

New product from Dick Smith

Wizzard Video Game + Personal Computer



Many people cannot make up their minds whether to buy a personal computer or a video game console. The Wizzard from Dick Smith is a third possibility. It is primarily a video game console but has the capability to be upgraded to a personal computer with the addition of a Basic interpreter cartridge.

If you or other members of your family are video games fanatics you will naturally be interested in this latest release from Dick Smith Electronics. It is called the Wizzard and the improbable spelling is not a printing error. The Wizzard can be had with a range of games cartridges (each at extra cost) which have a high degree of animation and make good use of graphics and colour capability.

As well, each game has music and sound effects.

The Wizzard console is largely finished in matte black plastic with fake woodgrain end-panels. Dimensions are 355mm x 60mm x 230mm (W x H x D). There are two joystick controllers and these are attached to the console via a coiled cord which can extend about 60cm. A button on each side of the joystick controller provides a "fire" controller while a 24-way pressure sensitive keyboard (like the Sinclair ZX81) is also a feature. In the normal games mode, a coloured plastic cover is slid over these keyboards and only two of the "buttons" are used. In the computer mode each joystick controller is clipped into the console to form a 48-way keyboard in a more or less conventional "QWERTY" format.

In the games mode, the joystick controllers are quite effective although their capability of moving an object in any of

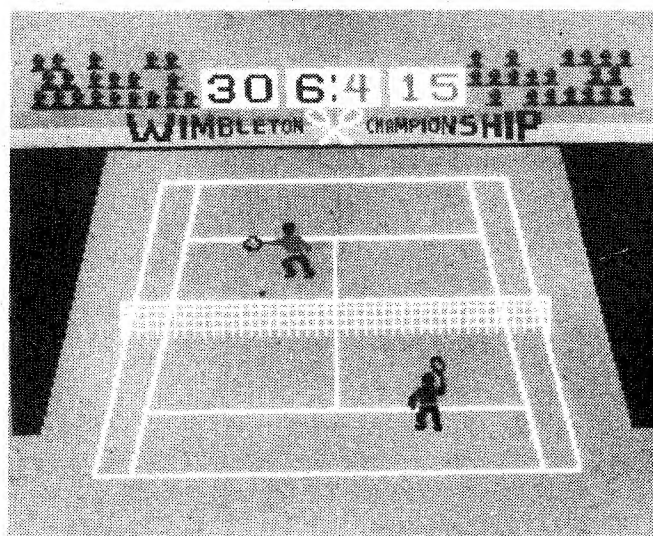
16 directions does not appear to have been fully utilised in any of the games we tried. The joystick controller actually only has eight contacts in its membrane but the software interpolates between these (when two contacts are closed) to give 16-direction capability. The "fire" buttons are also effective but strangely, they are not mentioned or described in the instructions. This means that unless you happen to discover their operation by accident, you are likely to use the adjacent contact keyboard buttons instead, because of the labelling of the keyboard

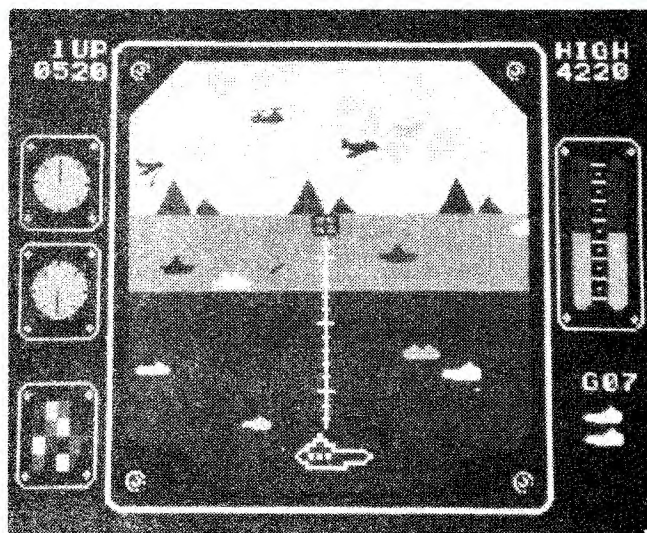
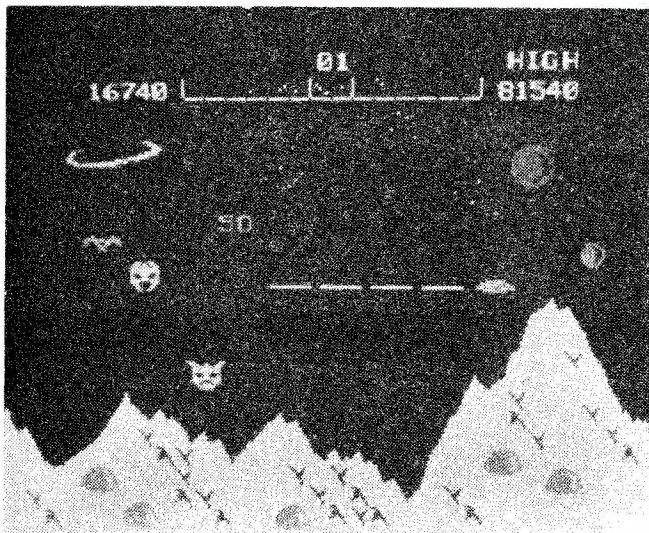
overlays. And using the keyboard for games is a real chore. As with other video games in this price range, the sound effects are produced from the TV set loudspeaker rather than in the console.

All the circuitry inside the console is accommodated on a double-sided PC board measuring approximately 300 x 125mm. The microprocessor used as a version of the Mostek 6502A in conjunction with what would appear to be a CRT controller and PIA of unknown make. The mains power supply is external to the unit and plugs in via a 5-in DIN socket.

The games cartridges use 2716 and 2732 EPROMs and plug into an edge connector slot on the side of the Wizzard console. The TV antenna connection is via a cable fitted with a 75Ω plug and the connection can be made per-

This is a frame from one of the Tennis games. Some of the detail on the review sample was different including the name "Wimbledon", to Wimbledon. Notice that the ball casts a shadow.





These photos are frames from the Planet Defender and Air/Sea Attack game cartridges. Note the good graphics resolution.

manently via the supplied antenna switch box. The inbuilt RF modulator is set to Australian channel one.

Each games cartridge is supplied with an instruction sheet which lists the game features and the multiple versions which can be for one or two players. We tried a selection of game cartridges and can report that they are quite impressive in comparison with competing video game systems. The colour and graphics capability are used to good effect and in some cases quite cleverly.

Probably the best of the games is the Tennis. This has 16 versions on the one cartridge and includes versions where one player is handicapped so that youthful and ancient players are more evenly matched. Rather than showing a two-dimensional court, an orthogonal projection is used to simulate a three-dimensional game where the ball can go over the players' heads and it casts a shadow!

As might be expected, the players' positions are controlled by the joystick and their choice of forehand or backhand play is determined by their position vis-a-vis the ball. Velocity of play is also affected to some extent by the use of the joystick.

This game really does go a long way towards simulating an actual game, even to the amount of tension and perspiration it can produce!

Sound effects for the various games are fairly predictable and in line with those on comparable video games. Each game has its own signature tune which is played at the beginning and end of each set. This begins to pall quickly, especially if one is losing repeatedly in one-sided games with the machine.

Picture quality on most of the TV sets we tried with the Wizzard was very

good. The exception to this was one set which was affected by bad herringbone interference. However, the other sets were so good that we are inclined to suspect that the latter set was faulty.

Having discussed the games we can pass on to what is perhaps the main feature of the Wizzard and that is the computer option. With the addition of a Basic cartridge the unit will function as a personal computer. On the basis of its features, the Wizzard Basic would appear to be roughly comparable to that in the Tandy TRS-80 (level II) in that it has a full range of mathematical functions (with floating point arithmetic) plus string functions.

The sound facility of the Wizzard is programmable by SOUND commands which control the volume and pitch of four channels (giving chord capability) over a range of 2½ octaves (30 notes). Graphics characters can be created using the CHAR command to fill in an 8 x 8 matrix. These special characters can then be placed anywhere in 32 x 24 grid on the screen using the PLOT command.

The Basic interpreter is resident in 8K

EPROM in the cartridge. Total RAM in the Wizzard is 17K of which about 11K is available for user programs. A cassette interface and deck will shortly be available to clip on to the side of the Wizzard console. And the inclusion of LPRINT and LLIST statements in the Basic also suggests that a printer interface may also be in the pipeline.

Naturally, colour can also be added with a COLOR command.

An expansion interface will also be available eventually, to plug into the cartridge connector. This will ultimately give the machine a total memory capability of 48K in RAM.

While it all sounds very promising as a well-optioned personal computer, it is too early to judge the final product. At the time of writing we had only a few hours to try a preliminary Basic cartridge which did not have all the features mentioned above. Nor was the supporting Basic manual, presently being prepared, available.

The Wizzard looks as though it could eventually be a worthy competitor to

Continued on p141

Wizzard video game . . . ctd from p131

the Commodore VIC-20 or the Tandy Color Computer.

Where it is likely to suffer by comparison with these two machines is in the pressure sensitive keyboard which is not as easy to use as a regular typewriter keyboard. And whether there will be a large range of software to suit the Wizzard Basic remains to be seen.

In the meantime, the Wizzard provides a good selection of games cartridges which is likely to expand. The Wizzard console together with one game cartridge sells for \$295 and additional game cartridges are available for \$39.50 each. The Basic cartridge will sell for \$69.50 which will include the companion Basic manual. (L.D.S.)

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See page 98 for address details



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