COMMODORE COMPUTER CLUB

NEWS



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THE COMMODORE 64: A DESIGN CASE HISTORY - PART THREE

By TEKLA S. PERRY and PAUL WALLICH

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(Continued from last issue)

The C-64 designers weren't the only ones revising their machine; even some assembly-line workers got into the act. Since testing color quality automa-tically is virtually impossible, assembly-line workers instructed to turn a potentiometer that controls the color and black-and-white signals until they saw color. As Charpentier recalled, the workers soon discovered that if they turned the potentiometer as far as possible, it resulted in saturated color—but it also wiped out the black-and-white signal. thousand computers had been shipped before the assembly-line workers' "revision" was noticed; by then, some reviewers were lambasting the C-64 for its "garish" colors.

Though these modifications have been made in the C-64 since its introduction, designers who write commercial software for the machine would like to see a few more. One such change would be adequate quality control. "They don't test," said Nelson of Epyx. "I've opened up brand-new Commodores and found traces cut. They obviously use a power screwdriver to assemble the C-64, sometimes miss the screw, and chop the traces. How, you might wonder, could that have passed final Hell, those traces are hooked up to the disk-drive connectors, which they obviously don't test.

In hindsight, Charpentier called one of Commodore's

mistakes "not coming a little closer to quality."

One complaint voiced by designers of add-on hardware for the C-64 is that its minimalist design results in undesirable interactions between parts of the hardware and software. For example, the circuitry

CHANGES AFOOT AT CCC

As you are no doubt aware, the CCC is going through some changes in the last few months.

First off, the club has moved back to its "ancestral home," the Sunset Community Center at 404 East 51st Avenue. This is where the workshop meetings are now being held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The reason for this move was one of economy--the size of attendance at workshop meetings did not justify the considerable expense of renting the Thompson high school cafeteria. The attendance at the club's "lecture" meeting-held on the third Mednesday of the month at Emily Carr College--has also been declining, and thus has led to speculation that this meeting may be dropped altogether in the fall.

There is only one meeting remaining at Emily Carr, that being on April 16th. The workshop meetings (at Sunset) which have been scheduled at this time are on April 1st, May 6th, June 3rd.

Another change is that members will be allowed to sell items at the workshops. This move is on a trial basis only and has some stipulations. A maximum of three items will be allowed for sale per member at each meeting. Any number in excess of this must be approved by the club's directors. Application must be submitted to the directors for consideration at their meeting which takes place at Sunset on the second Tuesday of each sonth.

The last few months also saw the appearance of a course on machine language conducted by Murray Kopit (now completed). From all reports, it was very successful, and may be repeated. This course was in response to a survey taken in the club last year.

The newsletter schedule has been altered somewhat, though it is hoped that it will appear at least four times a year. If there are not sufficient articles contributed for each issue, the present tabloid format may have to be dropped in favor of an 8-1/2" x 11" newsletter.

used to control the joystick and game-paddle port is borrowed once every 1/60 second to scan the keyboard for keys that have been pressed. If the joystick switches are closed, the keyboard-scanning software will report that a key has been pressed. Devices that attach to the joystick ports can cause unpredictable responses—a problem that would not occur if separate hardware had been used for the two functions.

Another flaw is the computer's crude internal software. The system comes up in BASIC when it is turned on. This is a leftover from the days of the first PET computer produced by Commodore, which had no disk-operating system, since there were no disk drives to be had then. "A decent disk-operating system wasn't developed until PET BASIC 4.0, " Charpentier said. The C-64 doesn't use this advanced version of BASIC "it would have required more RDM than we could because put in." Instead, the machine uses a more primitive version of BASIC, borrowed from the VIC-20.

The more glaring omissions from the Commodore 64's BASIC are commands to control the sound and graphic There was never any intention that the system would have built-in software to control the graphics the sound," said Yannes. "That was an obvious part of the Commodore philosophy: you don't waste money on things that make the product more expensive and that

the majority of buyers aren't going to use."
"Commodore has always paid lip service to soft-ware," Charpentier said. "They do enough to get by and then rely on outside sources to fill the gap. dore was an extension of Jack Tramiel, and to him software wasn't tangible--you couldn't hold, feel or

touch it--so it wasn't worth spending money for."
The C-64 designers had plans of their own for changes which haven't yet been implemented. They used VIC-20 case to shortcut development, but th have a new case designed that they intended to substitute in eight to ten aonths. "It was thinner in front and had more of a wedge shape to it," said Charpentier. "I always thought the VIC-20 case looked clunky." A few new features were also to be added to the machine.

The fact that these changes have not been made has not really affected the success of the C-64, assrted Brian Dougherty, president of the Berkeley Softworks of Berkeley, Calif. "This machine has the best graphics-display capability of anything that has yet been done for a TV screen," he said. "It came close to being an awesome system."

The one major flaw of the C-64 is not in the machine itself, but in its disk drive. With a reasonably fast disk drive and an adequate disk operating system (DOS), the C-64 could compete in the business market with the Apple and perhaps with other business computers. With the present disk drive, though, it is hard-pressed to lose its image as a toy.

*Pusiness-oriented software does not look as good as it should on the C-64, said Dougherty, not because the base system isn't good enough but because the disk-drive access is too slow: any business application requires a lot of disk access. And since the DOS is so weak and lacks features such as the automatic creating and maintaining of directories and keeping track of files, "it is a lot acre difficult to develop business software" for the C-64, he added. Somebody like Lotus [Development Corp., manufacturer of a popular integrated business-software package] is facing a lot more difficulty than they did developing software for the IBM PC, because the PC has an operating-system structure that just doesn't exist for this product."

The basic input-output system in ROM is done fairly cleanly, according to operating-system principles. All the routines that need to be there are there, but there should also be a facility for automatically reading the first track of the disk and booting a more sophisticated operating system into memory.

disk drive does in fact have a facility for automatically reading the first track of a disk, according to Nelson of Epyx, but because it not documented, it is not widely used.

(Continued in next issue -- Earlier parts of this article available on the CCC BBS at 271-1082.)

NIX TO PROTECTION MEANS MORE SALES

A bid to create a mass market and to prevent paracy is under way as many of Canada's software developers have started to remove copy protection from personal computer programs, industry spokesmen say.

Developers are also cutting software prices--a trend expected to continue as more companies enter the market.

The elimination of copy protection is a "healthy trend and the direction in which the industry will be going in the next few years," said Reuben Lando, chairman of the Software Developers Association.

The practice is counterproductive "if you're trying to get into the mass market," said Lando. The industry will grow if programs can be easily copied, he added.

To be successful in the volume market, a product name must be familiar to users. Because copy protection prevents copying and lending, it encourages the public to purchase pirated software instead of the original.

For example, if the purchaser cannot copy a \$200 software package and the product is later damaged he has lost the value of his purchase, said Michael Reichmann, president of Batteries Included.

"That's a disservice to the end user."

A year ago, Reichmann's company decided to move away from copy protection. Now that customers can make copies, they don't have to fear losing a program and

For the sanufacturer, unbridled copying is "the best fore of advertisement you can get," Lando said. Knowledge of the product translates into higher sales volume and customer loyalty.

For example, Batteries Included produced its first unprotected package last year and "we sold significant volumes of the product, " said Reichmann.

Today, the company sells 50 software packages, compatible with major brands of hardware. Only three are protected and "we try to price our products as inexpensively as we can."

Because companies are pricing their products aggressively, they can sell twice as many software packages at half the usual price and still make the same money.

"We've dropped prices to the point where it's not worth copying," said Raj Manucha, president of MSR Inc.

After the company removed copy protection last year, its sales tripled.

When software is priced so low, it "cuts the pirates out because you're giving it away," said Peter Sprung, associate director of the department of computing services at the University of Naterloo.

mputing services at the University of Waterloo.

The pirates are also cut out by the new 'shareware' concept in which some manufacturers sell their unprotected product to user groups for as little as

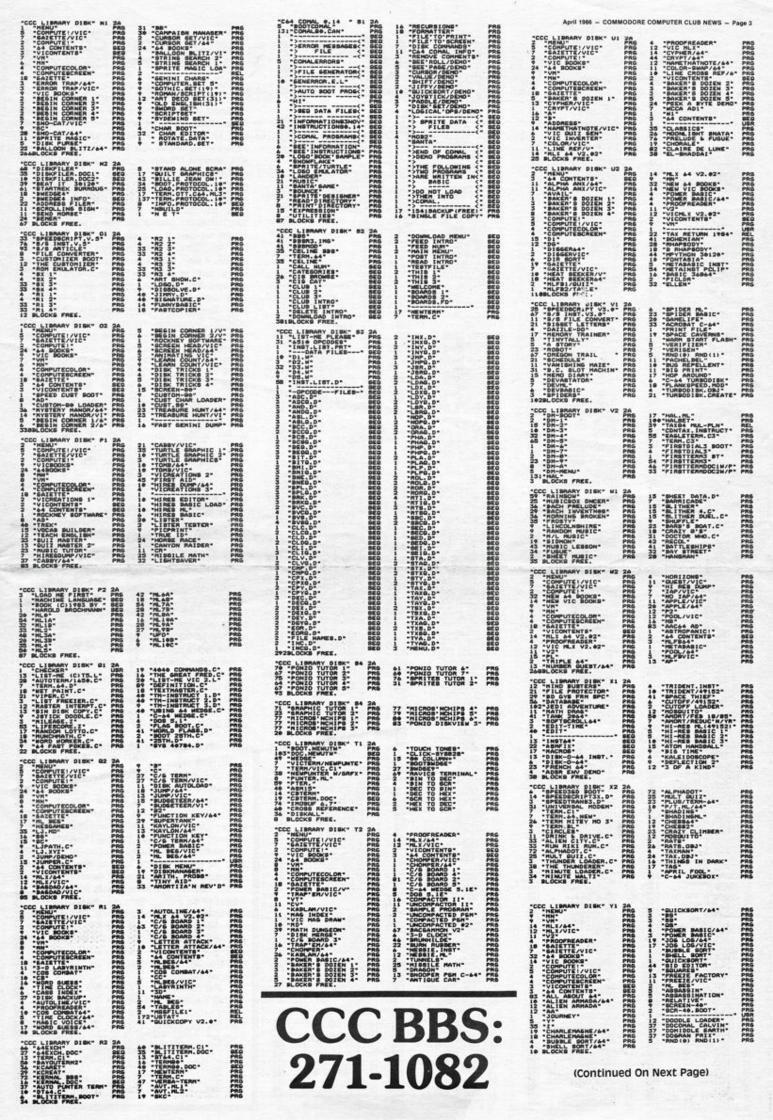
-- reprinted from The Vancouver Sun

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WORD PROCESSING

By MIKE QUIGLEY

Search and Replace in a word processor is a handy feature which allows you to find and substitute one word or phrase -- or even a particular group of letters -- for another. Let's say you write an article with numerous references to a "Mr. Smith" and then find out the person is actually Mrs. Jones. Using Search and Replace, you can go through the entire document, and sometimes even subsequent documents which are chained to the first one, automatically substituting one name for the other.

You say think this is something you will rarely use, but there are many occasions when it is a real godsend. A woman who writes articles of a veterinary nature told se that she had one long feature which used some complicated medical expression many times. Every time she came to this express she would create a dummy expression like "qzq", something which would never be encountered "in real life". Then, when the article was finished, she searched and replaced this combination ... zap, zap, zap!

There are certain limitations with this feature. One is that you have to define the item you wish to Search carefully. Let's say you wanted to replace every occurrence of the word "the" in a document with "a". Since Search and Replace is quite literal, you could end up with words like "other" -- containing "the" in its middle-becoming "oar". To avoid this, you would have to search (space)the(space) and replace it with [space]a[space]. Most good WPs give you the option of Searching and Replacing all occurrences automatically, or else prompting you with "Yes/No" before each change.

One thing to watch with Search and Replace is how literal it is. With some MPs, searching for "the" will find all instances of "the" as well as "THE", "The", "tHe" and so forth. This can prove a hindrance. You should also consider how many characters can be dealt with at once. The usual limitation is 40 - the width of the screen. If the expression you wish to replace is longer than this, you say have to divide it into two pieces, end the first one with another dummy phrase and then replace that dusay phrase with the remainder of the expression.

Most word processors are limited to searching for ordinary upper and lower class characters and numbers. If you have any reverse or graphic characters (sometimes used to activate special printer features), forget it! I have yet to find a word processor which will search for, let alone replace, its RETURN character-usually depicted as the left arrow.

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Club meetings are normally held: Morkshop: first Tuesday of the month, 7:00 p.m., Sunset Community Centre, 404 East 51st Ave.; Lecture: third Wednesday of the month, 7:00 p.m., Emily Carr College of Art and Design, 1399 Johnston, Granville Island. For up-to-date information on any changes, please call the club BBS at 271-1002 or the club's 24-hour answering machines

PET-3311 (738-3311)

Club Executive: President -- Philip Seligman; Vice-President -- Sary-Lee Nova; Secretary -- Al Townsend; Recording Secretary -- Ellenor Jonsson; Treasurer -- Hu Reijne; Directors -- Dave Allen, Guenter Hake, Glen Hazlewood, Helen Hing, Douglas Johnson, Murray Kopit, Bob Mascott, Ken Moren, Larry Phillips, Tisothy Pinnell, Mike Guigley, Nick Shevchenko, Sig Steiner, Stewart Tait.