

I.O.U.

The Voice of the Independent Oric Users' Group

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EDITORIAL

This, I think, is quite a special issue. The I.O.U.G. is just over one year old, I.O.U. has made it into double figures and we've maintained a membership of 70+. It is also the first to be produced on my new printer, an Amstrad DMP-2000, in conjunction with Tansoft's Author.

Newsflash contains some very interesting and indeed exciting news, particularly from W.E. (Software). However I think that most members will agree that some of the prices could be more competitive.

As you will soon notice this issue is six pages long. I am able to do this because the current number of members enables this to be done without making a loss on the bulk photocopied issues. How often this will happen in the future will depend upon how many people have ordered within the deadline, production costs, and how much material there is for the issue. Since a six page issue involves a loss on issues photocopied in small batches, by self-service, I may have to charge the full break-even price for orders received after I have run out of bulk copied issues. G.R.

NEWSFLASH

W.E. (Software), in the last week of June, accepted an offer to become U.K. agents for Eureka Informatique and Oric Products International. This very welcome move means that U.K. users will be able to benefit from some of the developments on the French scene. These include:-

The ORIC TELESTRAT featuring dual joystick ports, Centronics parallel and RS232 serial interfaces, midi interface, 64K RAM, compiled BASIC, full compatibility with Oric 1 and Atmos and complete with a 3" double-sided disc drive is "soon to be released in the U.K.". The price is likely to be 360.00 pounds plus VAT and carriage.

The Eureka disc drive featuring the SEDORIC operating system is available at 269.95 plus 8.00 carriage.

Oric-1 and Atmos ROMs are available on cartridge at 22.95 each plus 60p postage and packing.

The SEDORIC DOS is available on 3" disc at 59.95 plus 1.50 p+p.

The Eureka/Oric COSMOS printer (40/80/132 columns, 80/100 cps) is available at 309.95 plus 10.00 p+p.

For more information contact W.E. (Software), Foley Bank, Worcester Road, Great Malvern, Worcs. WR14 4QW tel. 06845-69059

FGC's summer supersaver price list contains some new software releases. These are: Chuckford (6.95), Snake Venom (5.95), both arcade type games; Buccaneer (6.95), a graphics adventure; League Champions

(5.95), a football strategy game for the Atmos only; and two utilities for the Atmos, MCP-40 HIRES Dump (6.95) and Screen Designer (6.95)
All the programs are distributed by FGC.

FAHE AT LAST: Thanks to Pete Canning of Hitchin, Herts. I've finally made it onto television. Pete put a plug for the I.O.U.G. on the computer page of CEEFAX which has attracted a few new members.

Patrick Browne of Orpington, Kent drew my attention to a letter in the July issue of Computer and Video Games enquiring, amongst other things, about the existence of Oric users' groups. I've written to them about this and to draw their attention to the fact that new software has been appearing for the Oric.

RESPONSE

R.M. Dutton has a problem with The Hobbit by Melbourne House. The game is crashing shortly after loading the character and also during the game. He would like to know whether this is a fault with the program or just with his copy. 60 Whateley Crescent, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham B36 ODP .

C.J. Cook of Basildon, Essex informed me that the Atmos is being sold for 15.00 by the Morgan Computer Co., 179 Tottenham Court Road, London W1. The price is exclusive of VAT and carriage and there is no warranty.

David Goodrum of Norwich would like to clear up a couple of points about the planned O.P.E.L. disc system. He says that it will include a second processor and an RS232 interface and that it will not be compatible with the Oric microdisc but will have a DCS which is similar in operation to that of the microdisc.

Graeme Burton would like to know where he can buy Mr Mephisto by Eurobyte and Warpl by Icon. 5 Honeybourne Way, Peltswood, Kent BR5 1EZ

REVIEW

Chuckford from FGC for Oric 1/Atmos 48k. Price: 6.95 from FGC, 5.95 from O.J. Software.

Loading time from cassette is approximately 3 mins. 2 secs at the fast rate. As is usual for FGC's own titles there is only one, fast copy on the tape but also as usual this loaded without any problems. There is a colourful but somewhat basic loading screen presented during loading.

Chuckford is a platform game. Your aim is to control your little man in his task of running and jumping around the platforms and going up and down ladders whilst he collects eggs and what I assume are piles of bird food. Whilst doing this he has to avoid the attention of the patrolling birds, which look like chickens. The controls are Z - left, X - right, ; - up, . - down and RETURN - jump. I found this to be a very usable combination. There is also a choice of two levels of sound, pause and escape (ie quit) facilities and a hi-score table. There are 10 different screens to complete.

The graphics are quite simple but effective. There is a cheat mode

which enabled me to look at all of the screens and I think that even experienced players will find some of the later screens challenging. As for how the cheat mode works I'm not sure whether I'm allowed to tell you. The use of sound is quite good but I think an option to switch it off altogether would have been preferable. I don't have much experience of platform games but I found this one extremely playable, and consider it to be good value for money for arcade game fans.

Gary Ransay

Thanks to Ken Smalldon of FGC for the review copy.

Software and Hardware Suppliers Survey

For this article I have taken four important suppliers of Oric software and hardware to compare and contrast their services and prices. As an aid to price comparison for software I took four programs that I thought would appeal to users of differing tastes. These are: Xenon 1 by IJK; Manic Miner by Software Projects; The Quill, adventure writing system from Gilsoft; and Author, the word processing program from Tansoft.

Please note that my counts of the number of titles supplied by each firm are subject to a small margin of error. To the best of my knowledge all the information within this article is accurate at the time of writing.

O.P.E.L. (Oric Products Exports Ltd.)

O.P.E.L. have just over 100 software titles listed (my count 101) all of which are marked as Atmos compatible. Prices for the sample programs are:-

Xenon 1 (7.50), Manic Miner (7.95), The Quill (15.00), Author (12.95)

O.P.E.L. have also produced some software themselves including Ski Game/Graphic Design (7.95), ASM-65 assembler/disassembler (14.95) and Minitext Word Processor (14.95).

Hardware supplied includes the MCP-40 printer/plotter (83.90) and the Oric Modem (99.95). They are also developing their own disc drive which they hope to release in the near future.

O.P.E.L. Ltd, Home Farm, Wentworth Drive, Wentworth, Virginia Water, Surrey GU25 4NY tel. 09904-2877

FGC (Financial and General Computing)

Over 110 titles (my count 111), most of which are Atmos compatible. Prices for the sample programs are:-

Xenon 1 (5.50), Manic Miner (6.90), The Quill (14.95), Author (11.50) .

FGC are also involved in the purchasing of copyright/distribution rights for programs and distribute a variety of programs under its own label.

On the hardware front FGC has the Cumana 3" Disc Drive plus interface for the Atmos (184.00), Oric Modem (79.95), Downsway Programmable Joystick interface (29.95) and Centronics printer cables

12.50) amongst other things

FGC also supply some books including the excellent Advanced User Guide (9.95) and Exploring Adventures (4.95)

FGC (Mailorder), 20 Meadowcroft, Euxton, Chorley, Lancs. PR7 6BU tel 02572-70088 (outside office hours for personal attention).

O.J. Software

Over 110 titles (my count 114), mostly Atmos compatible. Sample program prices:-

Xenon 1 (7.50), Manic Miner (6.95), The Quill (14.50), Author (11.50) .

Amongst the hardware and accessories that O.J. supplies are Cumana Disc Drive + Interface (179.95), Aztec Printer Cables (11.95) and Downsway Programmable Interface (27.95).

Books supplied include Advanced User Guide (9.75) and Exploring Adventures (6.95).

O.J. Software, 273 Moss Lea Road, Wrightington, Wigan, Lancs. WN6 9RN tel. 0257-421915

W.E. (Software)

Over 150 titles (my count 157). W.E. are the odd firm out in that they operate a software club. The annual membership is 5.75 and entitles the member to a 1.00 discount off each tape and to telephone orders and pay within ten days of receipt. They also charge extra for postage and packing, this being 75p for one to four tapes and free for five or more. It is also possible to buy from them without being a member and these are the prices that I shall consider. sample program prices:-

Xenon 1 (8.50), Manic Miner (7.95), The Quill (16.95), Author (14.50). All prices exclude postage and packing.

Hardware items include IJK/Oric Joystick Interface (7.50 + 0.50 p+p), Oric/Atmos Modem and Interface (64.95 + 1.50), Eureka 3" Disc Drive (269.95 + 8.00) and Oric-1 and Atmos ROM Cartridges (22.95 + 0.60 each)

W.E. (Software), Foley Bank, Worcester Road, Great Malvern, Worcs. WR14 4QW . tel 06845-69059

CONCLUSION

Overall for software FGC and O.J. Software are by far the cheapest suppliers, with FGC's current summer supersaver price list being the winner by a short head. Both have a reputation for reliability and rapidity of service and should be considered by any Oric owner.

O.P.E.L. comes next and although it is more expensive for most programs than the above two there are a few for which it is a clear winner and there are also its 'own brand' products to consider. This is another company with a reputation for reliable service.

As for W.E. (Software) I'm afraid that for the great majority of programs it is a clear loser, even if you join the software club.

However it does have a very large range and you may not be able to obtain some of the programs anywhere else. This is a relatively new company to me and as such has not really had time to get a reputation.

The variety and prices for hardware etc. are much more competitive. W.E. provide the widest range but there is no clear winner on price.

Gary Ramsay.

ISSUE 11

I am aiming to distribute issue 11 between August 30th and September 13th. Please allow at least one week after the latter date before querying about non-receipt of your issue. Expected cost is 40p. People ordering the issue individually should send payment - cash or cheque/P.O. - plus an A5 s.a.e. to reach me no later than August 23rd to:

I.O.U.G., c/o Mr G. Ramsay, 1 Kingsway Crescent, Burnage, Manchester. M19 1GA

Issue 11 will be prepared by Allan Whitaker. If you have any items for consideration and you are NOT sending for an issue or a sub. at the same time then you may prefer to write directly to Allan:

I.O.U.G., c/o Mr A. Whitaker, 8 Staley Hall Road, Stalybridge, Cheshire SK15 3DT.

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS

First class postage - 2.85

Second " " - 2.65

In both cases also send five A5 self-addressed (no stamp) envelopes. Covers a maximum of 5 issues, production costs permitting.

N.B. An A5 envelope is approx. 228 x 162 mm or 9 x 6.5 in.

Cheques can be made payable to I.O.U.G. .

RENEWAL OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

The subscriptions for those of you for whom the first issue of your sub. was no. 6 are now finished. Due to the change in subscription conditions which was necessitated by a change in production costs most of you will have some credit. If you paid the exact amounts specified ie 3.12 and 2.88 then your balances are 0.32 and 0.33 respectively. Those of you who do not satisfy this criteria will have received special notification of your balance.

Subtract the amount of your credit from the amount that you send for your next issue or sub. . I have returned your spare envelopes.

Members who are unsure about whether their sub. is due for renewal or how much to send should send me a s.a.e. . The same applies if you want a refund of any excess funds.

I.O.U. EXCHANGE

For Sale: Oricmon by PSS for Oric-1 (1.50). Wanted Back issues of Personal Computer News, Oric Owner and Tansoft Gazette and Tansoft's Insect Insanity if Atmos compatible. David Goodrum, 23 Bone Rd., Norwich, Norfolk NR6 6EH tel. 0603-868232

For Sale: ZX81 (16K) + ZX Printer + 5 Rolls of paper - 15.00 or swap for Author and Oric Cad or other swaps. Also Tandy Quick Printer II (32 cols., serial + parallel interfaces, no cable) 15.00 or swaps as before. Martin Bateman, 121 Coppice Way, The Coppice, Aylesbury, Bucks. .

For Sale: Fireflash by No Man's Land (1.50), Green Cross Toad and Frigate Commander by IJK (3.00 each), Grail (0.75) and Dinky Kong for Oric-1 only (1.00) both by Severn. Gary Ransay - send an s.a.e. or phone 081-431 4180

Software Review - Titus Assembler/Disassembler

Titus is a 6502 Assembler which runs on the Oric Atmos. Although sold as such, it is best to look at it's other features first. These are :-

- a) Disassembler - This is nice to use. A single command will list twenty lines (this can be altered), and another command lists until <return> is pressed.
- b) List memory as Ascii characters
- c) List memory as Hex data
- d) Hex/decimal + decimal/hex conversion - extremely simple to use, just type either #n or Tn (n is hex/dec number) and the conversion is shown.
- e) Move command
- f) Warm reset
- g) Printer toggle

The assembler is of the type that assembles direct into memory as you type the code in. It accepts standard 6502 mnemonics, with # for immediate and \$ for hex. This is inconsistent with the hex-decimal convertor which uses # for hex, but this is a minor point! The assembler itself is very similar to Tansoft's Oricmon program, but does score one major advantage in that there is a facility to use up to a maximum of thirty labels. The catch is that the labels must be declared before use, but even with this limitation it is a very useful facility. It is possible to set up a single temporary label when using a forward branch, which is useful. A very nice feature is being able to use these label names from BASIC by the ! command. This turns out to be quite useful when developing routines to be called by BASIC programs.

Titus is located at #881C - #97FF. An alternative version (TITUS II) is located in the GRAB area, for use when HIRES graphics are not required.

The Titus program comes on the same cassette as 'Cyclops'. This is a machine code monitor program which offers a command to break out of a code program, a search command, and a break routine to report on the state of the registers and flags while the program is running. I do not know why this is a separate program, but is a useful addition to Titus.

Although described as 'one of the most powerful programming aids', I would not recommend it for the development of machine code programs of any great size. The limitation of it assembling direct is that there is no 'source' code as such, so any alterations mean juggling about with the contents of memory to open up space for extra code. However, for writing small routines to be called from BASIC, or for somebody just starting machine code it is certainly a useful utility. The cost of the program is 6.99 which is reasonable for this sort of program, especially since I have recently seen adverts for Tansoft's similar program for about 12.

Titus can be obtained from:

Mr. Ray Middleton, 38 Wensley Green, LEEDS, LS7 2ND

Review By Steve Brunton.