

Micronews



The ACT Apricot *—innovative and easy to use*

Designed and built in the UK by Applied Computer Techniques Ltd, the Apricot personal computer was released in Australia recently by the local distributor, Barson Computers, who also distribute the popular Sirius Computer. It is intended to complement the higher priced Sirius, but is potentially a more powerful system.

For starters the Apricot uses the full 16-bit 8086 microprocessor, with an Intel 8089 controller chip handling input and output. Standard memory is 256K bytes, expandable to 896K, and two Sony "microdrives" are built in, providing disk storage of 315K each in single density, unformatted. Double density disk drive controllers expand this storage to 640K bytes per disk.

The Apricot is an attractive computer, with a low profile logic unit, a detachable, 96-key keyboard and 22.5cm (diagonal) green phosphor display screen. The keyboard and logic

unit fold up into one compact case for transport.

The keyboard is particularly worthy of note. It contains its own controller and is capable of both sending and receiving information from the computer. Apart from the usual array of programmable function keys it also contains a two line by 40 character LCD "microscreen" which displays the time, day and date and can be used as a four function calculator, independently of the remainder of the system.

Six membrane keys beneath the LCD display can be labelled on the LCD screen, and information displayed on the microscreen can be sent to the main video display at the touch of a button, a convenient feature when including results of calculations into other documents. According to the manufacturers the micro LCD screen also allows the keyboard to be used alone in a semi-portable mode.

Other hardware features include a single key screen print function, built-in disk cache memory to speed disk I/O, a "smart" printer driver with its own 2K buffer memory, and full diagnostics in ROM to verify correct operation. The screen display is 25 lines of 80 characters, with a graphics resolution of 800 x 400 pixels (monochrome only).

Without software, however, the most sophisticated computer is useless, and the range and variety of software available for the Apricot is impressive. Firstly, the Apricot is 100% compatible with the ACT Sirius, which immediately provides some 400 applications programs. Special emulator software also enables the Apricot to run 95% of all IBM Personal Computer programs.

No less than six operating systems are available; MS-DOS 2.0, Concurrent CP/M-86 and CP/M-86, UCSD Pascal, Xenix and the UK BOS system. The first three operating systems are included in the price of the Apricot.

Also included in the price are a full range of utilities for each operating system, Digital Research GSX graphics extension to CP/M, communications software and a printer spooler. A "System Manager" comes between the user and the chosen operating system, enabling applications programs to be selected from an on-screen menu using a mouse pointing device.

The Supercalc spreadsheet, Microsoft Basic and Digital Research Personal Basic are also provided with the basic unit. A wide range of applications programs from US, UK and Australian companies will run on the Apricot, including WordStar, Superwriter, DBase II, Multiplan, and packages for accountants, farmers, auctioneers and others.

Including the three operating systems the recommended retail price of the dual disk Apricot is \$4444 (with sales tax).