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Big fun and games

TWO ARCADE GAMES, a fabulous
learn to type program and a IIGS
system that beats them all form this
month's column. The games are both new
to Australia, although they have been
available in the USA since 1987, showing
how far behind we often are with IIGS soft-
ware.

Mind you, this will not always be the
case as the IIGS numbers increase in Aus-
tralia. This must happen given the increas-
ing availability of third-party peripherals
and the quality of the latest IIGS software.
Next month I will be reviewing Medley, the
latest IIGS desk top publishing program,
as well as some state-of-the-art games
that aren't even available in Australia. But
for now, a look at a IIGS system that is
simply awesome...

A big IIGS
THE COMBINATION of a no frills comput-
er, single floppy and a monochrome
screen is becoming less and less useful
in these days of all singing and dancing,
memory-hungry software. Also, users are
themselves becoming more demanding as
computers take their place in the 'can't
live without' category. The IIGS in its basic
form is already fairly sophisticated, mak-
ing it suitable for most tasks required by
the home or professional user, and it can
be easily expanded as the needs arise.

But I haven't seen a IIGS system quite
as expanded as that being operated by the
marketing manager of Domino Compu-
ters, Malcolm T. Elliot. Many readers
around Australia will probably remember
him as a radio/TV personality, and it's his
links with this industry that necessitate
the large system he uses at home.

Elliot upgraded from a fully blown IIE to
a IIGS only recently, and decided to go the
whole hog. Realising that life can't be any
fun without a hard disk, he bought two
(twice the fun). The drives, both made by
CMS, are also partitioned, in effect giving
four hard disks, driven from two CMS SCSI
cards. The total storage is 103Mb, made
up from 43 and a 60Mb drives. Naturally,
the system also has a 3 1/2 inch and
5 1/4 inch drive for versatility.

To complement the external storage,
the system also has a 2Mb extension RAM
launcher system of GS/OS is too slow. El-
liot instead uses Ezdrive 1.5 (available
from Quality Computers, 15102 Charle-
bois Ave, Grosse Pointe, MI 48230 for
SUS100) to launch a selected program and
to manage his system. Although I enjoy
the graphics interface of the IIGS, I must
admit that a text-based launcher and
manager is much faster, and makes the
IIGS comparable in speed with an IBM AT
running in turbo mode.

After seeing this system and watching it
work, I can only repeat earlier comments I
have made - the IIGS is quite a machine.

Given the right software and hardware
combinations, the IIGS can be as sophisti-
cated as any other computer on the mar-
et. Elliot, whilst acknowledging the su-
perior capabilities of the Mac, finds the
IIGS meets all his needs, is in colour and
is far more affordable. But, like any com-
plex system, conflicts occur, probably
caused by non-standard software, and he
occasionally has to power off to get the
system back on the rails.

Unfortunately, not all software can be
used from a hard disk, as the following re-

Malcolm T. Elliot upgraded his IIGS and went all the way - two CMS hard drives, giving
total storage of 103Mb, a 3 1/2 inch and 5 1/4 inch drive for versatility. The system also
has a 2Mb extension RAM card, with 512K set aside for a RAM disk, an ImageWriter
printer, a Thunderscan scanner and a joy stick.
views will show. I'll keep complaining about this until common sense prevails and software writers make appropriate allowances. When you expand your disk storage to 103Mb, it is frustrating to not be able to use it, particularly for software such as a typing program, which is likely to be in regular use.

Learn to Type

LEARN TO TYPE programs have been around since personal computers became all the rage, and Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing is one of the more recent of these. I originally learnt to touch type with a program called MasterType, in which correct typing would shoot various nasties to prevent annihilation. This sort of program is probably not as ordered as more conventional tutor programs, but my survival instinct seemed to promote speedy typing.

Mavis Beacon is a true IIGS program, with a lot of excellent graphics, and falls roughly into the category of a tutor program. There is however a game section, so all tastes are catered for. As well, a comprehensive help menu is provided, including a demonstration of each section of the program.

The program is presented in modules, the classroom, workshop and the arcade game. Like most typing programs, you log on once, and running scores are kept of your progress. The initial log on process allows selection of your perceived typing ability, the time you want to spend at each session, and your goal in words per minute (wpm).

I logged as an intermediate typist, with a goal of 40wpm (well, why not?) and ran through each module. The classroom shows a keyboard with two hands over it, and a screen with running text. The fingers move over the keyboard as you type each letter, thereby illustrating the correct fingering. Beeps and buzzes highlight mistakes, and the session ends with comments on how well things went.

The workshop includes a timer, a metronome and various bar graphs along with a range of exercises of the 'type beneath the text' variety. The game requires keeping up with a red car, by typing under a flying text line. Unfortunately, the text is very hard to read, and I kept bombing out on that one. After spending several very entertaining hours with the program, I can honestly say that this is the most comprehensive typing program I have ever seen. It seems to be able to understand exactly what you need in the way of practice — almost as though there really is a Mavis Beacon looking at you through the screen.

The exercises are entertaining, varied and very thorough. The graphics are first class, and the whole feel of the program makes you want to use it. Its versatility is almost awesome, and I get the impression that no matter how long the program is used, it will come up with new drills and new comments on your status. The review program was supplied by Computer Spectrum of Wollongong, and should be available from most Apple dealers.

And when you have done your typing practice for the night, why not get some target practice. Here are two games that can sort the men from the boys.

Sea Strike

THIS PBI Software game also dates back to 1987, and like Cavern Cobra, supports the MD1Ideas Supersonic stereo card, although again the sound is amazing enough without it. The game requires a 512K System 7, and is supplied on a single 3½ inch disk with a rather brief but adequate manual. The RRP of the game is $60, and, as usual, the copy protection doesn't allow it to run from a hard disk.

The game kicks off with a rather drawly voice exclaiming 'Alert, alert — enemy approaching...' after which all kinds of war-like missiles commence raining down. The idea is to defend a convoy of three ships as they sail slowly (too slowly for me) across the screen. The defence is provided by a heavily armed helicopter, code named Sea Strike, that is controlled by the mouse. The game ends either when all ships are destroyed, or you have lost all your helicopters.

If one or more ships make it, the next level is reached. The remaining ships start out again, but now there is a higher concentration of descending firepower. The game has various difficulty levels, selectable from a pull down menu, and the default is referred to as 'standard'. The only easier level is novice, with three more levels that increase the action accordingly. The fun comes when the screen blacks out!

There are lots of hidden surprises, and the game is action all the way. Because of the increasing difficulty as each phase is reached, the game should remain a challenge for all but the most proficient players. Scores are stored on the disk, along with the player's name to give proof of one's expertise. Also, a game can be stored for future resumption if bed time is reached before the enemy wins.

If you are into arcade games, this one is for you. It is simple in concept (no brains required — just aggression), but has challenges that never seem to stop. Oh yes, the 'immolation' capability of the helicopter is your last resort in many cases. □

Cavern Cobra

THIS GAME from PBI Software has been available in the States since 1987, and is now only being distributed by Questor for Australian consumption, at a price of $79.00. The package comprises a single copy protected 3½ inch disk and a 3-page manual all packaged in a rather smart plastic case. The program features support for the MD1Ideas SuperSonic Stereo card, although the sound effects are quite amazing anyway.

However, you will need at least 768K of RAM to run the program. The game is deceptive in its apparent simplicity, and requires you, the pilot of a heavily armed helicopter called Cavern Cobra, to run the gauntlet of a barrage of ground-based and flying nasties as you proceed to search and destroy the World's Most Dangerous Terrorist. The helicopter is controlled by the mouse, and can move at very fast speeds, making continual crashing part of the learning process.

The idea is to try and find a helipad that will take you underground from level one down through various levels until you get to where the WMDT lives. On the way you can score points, more fuel, armour, bombs and so forth, providing the balloons, ICBMs, gunners and heat seeking missiles don't get you first. This program is IIGS specific, and uses the graphics and sound capabilities to the full. The keyboard is used to launch a range of bombs, and the combination of mouse and keyboard makes a powerful 'control panel' for the helicopter. A joystick is not even recognised by the program, which is unusual in a game of this sort.