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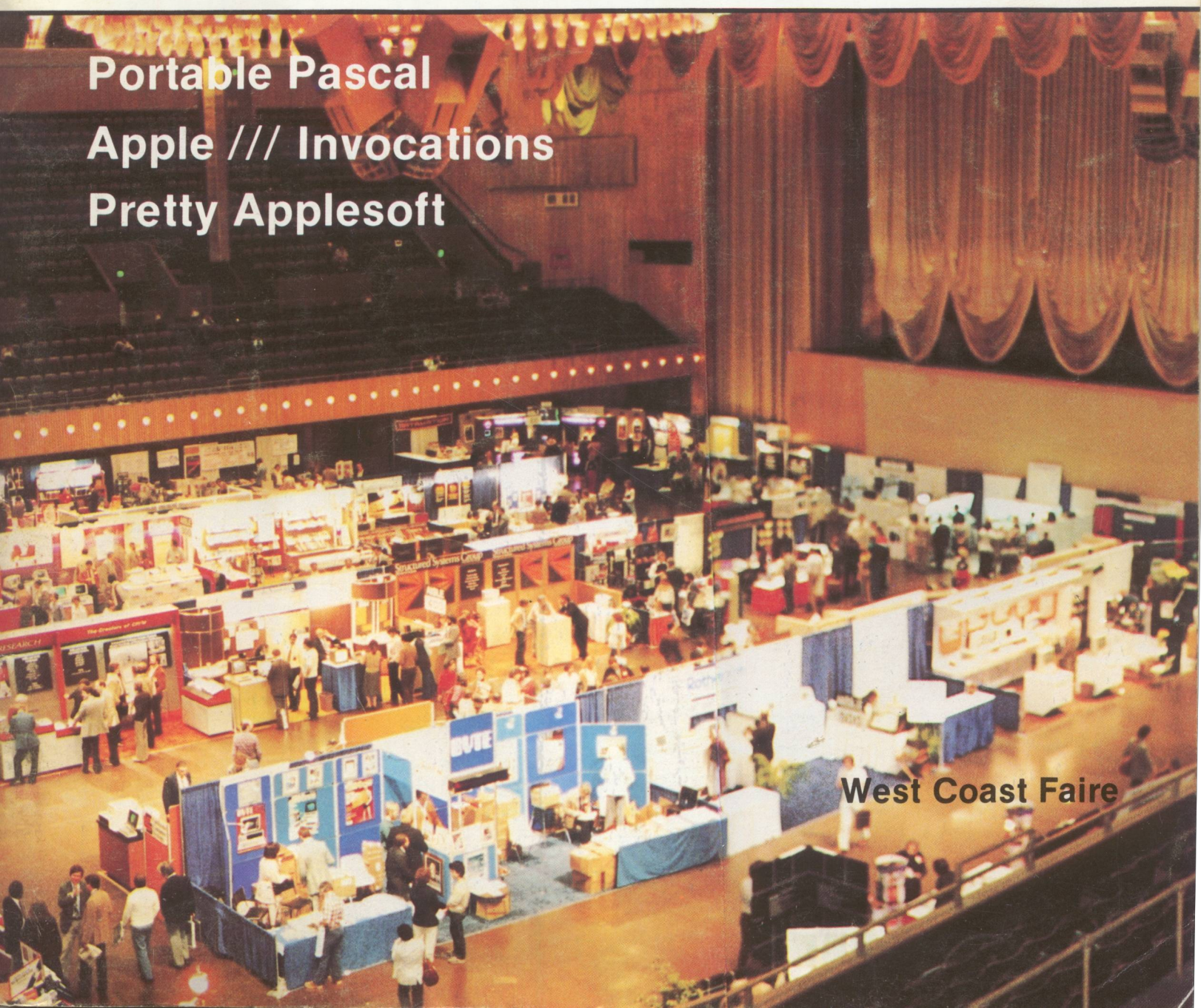

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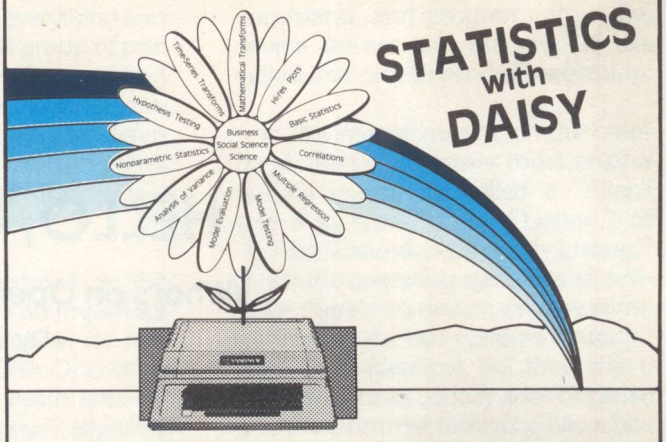

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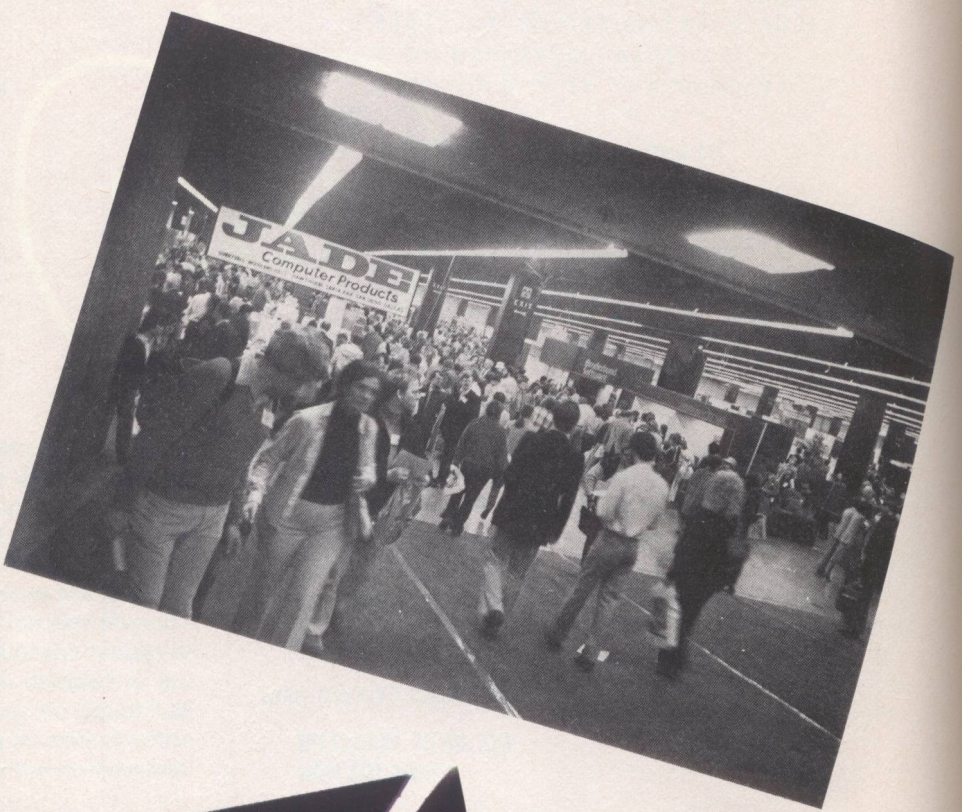
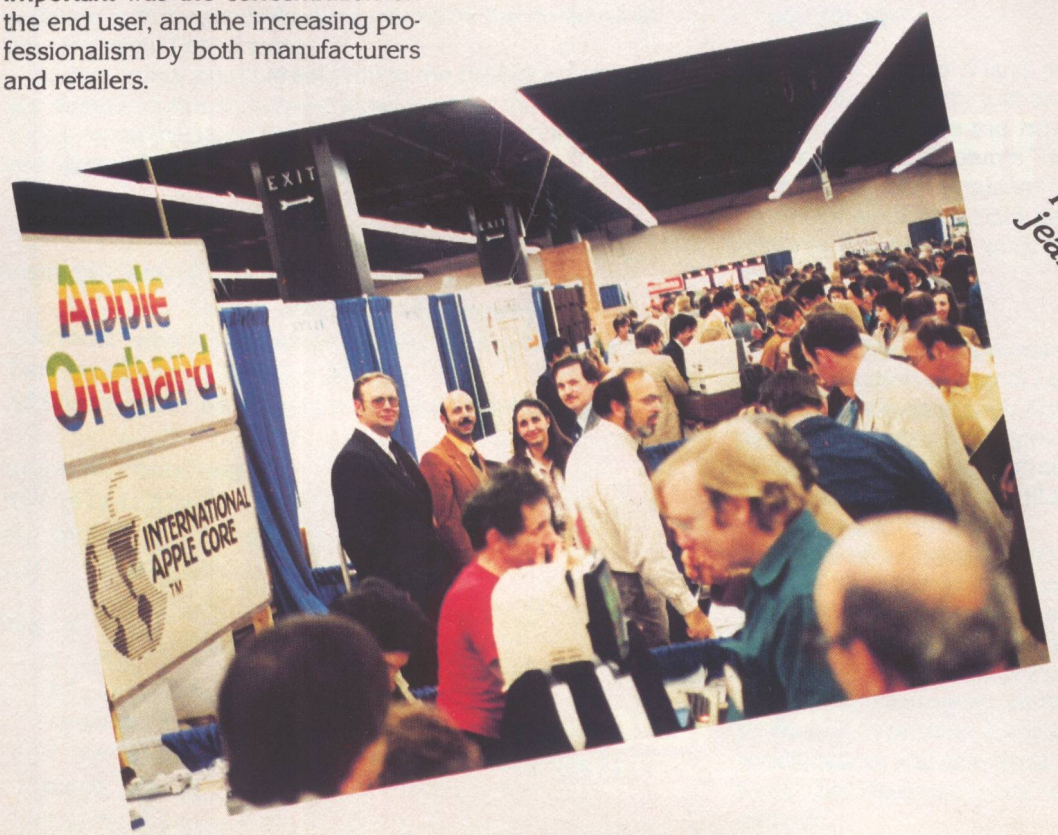
SEVENTH ANNUAL COMPUTER FAIRE

by Amanda Hixson



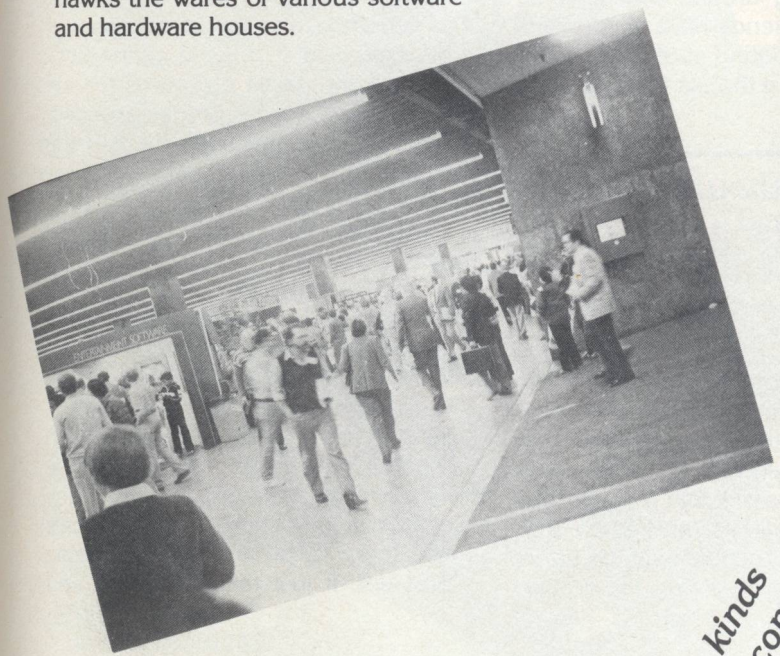
For the past several years we have been presented with the West Coast Computer Faire and Convention. This event is the brain child of Jim Warren, and has been a showcase for the computer enthusiast in the past. In fact, the Apple II computer was first introduced at a previous West Coast Faire. Little did anyone know, then...

Some of the prior shows have resembled crowded bazaars rather than sophisticated demonstrations of current computer products. This year's Show bore much less resemblance to a town square market place than past shows. Certainly, there were the usual masses of computer fanatics, but this year's Faire contained some striking new elements. The most important was the concentration on the end user, and the increasing professionalism by both manufacturers and retailers.



There were more three-piece suits; fewer blue jeans.

In the past, it had often been difficult to tell the buyers from the sellers. Much of this was due to the industry's lack of polish, and the quickness with which which the industry was developing. This year's Faire evidenced a maturation of both the consumers and the vendors present. No longer will we deal only with the blue-jeaned programmer; now we must contend with the slick Madison Avenue professional in the three-piece suit as he hawks the wares of various software and hardware houses.



New Products and Prices

This fierce competition in the computer industry will benefit the consumer for many reasons, the most important one being the lowering of prices for many types of computer products. Apple users became very aware of this as they made their way through the throngs and were confronted with items like Xebec's 5-megabyte hard disk system for less than $1500. (*Xebec showed poor taste in their slogan, though; imagine "Join the Hardcore...Forget the Applecore...." Forget, heck!! —PCW*). Also mentioned was a twenty-five meg 5¼" hard disk system being developed by one of the industry front-runners, with possible release by the end of the year. There was also a remote operating system for the Apple which could handle up to 127 remote Apples, and which was not proprietary to Corvus or any other single manufacturer's drives. The cost of the initial system (two or three user access) is around $500, and additional boards run around $180 per station. The whole system operates with a number of hard or floppy disk systems.

Not only does industry competition create a competitive basic price structure for the consumer, but it also creates the need for new product development and upgrading of already existing packages. This benefits those of us who already own systems because it gives us a wide variety of products from which to choose, whether they are completely new and different or just enhancements of currently available software. Some of the products generated for the Apple are the result of this process, and this year's Faire included some of these items. There were several printer attachments which created storage buffers for different Apple compatible printers, like the Epson line. Several of these buffers have the capacity to store up to 32K of information, and

Prices on many kinds of peripherals are coming down.

make it possible for the user to use the computer while the printer is printing reports or other information. One unit, the "Doubletimer," included an interrupt method for the Apple. These are very nice for people who often find they are losing valuable time because they have to wait for the printer to finish before they can resume data input. One version of this add-on even has an isolator with two external outlets for attaching still more peripherals to your Apple.

Much of the software and hardware wasn't really new, but some of it was made available to other machines, like Versa-form for the Apple ///. Many programs and hardware which previously were not able to run on the Apple /// were available at this year's Faire. Unfortunately, still isn't as much as the Apple /// user could hope for.

One interesting sidelight was the combination of a ///, an ink-jet color printer, and noted artist Saul Bernstein. Mr. Bernstein is working on an internal project for Apple Computer, and was doing portraits with a graphics tablet and light pen, much to the enjoyment of the crowd. (*More on Mr. Bernstein is scheduled for our July-August issue.*)

Games

An area of intrerest to many Apple users is in game software, which was present in great profusion at this year's convention. Games have been an area of frustration for many adults. Many claim that they attended this year's Faire to see the latest developments in *useful* programs, and are annoyed by the game vendors who jam every aisle with groups of children gathering around machines to watch their friends blast alien invaders, perform daring escapes and rescues, and die a thousand deaths.

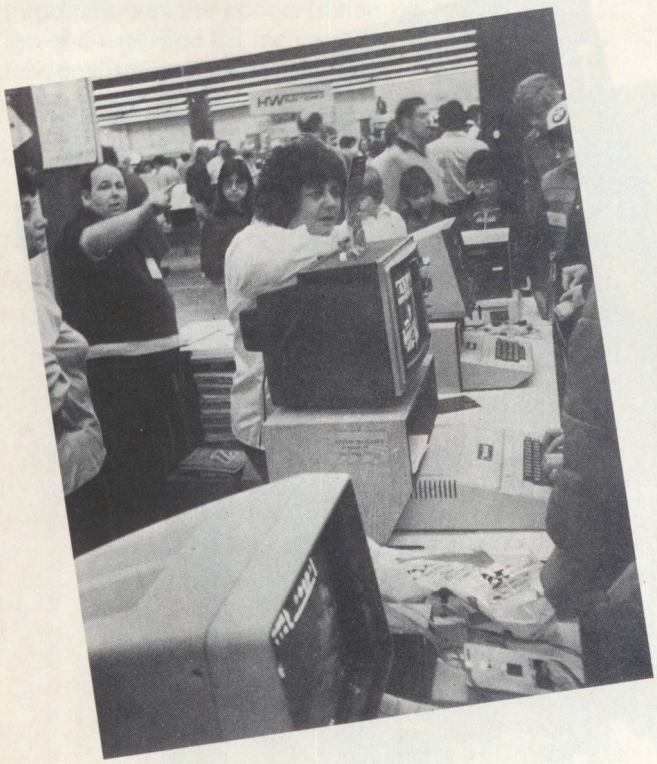
Games abounded; and the kids were the experts.

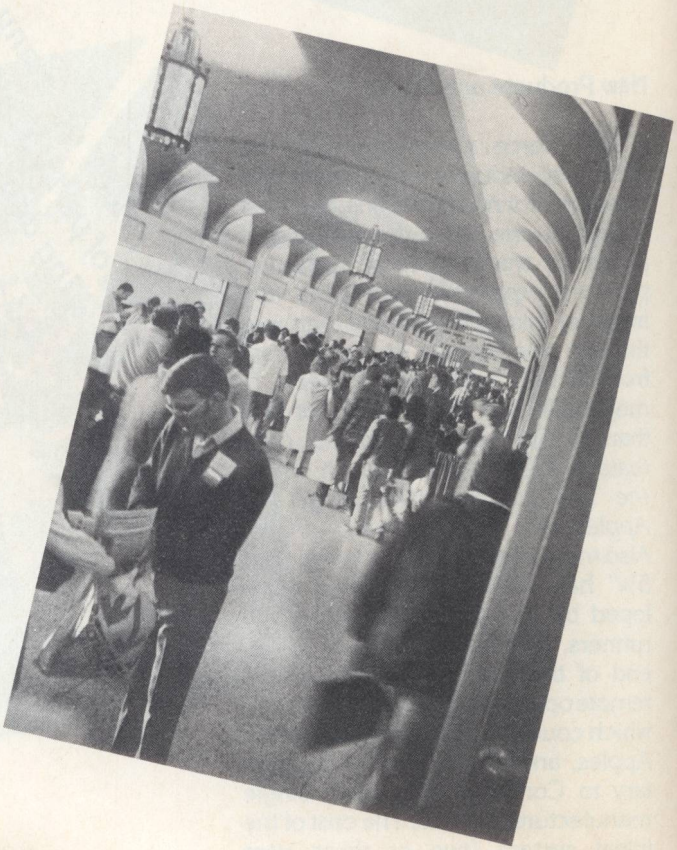
It was almost impossible to get close to machines where games were being played; but it seemed to me that many of the adults' *real* annoyance came from the fact that *they* wanted to play the games, and knew that most of the kids could beat the *pants* off of them, so they were too embarrassed to play.

The large number of games has created a real problem for manufacturers because they must be highly innovative in order to stay ahead of their market. The short lives of many game programs make it very difficult for these companies to maintain interest in some of their products. Because of this, the consumer has to be very careful in selecting games. Slick packages often hide poor products in this area. This marketing technique is probably one of the hardest to penetrate, and special care should be exercised in buying game software. Many game programs for the Apple have similar names and very fancy jackets and trying to find the best of the lot is often difficult.

Other Games

The Seventh Faire could be called the Year of the Copycat. Many companies were displaying products that were very similar to products already on the market. The Franklin computer purported to be compatible with most of the products available for the Apple, but did not come with any standard color capability. Color does not seem to be an insurmountable problem; it just takes the time and





effort to develop it. But the Franklin comes with standard 80-column upper and lower case letters. There was also a machine, very similar to the Apple, which was designed for the European market and had a European keyboard and fonts.

Several companies went after other established machines. The Osborne I, last year's portable newcomer, was upstaged this year by the Otrona and the Keycomp II, new entries trying to grab a segment of the rapidly growing "sewing machine look alike" market.

In addition to machine copies, there were also many add-on boards and peripherals which give one machine the characteristics of another. For the Apple, this meant the introduction of boards similar to those which run the IBM Personal Computer. Several boards of this type are available, and they give the Apple II access to programs written for the IBM. That's an indication of why the Apple is still a very popular machine. It's possible to create so many peripherals which give the dedicated Apple user the ability to derive benefit from items developed for other machines. 8088, 6809, 68000 (!) and other similar boards are evidence that the development of other system hardware will continue for Apple users.

Professionalism is coming to the micro industry . . . at last.

And From Here...

Many of the larger companies are engaged in closed door meetings to begin development of products designed to capture a large market share of the new market created by these machines. One area where a large concentration of effort is taking place is in the choice of operating systems for these new products. We will probably begin to experience a struggle between different oprating system development companies and will probably begin to see variations on UNIX, OASIS, and other in-house operating systems.

Many people at the Faire expected to see a new 16-bit machine announced by Apple. Even though this did not take place, there was a good deal of speculation. The machine is ready. It's not ready. It's ready, and they're developing an operating system. The operating system is finished. It's a hybrid of Apple ///'s SOS. No, it isn't. Besides, that's a new operating system for the II also. Naahh. We won't know for sure until the information is released, but it's hard to believe that Apple Computer, Inc. will not make every attempt to retain their position in the market place, and it's becoming obvious that the 16-bit machine is the next step in micro evolution.

The final word on the 7th Annual Computer Faire is that the micro computer industry is finally started to grow into the professional stage. Although the bulk of the merchandise was not new, it was presented in a much more accomplished way than ever before. Care was exercised in approaching the different consumer groups attending this year's show, and the percentage of new users was very high.

It is becoming more apparent that the constant barrage of commercials aimed at the less sophisticated user is finally taking hold. We now know that the graphics displayed on television look very inviting to someone who has never experienced those generated by a mini or mainframe, and this year's show was well-stocked with persons there who had shelled out $15 per head to "just find about the things they had seen on TV." Care will be taken by hardware and software houses to bring slowly the non-computer buff into active participation in the growing environment. More money is, and will continue to be, spent on cultivating the new user.

As for those in the industry, we must now wait to see what the next twelve months will bring. We should begin to see the avalanche of 16-bit machines and hardware in the next year. We may have to wait for Faire # 9 until we have any amount of software for these machines, but in the meantime we will be able to enjoy what is already here and the multitude of variations which will undoubtedly develop over the next year for the current crop of machines.

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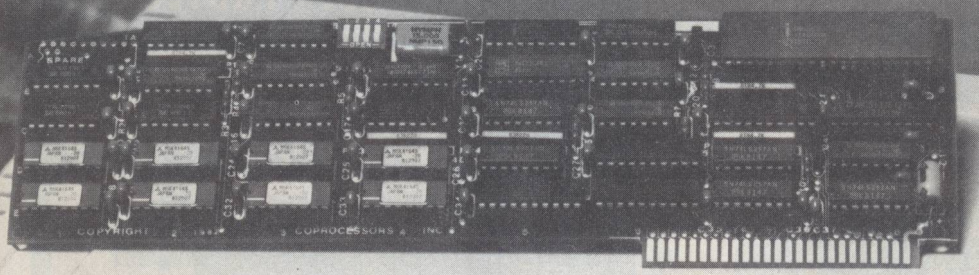

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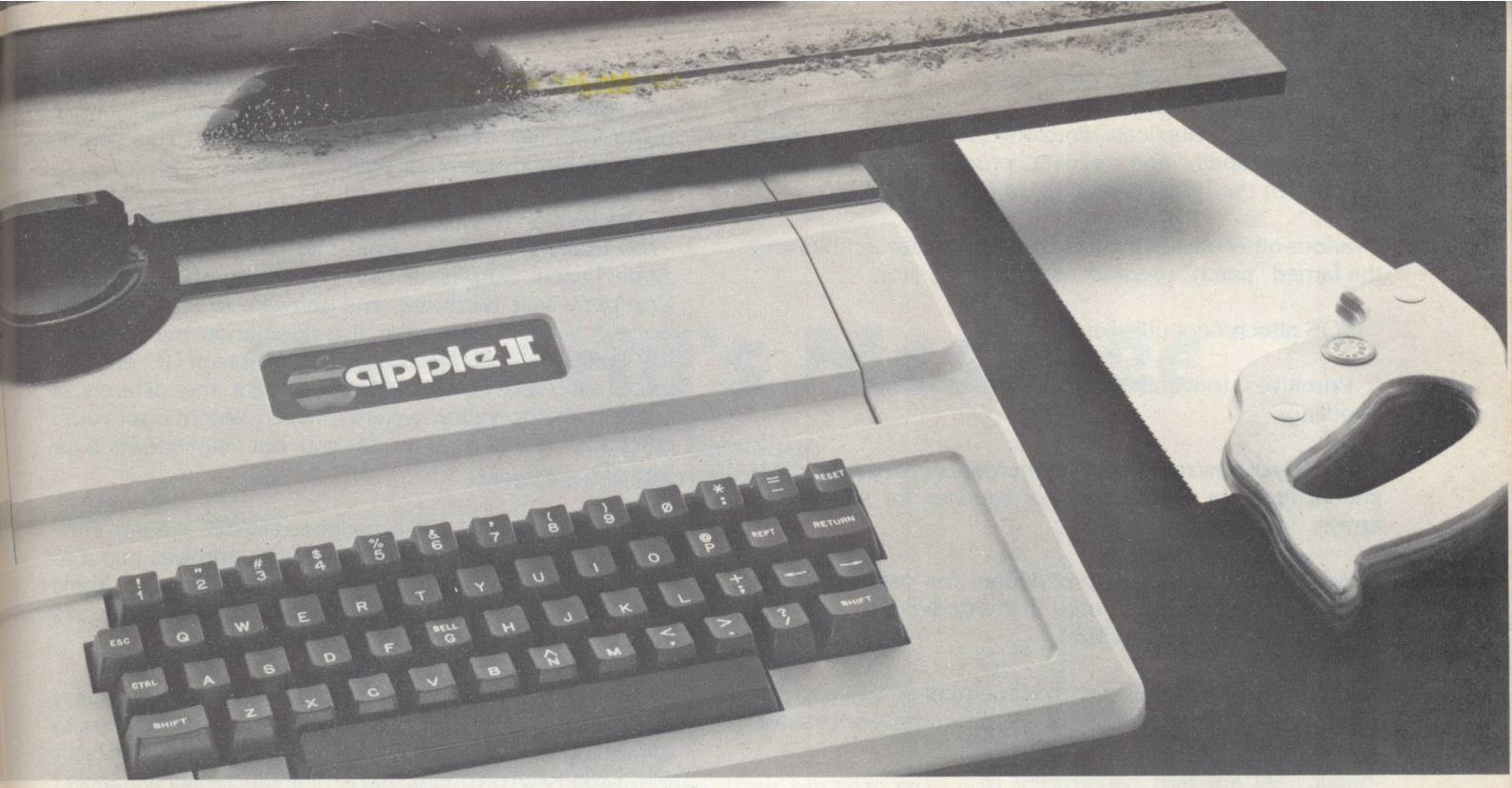

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- Fits inside the APPLE II case
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- Mounts with one screw—no drilling required
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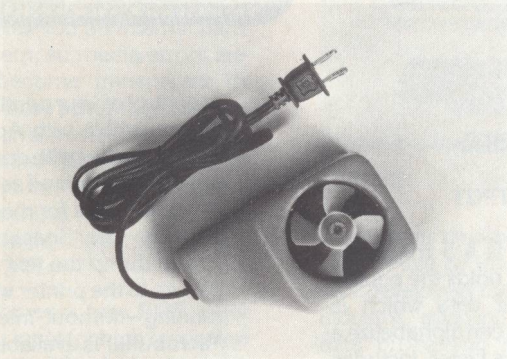

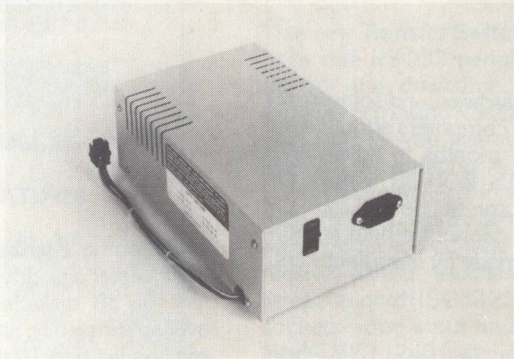

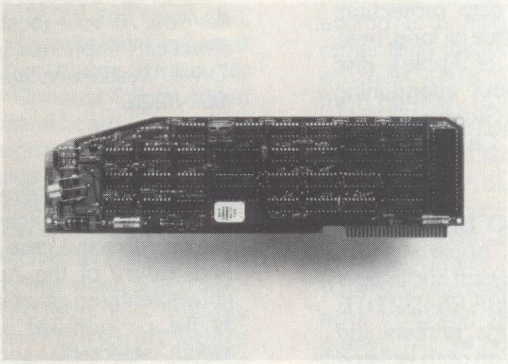

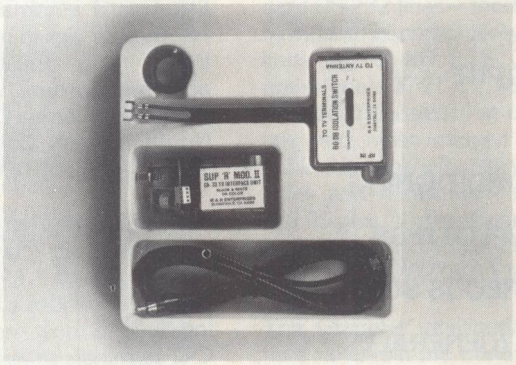

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- Character set can be user definable
- Shift Lock feature
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- Compatible with ALL APPLE II peripherals
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- 2K bytes of ROM
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- The only 80 column board that is synchronous with the APPLE II
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SYMBOL	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL	UNIT
F_c	Vision Carrier	591.5	MHz ± 0.5
I_{cc}	Supply Current	2.0	Ma
VO (Hi)	RF Output, $V_{mod} = 0$	1.5	Mv
VO (Low)	RF Output, $V_{mod} = 1.5$	-20.0	dB
R_{in}(mod)	Modulation input resistance	700.0	Ohm
V_{osc}(Min)	Oscillator stop voltage	2.0	Volt
V_c	Voltage	+5 to +12	Volts DC

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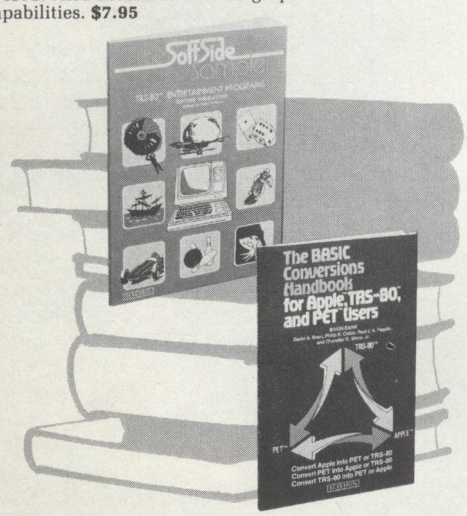

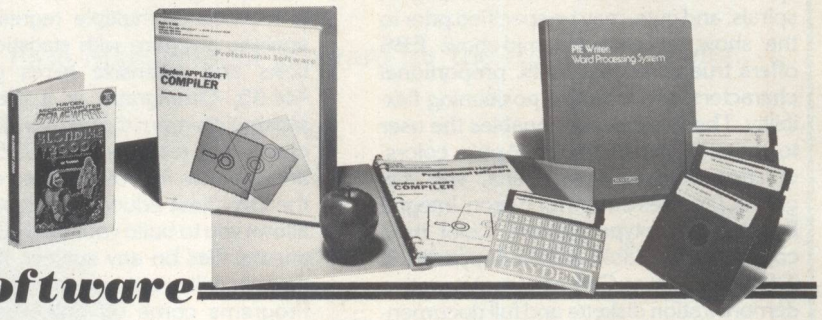

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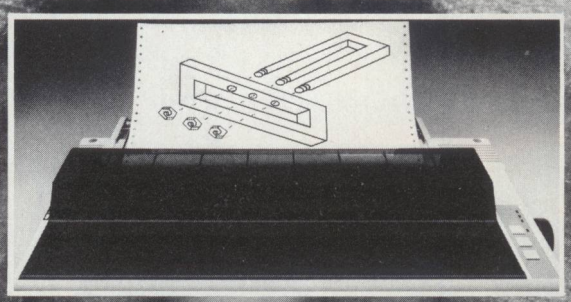

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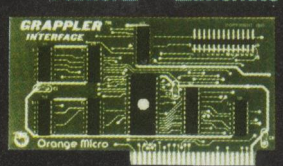

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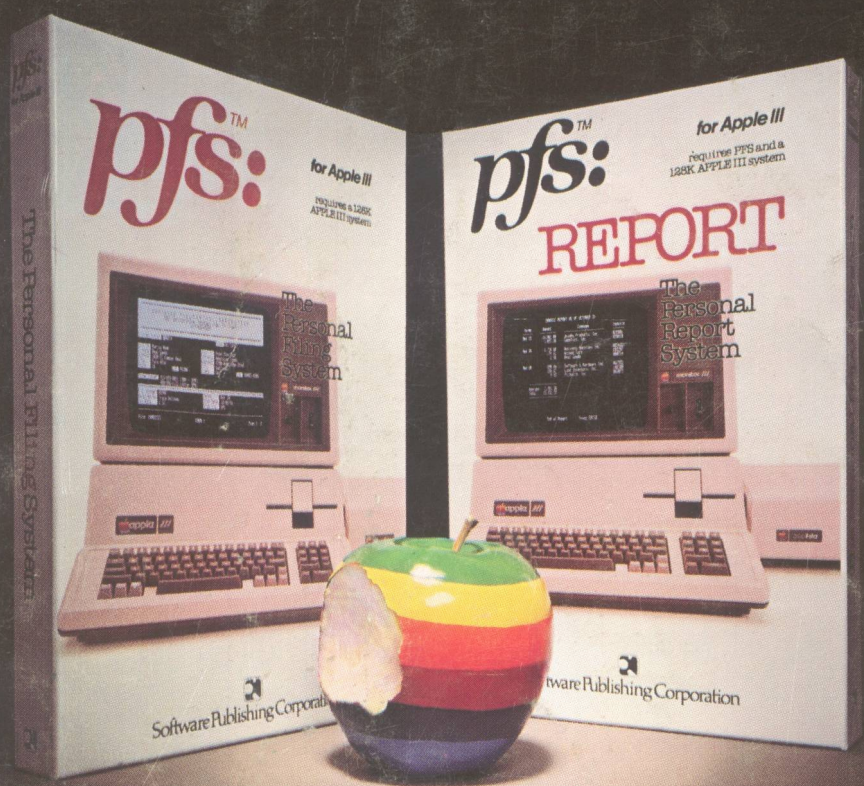
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