles, but they do not replace the logs like the arcade, they just appear randomly as a last obstacle to avoid. There is also a lack of turtles that dive under the water..

I looks better than it plays, and the blocky movement ruins what otherwise could have been a great game.

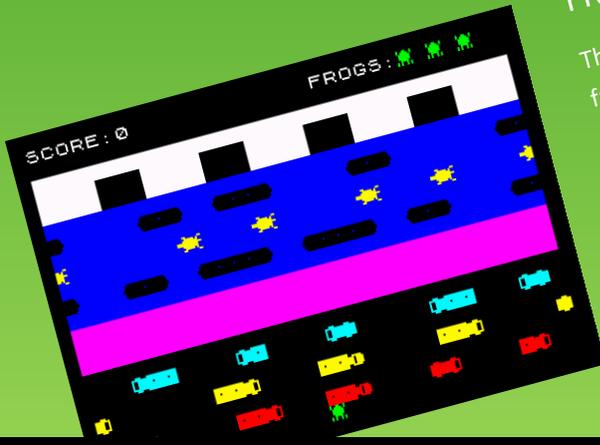


FROGGER - Astro Software - 1983

This is a commercial program written in BASIC and it suffers from the usual problems.

Small jerky graphics... poor sound... poor control and poor game play...

One to forget...



FROGGER - C-Tech - 1982

This game splits the action into two sections, first the road, which has cartoon like cars and gets busier as the levels progress. Next is the river with logs and turtles, although the turtles don't seem to dive.

The graphics are large but again we have jerky movement which spoils things. Control is more responsive than the previous games, so it is at least playable..

Sound is limited to beeps.. but there is a nice little tune that plays..

The time to move between levels is very long, and I thought the game had crashed at first.

Not a good clone, but so far... the best for playability...



FEATURE

FROGGER - Deanysoft – 2009

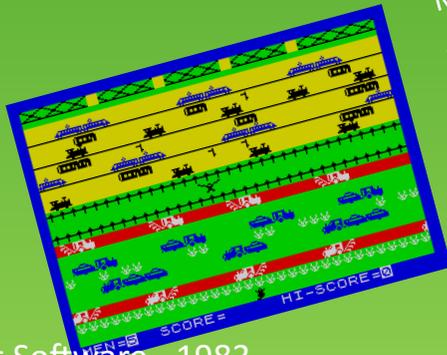
This is a much more modern game released outside of the Spectrums life.

The game play is the same, but moves away from the arcade graphic style, with larger graphics packed into a smaller playing area. The graphics are well drawn and move very smoothly, if a little fast, especially for the first level.

Control is very responsive, but because the frog doesn't hop in blocks, lining him up with spaces and logs proves quite tricky.

The logs in the river are particularly difficult to judge as his position is not fixed and he can move about around the log making the final leap awkward.

Sound is used minimally, and I can't help thinking this could have been the king of Froggers had the logs been larger, early game play easier and the movement of the frog in jumps.



FROGGER- Rabbit Software - 1983

The screen layout is changed from the arcade by adding a kind of maze between the road and the river.. but other than that its familiar territory.

The cars move smoothly, but our frog can move quicker than the slowest cars meaning he can often jump into them and die. The road is a bit cluttered making it hard to get across and it took me a long time to do it.

The maze adds more danger, as colliding with the wall kills the frog.. an unnecessary addition in my opinion.

The river is void of turtles... and the logs are large enough to get past.

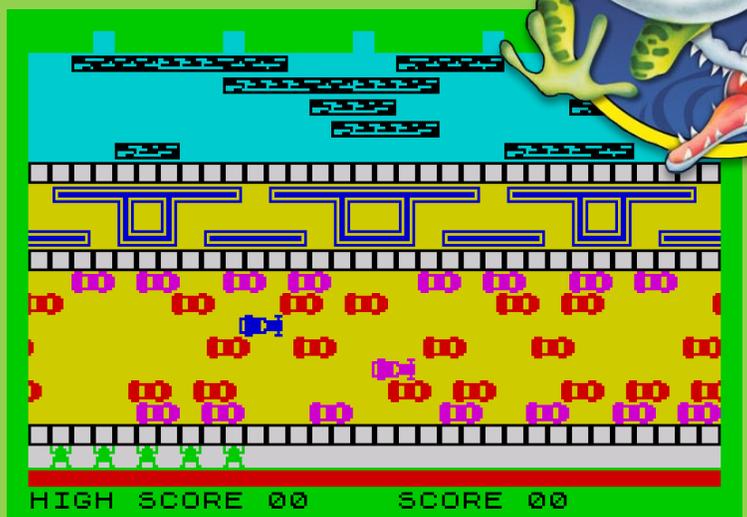
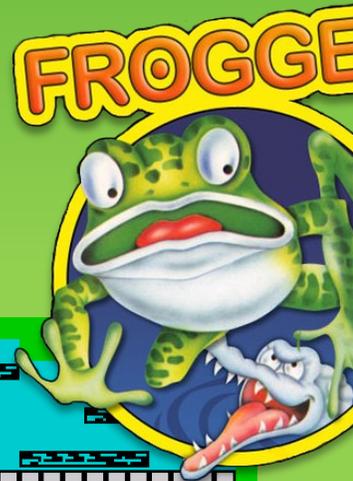
Control is OK, with the frog responding to the keys sharply and the sound is a little grating, especially after each life as the timer re-fills..



MOUSE - WB Software - 1983

This is a very busy screen, and the gameplay reminds me of Jogger (coming later). There is no river, just layers of things to avoid, so the gameplay does suffer. The movement isn't exactly smooth, but there is just too much on screen. The frog is replaced by a flickering mouse, but the principle is the same.

Sound is basic and the gameplay soon becomes boring. A truly terrible game!



FROGGY - DLJ Software - 1983

Wow – now this is a good version of the arcade game.

The graphics are a little small but move well enough. They are not smooth, but they suite the game and work well with the game mechanics, which is very important.

The road is not too difficult at first, making the game more approachable...

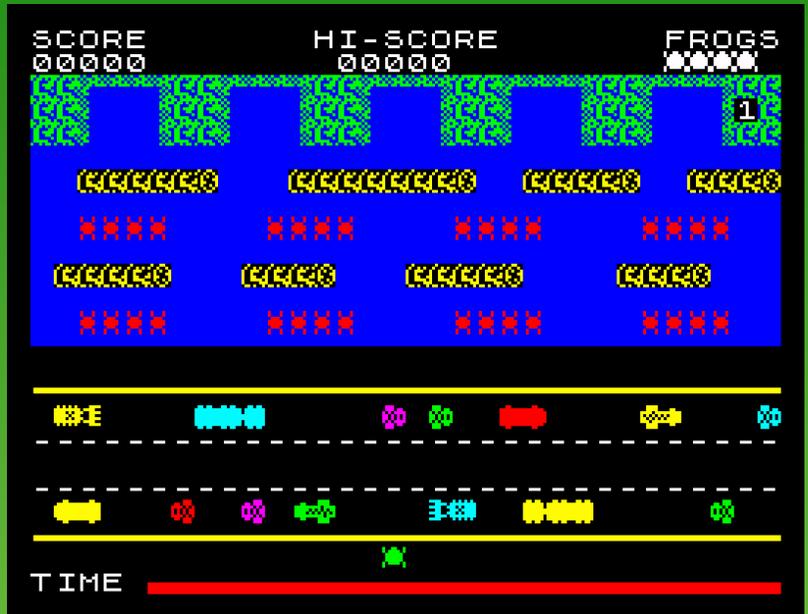
The river includes turtles that dive which adds more peril to the journey and we get a nice frog when he makes it home.

There are a few nice tunes that play and the sound effects are minimal but suite the game.

Playability is spot on, letting you get far enough that you want to keep trying..

The crocodiles do appear, but unlike the arcade, they just popup randomly in the space your frog has to get to.

Certainly the best game so far.



FROG HOPPER - Walltone Software 1983

This is one of those games that tries to impress you by throwing various annoying techniques at you rather than letting you get on with the game.

Yes, the sounds are impressive this first time, but it soon gets irritating.. as you will find out..

When you finally get to the game, the graphics are very large and mover very smoothly, and if anything they are too large.

Your frog moves along slowly and can actually cross half way between the different layers of obstacles.

This means it is too easy to get trapped, especially when the controls are a little unresponsive.

This happens all too frequently and means you have to sit through the tech demo before having another go.

This spoils the game... and it's not one I would go back to.



FEATURE

FROG RUN - Anirog Software - 1984

The screen, as you can see, is white... why would they do that?

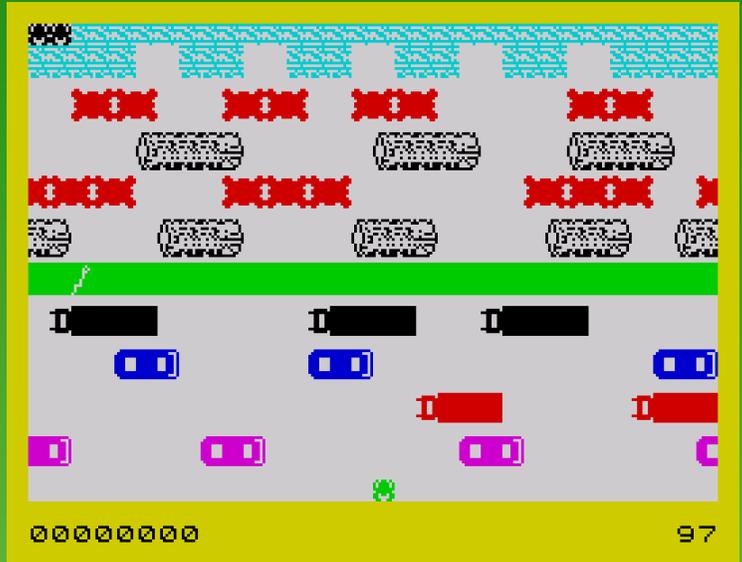
Anyway.. on to the gameplay... and despite what it looks like, it plays quite well and certainly better than some of the previous games.

The graphics are large, but poorly drawn and move in 8 pixel leaps. The turtles in the river don't dive.. which is a bit of a running issue it seems...

Difficulty is about right, meaning you can progress... and response is usually fine. I say usually because sometimes it can be over responsive and you have to make sure you don't hold down a key too long.

Sound is limited to beeps... which is a bit of a shame...

So, despite the obvious problems, it plays quite nicely if you can get over the bland graphics and white screen.



GREBIT - Alternative Software - 1990

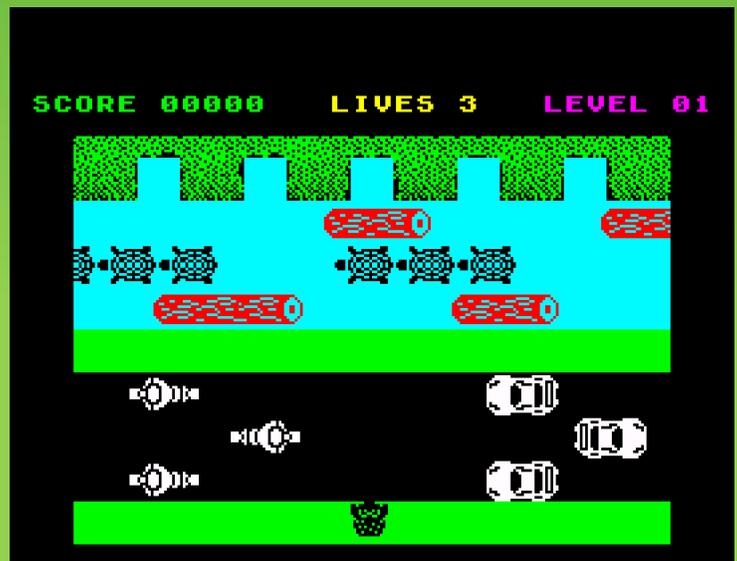
This game looks really nice. The graphics are large and well drawn and move really smoothly. The frog, although looking a bit odd, moves in jumps, which is ideal, and makes game-play so much better.

The vehicles move slowly enough to allow you to cross the road, and the logs and turtles prove easy enough to navigate.

The hardest part is getting to the final home. You have to be within a few pixels to get it right and this can be quite tricky until you get used to it. The far left space is very hard to get, as the logs and turtles don't always line up and you find yourself jumping around quite a lot. Luckily the turtles don't dive and there are no crocodiles, so this is made a little easier.

There is also no time limit but that can mean less frantic action. Sound is a bit minimal with just a jumping and death sound, but suites the game.

Not a bad attempt this, and certainly playable, although the lack of a timer does detract slightly as there is just no urgency to it...



HOPPER - PSS - 1983

On first glance, this looks to be a very busy screen with a lot of obstacles to get past, and it does prove very tricky to actually make progress for a number of reasons.

The movement of the frog is very odd, he can move smoothly left and right, but he jumps forward in bounds, this is a bit strange, especially when playing.

The traffic on the road is also weird. There are three lanes moving left, and three lanes moving right. Trying to navigate this is tricky, as the gaps do not present themselves as they would if the lanes were alternating.

The relative safety of the path is also made harder by the inclusion of a train for some reason. The river includes logs and turtles, although they don't dive. The white things in-between them are not things to jump on, as I found out, they are to be avoided, adding yet more difficulty. All of this makes playability harsh.

The graphics are basic but move smoothly enough and sound is minimal. Control is a bit too keen, meaning you can often jump twice meaning almost certain death. Luckily there is no timer, but even that doesn't save this game.



JOGGER - Severn Software - 1984

This game gives us a different take on Frogger, replacing the frog with a jogger. The premise is the same though, although things play differently.

The rivers can be traversed the same as roads, and you just have to avoid the ships and crocodiles. This can be a little disconcerting, especially having played numerous frogger clones before it.

The game is pretty basic, with small jerky graphics, bad sound and dodgy control response.

You could probably find better games to type in from magazines to be honest..

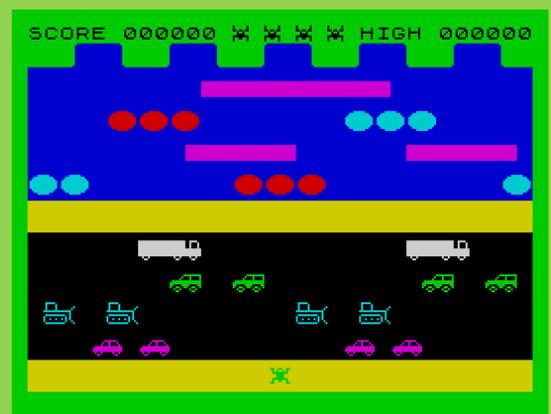


LEAPFROG - CDS - 1983

Very basic looking graphics. There is the usual road, path and river, but the cars, lorries and diggers look pretty poor. The logs are just solid blocks of colour and the turtles are reduced to oval blobs, but they do dive, well they sort of vanish, after a colour change.

Everything moves in character jumps and with the same movement for the frog, its quite easy to play. Response is good, sometimes, like many other games, a little too keen at times.

There is a lack of urgency too, as the timer is missing, so you can take as long as you like to get across the obstacles. Further levels increased the speed and number of traffic and reduce the turtles from three ovals to two.



FEATURE

ROAD FROG - Spectrum Games - 1983

For some reason this game chooses to draw the road in white but that aside, we get the usual Frogger layout. The graphics are large and move smoothly but the frog does look a little odd, more like a spaceship really. There are no turtles in the river, just logs, so an omission there.

The frog movement is in character squares which helps navigation and playability is not too bad. The sound consist of a continuous hiss, I think this is meant to be traffic, but it does stop to play a dull tune when you reach the path.

Control is hit and miss. Sometimes reacting straight away, other times not at all. This obviously causes issues and detracts from the game play.

There is a timer, so you can't hang about but overall, a pretty average attempt.



ROAD TOAD - Elfin Software - 1983

This game was quickly picked up by DK Tronics and sold under their own label. The graphics are large, quite well drawn and smooth, with the frog jumping in leaps as expected. The road is a little too cluttered though, making it difficult to progress. The river has logs and turtles that do dive, so we get the added hazard.

Gameplay is average due to the controls that can sometimes feel sticky, and this leads to our frog being squashed by a lorry or jumping into the river.

Sound consists of a few zaps when our frog gets killed but little else.

There is a timer, so you have to get on with your task, but the busy road does prove to be a little too tricky meaning you can often loose interest within a few plays.

Not a bad game, but not one that stands out.

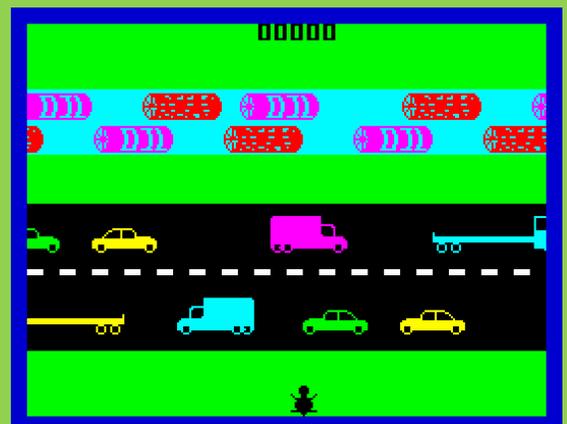


TERRY'S TRAVELS - Algray Software - 1983

Here our frog has been replaced by a turtle that you have to guide back home. The game has some nice speech, but once we get to the game, it all goes a bit wrong. There are lines of smooth moving traffic and longs, but the difficulty is just too high.

Movement and navigation is awkward despite the controls being responsive, but in the end it just gets too frustrating to play.

There is no timer either, so no real sense of urgency.. just endless rounds of dying quickly.



Yomp - Virgin Games - 1983

Was this really a commercial release by Virgin?

The format has been changed slightly and the frog is replaced by a soldier. There is no river, just lines of traffic that our hero has to negotiate.

The instruction claim there is a further section if you get three men across the road, but I never managed it.

The graphics are poorly drawn and move in characters making the whole thing look like it was typed in from a magazine.

Gameplay is difficult mainly due to the controls being a bit hit and miss, having no back key, so your only choice is forward, and the limited space between the lorries.

All in all, a poor offering from Virgin,



Wow, that was a bit of a marathon Frogger session, which took me ages to put together and involved a lot of alcohol and swearing.

So, which of the many versions came out on top?

There is no competition really...

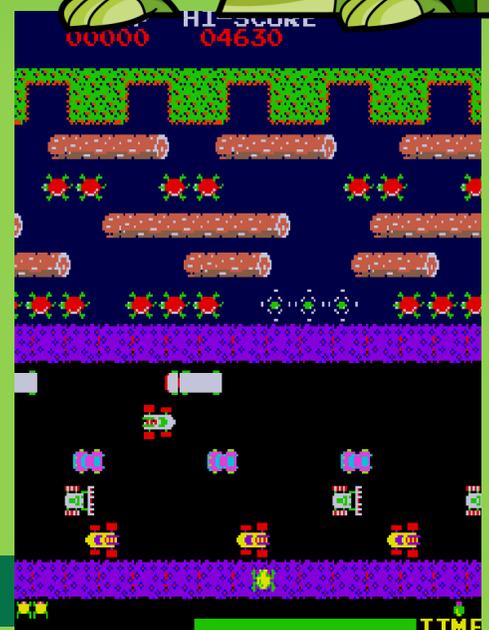
Froggy by DLJ

is the king of froggers..

It is very close to the arcade game, plays really well, and does everything right.

Many other games tried to change the format, which almost always never fully works. Why change something that has been perfected for the arcades?

Another issue is screen space. This also applies to any other game trying to copy the arcade equivalent. The arcade machines have a much taller screen, providing much more room and a more pleasing layout. The producers options were to squeeze the Spectrum screen to a thinner window or use the full screen and make changes. All chose the latter.



Arcade screen

GAME REVIEWS



Rewind - 2015



There won't be many game fans that don't know the name Castlevania. It was a hugely successful series of games across multiple platform, well, apart from the Spectrum. That is until now.

Castlevania, Spectral Interlude is a massively impressive game and features many role playing elements along with the usual whip cracking action from the originals.

The story builds as you progress. and is a little long to explain everything, but your day job is clearing skeletons from the graveyard. As you go about your business, you meet a necromancer who insists you kill him. You are more than happy to oblige. Once dead you pick up an artefact and the story unfolds.

He will help you bring Dracula's castle back into this world so you can destroy him. You, of course accept this offer, it seems sweeping up old bones is just too mundane. So off you go in search of points of power, or at least parts of them, as they have been broken.

The game comprises of a flip screen platform game, that features some stunning backgrounds. Each type of area, from the graveyard, to the caves, town and forest, are all beautifully drawn, all have their own



<http://spectralinterlude.com>



music too, which again is impressive.

As you wonder about there are plenty of things to whip, not just the skeletons but lamps and candles as well. These give you money which can be used to buy better equipment. Money is also dropped by enemies that feel the crack of your Indiana Jones style weapon.

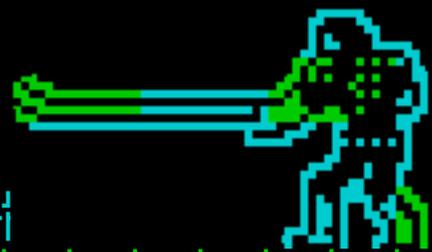
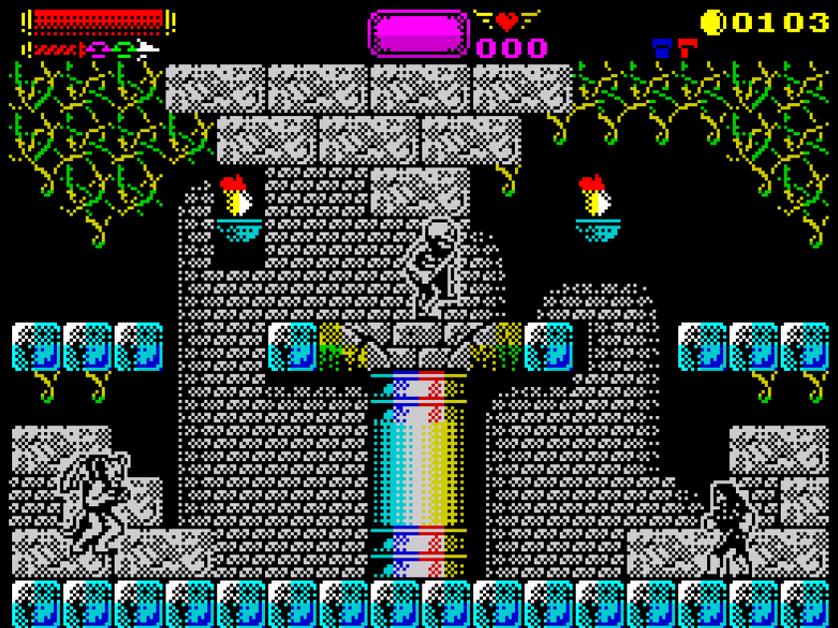
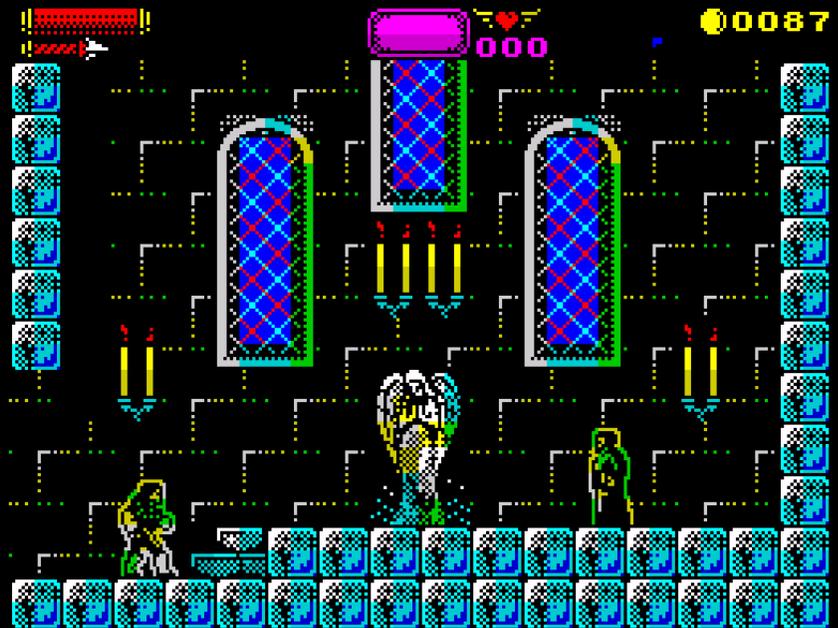
At various places there are statues that can be used to replenish your health, and you'll need them. The game is far from easy with some particularly tricky end bosses.

Control is good, and even climbing stairs is made easy, which is often a problematic mechanic to get right. The gameplay is spot on, and everything just feels so well put together.

It will take you a while to complete this game, but its certainly worth the effort.

Highly recommended then....

Go grab yourself a copy now..



GAME REVIEWS

ROBOCOP 3

Ocean 1992

Games based on the movies are usually available later than movie. The computer version of RoboCop 3 however, was released many months before movie premiere, but fortunately knowledge of movie storyline was n't necessary to play it.

RoboCop 3 is a simple shoot'em up divided into 5 levels. Level 1 is an Operation Wolf look-alike where you scroll the screen left or right and shoot enemies using crosshair. The next levels are typical 2D shoot'em up where you control RoboCop and have to go left or right, kill/avoid enemies and collect bonuses (tokens and better weapons).

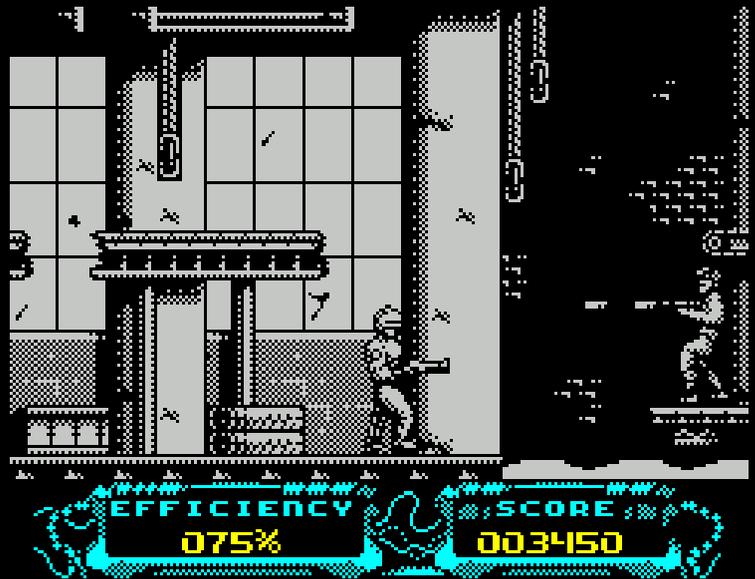
Most of the enemies are weak and can be eliminated with one shot, but there are also few stronger and bigger enemies like ninja cyborg Otomo, a big tank and the well known robot ED-209.

When RoboCop is shot he loses part of his efficiency. It can be restored between levels with tokens collected earlier. It's important to do this because you have only one life in this game and efficiency level 0% means the end.

Graphics in RoboCop 3, including the loading screen, are completely monochrome and sometimes they look ugly. Screen scrolling is not bad but animation of the main character could be better (he moves too fast). Music is good and plays all the time, there are also few sound effects like shooting and exploding.

The difficulty level is quite high, it's easy to die, especially in pools of acid on level 2.

RoboCop 3 is a full price game and requires a Spectrum with 128k of memory, but it looks like budget game. The levels are not big (and 2 of them are the same), there are no colours and the backgrounds are not animated. To make things worse this game doesn't work on "toastrack" Spectrum 128 and gray Spectrum +2. Fortunately there is a patch that fixes this.



Ocean released many great games for Spectrum 128, for example Total Recall and Navy Seals. They are colourful and have many big levels. In comparison RoboCop 3 looks cheap. The authors tried to include a bit of diversity (crosshair shooting, flying with a jetpack, repairing RoboCop) but the result is just another average shoot'em up.

If you like RoboCop movies you can try this game but don't expect something special.

Review by Piotr "PopoCop" Szymanski



Although having no background story or even instructions, you pretty much get a feel for this game straight away, and anyone who liked the arcade game Scramble will instantly feel at home.

You guide your submarine through mine fields and caves, armed with just your torpedoes. The mines randomly detach from their cables and float upwards, meaning you have to take evasive action. This becomes more tricky when you enter the underwater caves.

Later levels sees lasers, depth charges and falling rocks to contend with.

The screen scrolls smoothly from right to left and you can control your sub using keyboard or joystick. Like Scramble, you have full directional control, but even this makes dodging the mines tricky. You do have an unlimited amount of torpedoes though.

What you don't have an unlimited amount of, is air. Each time you drop below the surface, you air begins to deplete and to replenish it, you have to surface again.

As you approach the caves, you have to make sure you have a good supply as these are under water with no place to surface.

The graphics are well drawn with some nice bubble effects as you fire your torpedoes, and some good explosions. Sound is used well, and there is nice tune on the intro screen.

Judging the timings and the amount of space you have is not easy and it took me a fair few attempts just to reach the caves. Here there are added obstacles in the form of



guns, and the roof of the cave can get very low meaning pixel perfect movement.

There are different difficulty levels but I found it very challenging on the lowest. I must be getting old!

If you like Scramble and are a good gamer player – give it go.

A great game!

In the beginning, there was nothing....

Clive Sinclair launched his assault on the home micro market in 1980 with the release of the lowly ZX80. This monochrome soundless white block was to create a spark that still glimmers today.

Shortly after, the ZX81 came along, and at a price range undercutting all rivals, it started to sell in large quantities to groups of people other than the electronic fanatics or university geeks.

Publishers identified a blossoming market and quickly began to roll out new magazines to cater for this infant industry.

Computer magazines were not new though, they had been around for years

Personal Computer World is generally known as Britain's first comput-

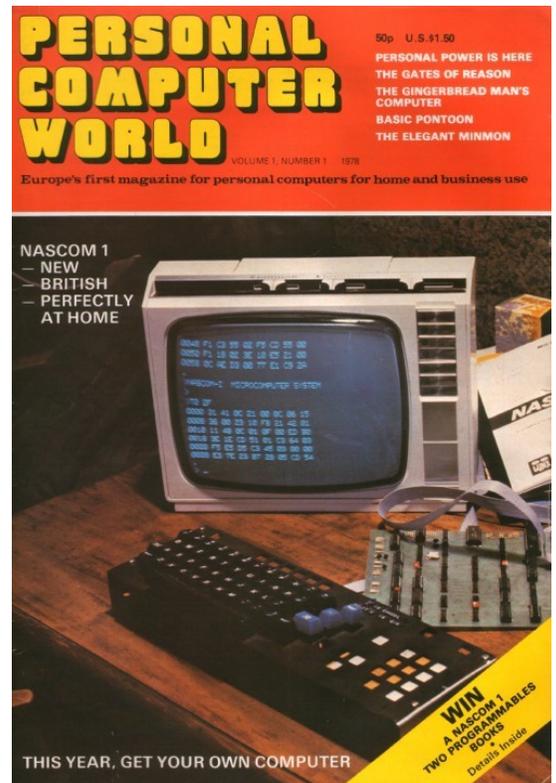
er magazine, starting life in February 1978.

Its contents covered everything, it had to, there was nothing else like it at the time.

There was news, bench tests, letters, features, game reviews and masses of adverts, in fact the adverts took up most of the space, but at least nothing was excluded, and there was something for everyone.

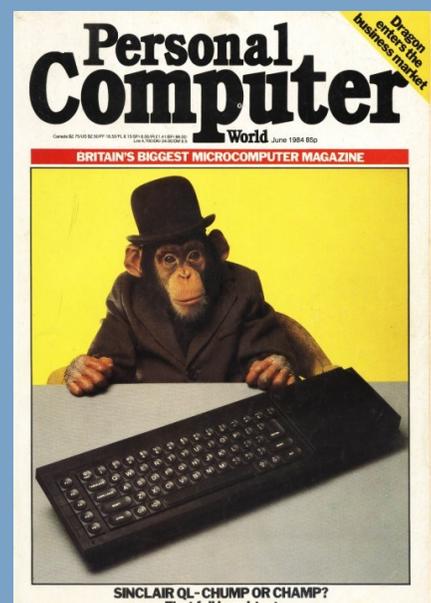
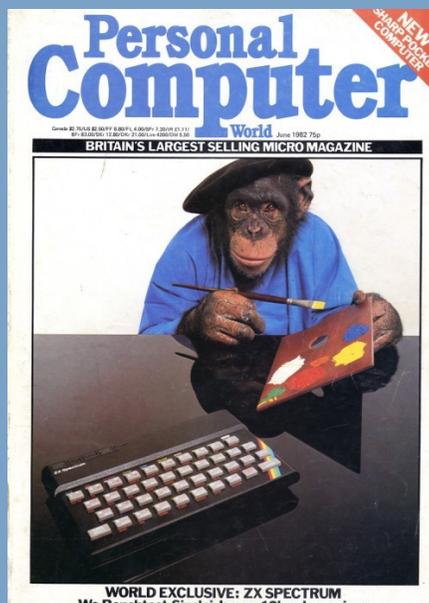
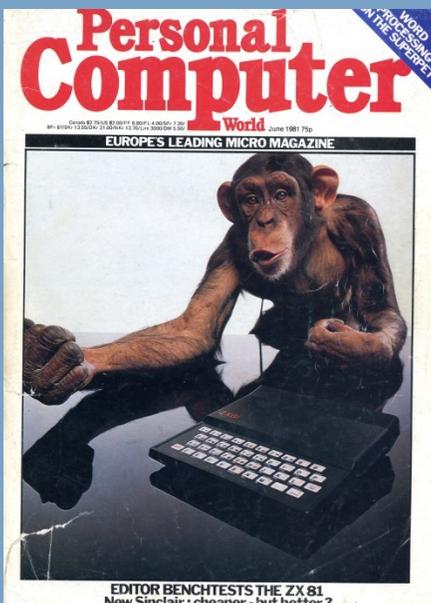
It was a serious magazine both in size and content with page counts often running to more than 350.

As each new micro was launched, it would feature on the front cover, and Sinclair's machines were not left out. Oddly though, they were always accompanied by a chimpanzee!



Making a monkey out of Sinclair?

PCW always had chimpanzees accompanying Sinclair's latest model.



FEATURE

Then came the flood....

Practical Computing came along 6 months later, in August 1978, catering for the larger, hugely expensive lumps of metal that were far outside the reach of Mr average. The type of machines that you couldn't play games on, or at least not to the extent of the soon to come rash of new micros.

The magazine tended to look down on the smaller home micros coming into the market and gave Sinclair's Microdrive a hammering, saying... "Is the Spectrum suitable? If all aspects of the business are to be put on the computer, probably not. The Microdirves are not good enough."

They did occasionally mention the Spectrum though, with a few game reviews here and there, particularly when Sinclair's machine was in it's prime. They could not ignore the best selling home micro, as much as I think they wanted to.

There was also *Computing Today*, launched in March 1979, again another hobbyist magazine that covered a wide range of subjects from DIY hardware, to program listings and home micros. IPC Electrical Electronic Press, the publishers of *Practical Computing*, noticed this trend and spawned a sister magazine to try and grab some readers, and so *Your Computer* was born in June 1981.

Your Computer was aimed at home users and amidst masses of adverts, the magazine included reviews of home computers, interviews, DIY projects, program listings and of course letters and news.

From the start they provided type in programs that were not merely BASIC, they included Machine code, and this was a trend that continued through most of the magazine's life.

It was a serious magazine that also did game reviews, some would say THE ideal magazine for home micros. But not the best for people who played games. Magazines for gamers would come later.

The magazine had a loyal following, myself included, and it was a huge publication with a lot of pages and took a while to get through. It sometimes felt that by the time you had actually finished it, the next issue was on sale.



Quickly following *Your Computer* came one of the longest running computer magazines that only ceased paper publication in 2004, *Computer and Video Games*.

Launched in November 1981, this magazine was mainly aimed, as its title suggested, at game players, and as such it's covers were emblazoned with images of space ships, dragons and aliens.

Inside the readers got news and reviews of games from not only the arcades, but also across multiple formats including the new Sinclair machines.



The style was factual and enthusiastic and the content included type in games for all formats and a serialised cartoon called The Bugs.

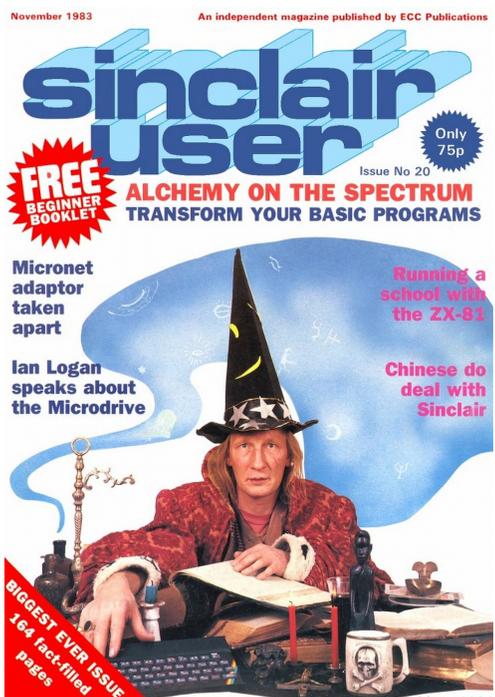
Yes it was a gamers magazine through and through. The style changed as the magazine got older though, with the inclusion of playing tips and game maps, but the reviews grew to take up more of the magazine, leaving behind type-ins and placing them into special pull outs or supplements.

New sections included The Bug Hunters, a sort of agony aunt for lost gamers and an adventure help section hosted initially by Kieth Cambell.

This was another personal favourite because it covered arcade games as well as computer games. I often felt disappointed that the Spectrum was sometimes ignored, but they did have a lot to cover and it was always interesting seeing what was happening in competing areas such as the C64 and Atari ranges.

As 1982 moved on it was plain to see, even then, that the Sinclair machines were outselling their rivals, with the new Spectrum boasting colour, sound and hi-resolution graphics.

ECC Publications decided to join the party but this time only Sinclair's prodigy were invited.



A dedicated publication..

Sinclair User was launched in April 1982 and was aimed more at the serious user than the full on gamer. It contained features about using the machines in schools and businesses, new hardware and even columns on how to write machine code.

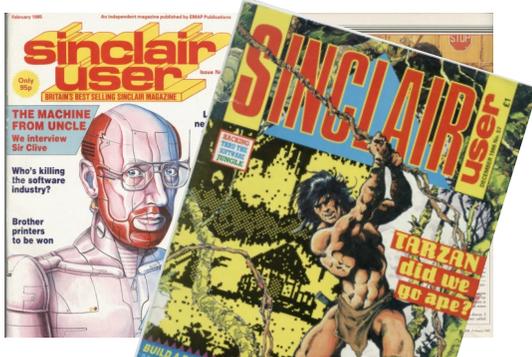
Type-in games were also included as well as game reviews, playing tips and industry interviews.

One of the more well-known people to write for the magazine was Andrew Hewson, who owned the software company Hewson Consultants. His monthly column covered many subjects including machine code tutorials and programming tips.

This format stayed in place until November 1986 when the magazine went through a re-boot and became less serious. The logo vanished and the letters page was littered with irrelevant images.

For some this was a backward step as gamers were getting older not younger, but that was just my opinion and I know a lot of people liked the new format.

For me though, this change had me looking for other alternatives, something that fed my appetite for the serious side of computing, even just something that didn't try to crack jokes every other line.



FEATURE

Still in April 1982 and a more serious entry arrives on the shelf, *Which Micro*.

Covering the larger machines like the IBM, Olivetti, Fortune and Sirius, it did include the home micros and even type-in programs. The business side of things meant it never really took off as a home users magazine though, and there was more approachable reading to be found in the newsagents.

The magazine did however, announce Sinclair's new ZX84 computer in February 1984 that eventually ended up as being the ill-fated QL.

Here come the weeklies

All of the magazines that were available were either quarterly, bi-monthly or monthly, which left a space for a more dynamic and news focused publication and in the same month, April 1982, *Popular Computing Weekly* was launched.

Initially this was a bright, in your face addition to the shelves with impressive cover designs, but inside was a serious news magazine covering the major formats and providing reviews, tips, and type-ins, but no game reviews at first.

In November 1982 readers were in for a shock. Gone were the flashy covers, replaced instead with a newspaper style cover. I liked this look, and bought this magazine regularly for about 4 years.

The content remained the same with special features and an adventure helpline run by Tony Bridge joining the pages. Also Automata UK took over the back pages to advertise their games in a way only a UK company could.

Game reviews were covered later in the magazines life, but this was a purely news focused publication.

The magazine also went through various changes, but somehow never lost its unique look.

1985, 86 and 87 saw the cover change only slightly, using better quality paper and moving to full colour.

The content also remained pretty much untouched – the news and features slowly moving the newer 16bit machines.





Yes, we are still in 1982 and the magazines were coming thick and fast.

EMPA stepped into the market with a magazine not only dedicated to the Sinclair machines, but focusing only on type in games, *Sinclair Programs*.

All the other magazines included type-in games as part of their content, but now the users got a magazine, albeit a small one, full of games and tools they could painstakingly type into their micros and hope it would work at the end. The games were nearly all just BASIC, with no machine code at all and the publication I think, was aimed at young users or people new to computing.

Later issues gained a news, help and game review sections, probably to try and save the flagging format. It failed and the limited audience meant sales were low.

A Rival for Sinclair User?

A month after *Sinclair Programs* appeared Argus Press launched *ZX Computing*.



More of a direct competitor to *Sinclair User*, this colourful magazine included hardware reviews, news, special features and of course, the staple of popular magazines, game reviews.

This was another favourite of mine because it covered all the things I was interested in and didn't focus on and specific area. I also liked how the type-in games were very well documented, with explanations of what each part of the code did, and usually a screen shot of the game, very useful in deciding if you wanted to spend time entering all the code. They also used a lot of movie screen grabs to illustrate their type in games.

The magazine was a different size to the others and had a thicker cover, usually covered with images of ZX81s or Spectrums in the early days. It certainly helped to make identifying it easier as the shelves began to fill up with new magazines. If you were a Spectrum owners, it was easy to spot which mag you should be buying.

In May 1986 the format changed and the familiar cover got a makeover, some say for the worst.

A new logo appeared and the whole magazine got re-booted with new styling and layout. It was more up-to-date in a way, but seemed to look just like *Sinclair User* after its re-styling.

Game reviews were not given scores, just a cartoon of some.. thing... being happy, sad or just plain distraught... all very childish really.

I stopped buying this on a regular basis after the re-style, only dabbling now and again to see if the terrible new format had been scrapped and it had gone back to being a proper magazine. It never did!



Continued next issue...

GAME REVIEWS

PRO BMX SIMULATOR

Codemasters 1988

Pro BMX Simulator transports you into the world of competitive bicycle motocross - or BMX, as it is almost universally known. From a top-down view, you guide your BMX (and rider) around a series of increasingly difficult off-road courses, speeding around the burms, struggling up hills, and holding your line across the rough ground, aiming to beat both the clock and your rivals.

The first stand-out feature of Pro BMX Simulator is the ability to have four players, with two huddled around the keyboard and two using joysticks. It is one of the few arcade games that provides this level of group fun. When I played Pro BMX Simulator in the eighties, I only had one joystick, so three players was the most that I managed (though I'm not sure I had more than two friends, anyway). Even so, three players meant a different kind of gameplay from the usual solitary engagement, and really added to the entertainment. However, even if you are playing on your own, three computer opponents will keep you busy.

Pro BMX Simulator was published under the Codemasters Plus brand: a refinement of the earlier BMX Simulator title from the previous year. While the original game is good in its own right, the professional version has several significant improvements that warrant the upgrade. The controls are more responsive, there are more than twice as many courses to race around, and a sense of fairness is restored as computer riders do not immediately cause you to crash if they get too close (as they did in the original).

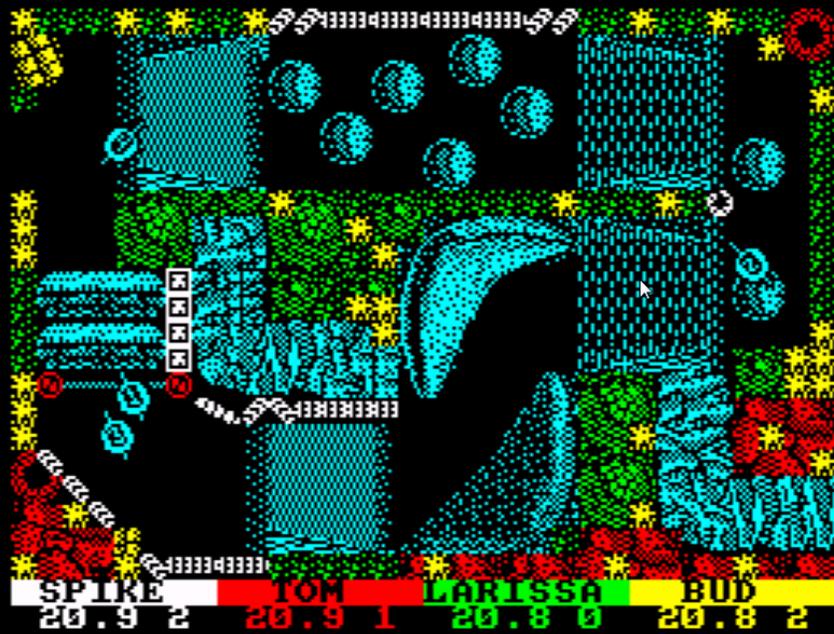
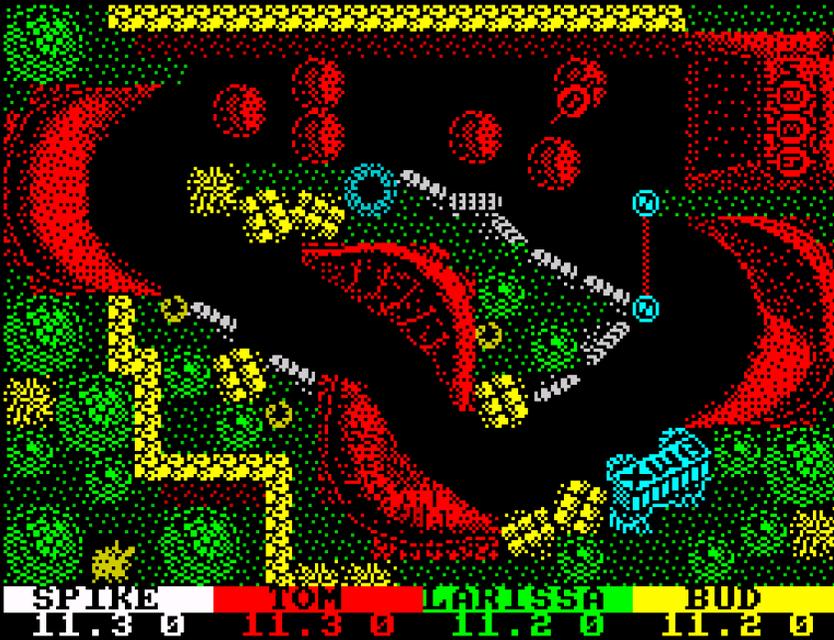
There are fifteen different courses, split into three different scenarios - dirt biking, quarry racing, and desert riding. Each set of tracks requires a different riding style to complete - tight turns and tough climbs for the quarries; long straights and sluggish handling in the desert sands. If you choose to play in Expert mode, then you can customise your bike for the conditions of the scenario before you start racing, selecting tyres for manoeuvrability versus top speed and gearing for acceleration versus speed. Further, only expert mode lets you



attempt the last (that is, the fifth) track of each scenario: these are deemed too challenging for a novice. The other main difference between expert and novice modes, is that you can be knocked off your bike by other riders, which can make it challenging to navigate through some of the tighter sections of courses. However, being knocked off your bike (or knocking your opponents off) adds to the realism making expert mode a worthwhile step up for as soon as you've got to grips with the game-play.

The difficulty level is about right. With a little practice, you'll soon be able to qualify through the early levels of each scenario, but finishing the last couple of courses will require lots of practice. Pro BMX Simulator is one of the few games that I actually completed on the ZX Spectrum, though it was also one of the games that I played most.

There are 48k and 128k variants of the game, although - as



was commonplace in the late 80s - the 128k version simply has better sound effects and music (actually, even the 48k version does a good job of providing sound to enhance the race action). Only one of the three scenarios can be loaded into the computer at a time - the quarry and desert scenarios were provided on a second cassette and could each be loaded in around a minute. It wouldn't have been too difficult to allow all three scenarios to be loaded at once in the 128k version, though having only one scenario at a time doesn't detract significantly from the enjoyment.

Code Masters gained a reputation for producing good quality, sports simulation games. Titles such as Grand Prix Simulator, Professional Ski Simulator, and ATV Simulator all score well on World of Spectrum website. Sadly, Code Masters have refused permission for their games to be distributed for free, so you will need to keep your eye on your favourite auction site for a copy of the cassette. It is worthwhile doing this though, to enjoy some engaging ZX Spectrum action.

Review by [George Beckett](#)

GAME REVIEWS

Blue Thunder

Richard Wilcox Software 1984

This game was released by Richard Wilcox Software that later went on to be Elite Systems and although released around the same time as the movie and television series of the same name, this game has nothing to do with them, or at least if you read the instructions. You are the only survivor of a mighty invasion force and have to penetrate the defences of the alien island and destroy the nuclear reactor to be able to rescue your comrades. That doesn't make sense, if you are the only survivor, then where did these comrades appear from? This is the first of many inconsistencies as we shall see.

For this mission you would expect to fly a powerful space ship or battle cruiser, but no, you just get a helicopter, or as the game states, a jetcopter. The game is very similar to Harrier Attack and you take off from an aircraft carrier (which I presume is on automatic as you are the last survivor remember) and head out across the sea. There are small islands with gun and laser emplacements that take pot shots at you, some of which are impossible to dodge making the game very unfair. The laser fire also bends to follow the copter. I never knew lasers could do that!

Once you get further inland you will eventually come to the reactor, but you can't get to it until you destroy a kind of bouncy thing. Once this has gone, the reactor pops up out the ground. Now you have to take out the vertical shield and then dodge the force field to be able to blow it up. Once done, you land and pick up your fellow comrades... but watch out for that balloon! Hang on.. a balloon.. are these aliens not as advanced as we thought?

Anyway, if you can dodge that its back to the carrier, dodging the lasers and cannons that are somehow being powered without a reactor now! Maybe they use solar power, but then why bother blowing up the reactor?

Once you land on the carrier it all starts again but with an added submarine taking shots at you. You have a fuel limit too with no way to refuel.

The graphics are OK and move smoothly enough, the sound suits the game but I can't help thinking the story was bolted on to avoid problems around copyright, either with the movie and TV series or with Airwolf.



The reactor that doesn't power anything!



The magic bendy laser!

Control is a bit odd. The copter faces right when you start and to turn it around you have to hold the fire key or button down for varying amounts of time. A short hold will spin the copter so that it is facing you, this is needed to destroy the reactor. Holding fire for longer turn the copter to face left. This is awkward as you fire in which ever direction you are facing and you can sometimes find yourself pointing in the wrong direction because you held fire down for too long. Tricky when you are trying to dodge the lasers or cannon fire.

Another problem is the speed of the copter, it moves faster flying backwards than forwards. I suppose this is useful when dodging things, but doesn't actually make any sense. Maybe I'm a bit of an old whinge bag.. but a game that tried to stick to a real story but then provides nonsensical elements just makes me want to scream.

Lasers should not track you, things should not continue to function if there is no power, the laser near the reactor does not fire even though you are about to blow it up, a balloon suddenly appears from nowhere and drops bombs on you and the control.. well.. lets not go there...

It could have been a good game... but for me.. it just doesn't stand up...



The killer balloon!



The Silly Bit

If you type 5318008 and turn it upside down, it says BOOBIES... huh huh huh.



QUACKERS

Rabbit Software 1983

Quackers is, as the inlay suggests, a version of the arcade rifle range game, Carnival. But, there are differences.

As the game starts you get rows of ducks, rabbits and I presume black cats, but I'm not entirely sure. Above them are green smiling faces and a scrolling wall with openings to allow you to shoot through.

The idea is to shoot all of the targets before the timer runs down and that is a fairly difficult task. Unlike the arcade version, there is no limit to the number of shots you have, instead you can happily blast away as much as you like.

The graphics are a bit basic, but scroll smoothly enough and sound is used to good effect.

Control can be defined,, which is a nice change for early 16k games, or you can use the cursor keys.

Once all of the items are clear, the game again breaks from the arcade version and gives you a turtle to shoot. It walks across the screen, and hitting it, makes it change direction. If you miss and it reaches the side of the screen, it's back to the gallery again. The idea is to keep shooting it and scoring points.

The inlay says you have to keep the turtle hopping to win a super prize but I am not sure if there is an actual prize, but you do get some nice points out of this section.

I played for quite a while and even though it's a simple game, it is implemented well, is easy to get into and is enjoyable in its own way.

Certainly not a bad game and worth having a go.



SOFTWARE STAR

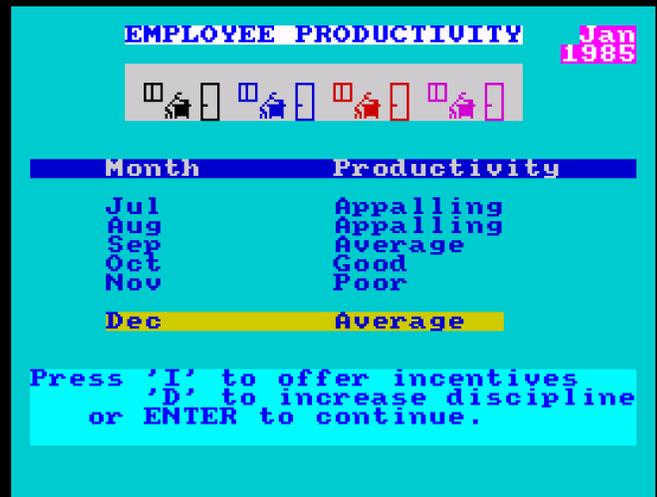
What could be easier than being a game developer? Knock out a few lines of code, add a few graphics and a bit of sound, and wait for the money to come rolling in. Unfortunately, as Software Star makes quite clear, there's a bit more to it than that.

Appointed as both Managing Director and top games programmer for a major software house, it is your task to churn out hit games and keep the Board of Directors happy. But on a more personal level you are also trying to become the titular "Software Star" along the way, and maintain that level of recognition for at least 10 months. So what does that entail? Late nights poring over assembly code? Losing hours of work due to a corrupted Microdrive save? Thankfully it is far simpler and less stressful than that, although in many ways your task would benefit greatly from a bit more realism.

Presented purely using text with some occasional "user-defined graphics", your role essentially boils down to a few choices each month, such as how many adverts to place or which region (North, South, East or West) to push sales in. At the start of the game you get the choice of 7 different difficulty levels, with the main (only?) difference being that booking adverts costs £1000 each on Beginner but £2200 each on Genius. After a few screens of very straightforward decisions to make, you get to the only real highlight – watching your game (hopefully) climb up the charts. After this your income is calculated – with excessive debt resulting in game over – and it's on to the next month with exactly the same choices as before.

While proving mildly entertaining very early on – especially when you get a game to the top of the charts – it soon becomes apparent that Software Star is an incredibly shallow experience, even by the relatively simple standards of early management games. This feeling isn't helped by the fact that you are at the mercy of a random number generator when you get to sales – barring the vague influence of how many adverts you've booked. It's odd that if you book zero adverts that you are guaranteed to not get even a single sale. Surely at least one person would buy your game after seeing it on a shop shelf, regardless of having seen an advert or not?!

Another bizarre experience is having a smash hit game one month, only to barely scrape into the charts on the next. The game buying public may be fickle, but not to that extent! Equally strange is seeing the same game at several positions in the charts, which spoils the one part of the game that is enjoyable. As it is only a top 20, this duplication of game names could easily have been avoided; at no point do you get the impression that Software Star is anywhere near to stretching the Speccy's 48K capacity.



After a few in-game months of progress you really have seen it all, and the desire to keep going drops markedly after your first number one hit. This is disappointing and a missed opportunity, as there were much better management games available even before this was released (perhaps most notably the author's own "Football Manager", released 3 years earlier). The over simplification and random nature of gameplay ensures that this cannot really be recommended as anything other than as a 10 minute curiosity.

Review by Dion Guy

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