

MUSCLE MACHINES: 33MHz '386 POWER

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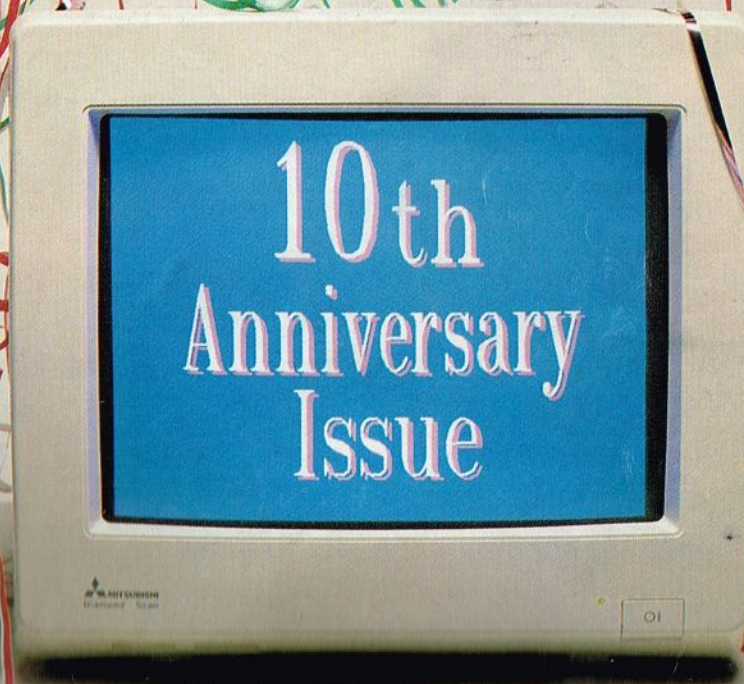
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THE ST'S THIRD-PARTY PARTY, PART 1:

"World of Atari" Tours Dallas

by D.F. Scott

The Atari ST/Mega architecture is being turbo-fitted, hot-wired, accelerated, backed up, and driven to reverse engineering at the World of Atari national tour in Dallas last August 19-20, sponsored by Atari Corp. and *American ST* magazine. It was a party of the third party, where computer enthusiasts and user-group members flocked to see developers and engineers who, in the Atari world, had attained near-celebrity status: David and Sandy Small, Charles Mason, John Eidsvoog, Tom Baker, Jim Allen, George Miller and Mike Vederman.

What makes a show like this exciting, from the point of view of an enthusiast, is not how big it is, how comfortably *small* it is, and how easy proximity to genuinely intelligent people.

The Dave and Sandy Show

Atari Corp. likes to judge its own real success by the crowds its computers can attract at major trade shows like COMDEX and CES. If you were to use Atari's standards to judge its own show in Dallas, the most innovative computer this time around must have been, ironically, one running Macintosh soft-

ware on a monitor, but its disk drive as well—thus the "GCR," which stands for the Group-Coded Recording method used by the Mac. The ST's main disk drive need not be physically modified for this emulation to work; the cartridge and Spectre software perform the necessary modifications once they're invoked, on the fly.

David Small looks upon his work as a brainchild under development, and describes it to the public like this: "This is the son of Spectre 128, which is the son of Magic Sac. So this is the third generation; this one

the algorithmic breeze with whomever passed by, Sandy was shaking hands, passing out leaflets and pitching the product to prospective purchasers. If you can't call her "Dad," Sandy might at least be described as Gadgets' campaign manager.

During the show, David, a group of colleagues, and I were testing every piece of Macintosh software that volunteers could hand us. One such piece was a shareware game where the mouse moves a floating hockey-puck-like character collect-

"If we were to use Atari's standards to judge its own show in Dallas, the truly innovative computer this time around must have been, ironically, the one running Macintosh software."

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it can be loaded by MultiDesk; and with the new version of Charles' "Little Green" selector, it can be loaded by an auto-folder replacement for the GEM item selector. Like the modules of an Erector set, all of CodeHead's expert-user operating environments have the intrinsic need to link into each other.

This year, the CodeHeads found themselves attacked by their closest competitor—literally. Two booths to the north of Johnson and Eidsvoog, the men of Double-Click Software—among them Michael Vederman,

Paul Lee and Gilbert Callaghan—were arming themselves with what proved, for the sake of this show, to be heavy metal ammunition: little metal hand clickers. Even while innocent prospective buyers were checking out the CodeHead booth, they were unknowingly clicking the double-clickers like an uncontrollable twitch or reflex action. Before long, the exhibit hall of the Holiday Inn sounded like it was invaded by locusts.

Of course, you know this means war. Early in the show, Eidsvoog decorated a wastebasket with a sign that read "Clicker Receptacle," and placed it at the back corner of the CodeHead booth. It was to be moved forward from that location several times during the show. The Double-Clickers, led by Vederman, would make sporadic "hits" on the CodeHead booth, leading Johnson to ask the crowd, "Who wants to post bail for me?" as he started to lunge for Vederman. Late in the show, Johnson tripped over one of his own clipboards, resulting in a terrific clapping noise that was to spell revenge for the CodeHeads. An army of clickers proved no match—at least in decibels—against two formica clipboards.

The percussion duel was all in good fun, but the market battle is a bit more serious. Double-Click showed its DC-Stuffer which, like MultiDesk, runs accessories as if they were applications, clearing them from memory when they're through. Also introduced was the DC Utilities package, which is extremely competitive with CodeHead's offering. On the DC disk, Squish allows executable files to be compressed in size permanently, while remaining executable; the background program loads and decompresses programs faster than a standard ST would take just to load the same program full-size.

Mike Vederman explains: "What it does is clear out the bss [block storage segment] and the rest of the memory, or a portion of it if you need it. Squish uses an undocumented feature of TOS 1.0, 1.2 to bypass the memory-clear routines which really slow down the loading of programs. So we bypass those completely. What we do is we implement our own routine to clear

out the bss. It assumes this is uninitialized data. It's going to use that for storage which says, 'I know I need this much memory, but I don't know until I run the program what I'm going to put in there.' A lot of programs assume that it's completely zero when it starts up. We zeroed that out, using a very fast method of clearing that out. Some programs don't like that; they assume the rest of memory to be cleared also."

DC-Deskey provides single-keystroke execution for applications like HotWire, but extends keystroke definition to the GEM drop-down menus for each application. Mike Vederman says this makes GEM "expert-friendly. [GEM by itself] is great for people who are just getting familiar with the program, and who really need everything lined up; but for people [like me] who use the same program day-in, day-out, and do the same thing.... Every time I go into a word processor, the first thing I do is go up to 'File/Open.' If I can run the program, and just hit Alternate-Shift-O instead of having to go up there, I can save myself a bit of time."

DC Utilities contains a RAMdisk as does CodeHead, but DC's is perhaps the first I've seen that is actually formattable, by tracks and sectors rather than necessarily by kilobytes. One good purpose for a formattable RAMdisk is for quickly making multiple copies of a single physical disk, by copying it into memory by track rather than cluster.

CodeHead Utilities counters the DC product with expert-level programs that erase a disk without having to reformat it, replace the screen and printer standard fonts, and make incredibly fast image copies of diskettes. Each utility described here was demonstrated flawlessly at the World of Atari in Dallas. We'll be covering the battle between the career musicians and the double-clickers here in *Computer Shopper*.

Products and People Introduced in this Article

Spectre GCR
David and Sandy Small
Gadgets by Small, Inc., 40 W. Littleton Blvd. #210-211, Littleton, CO 80120

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