

ARCADIANS #4 Sept 1, 1978

I recently placed an ad in Kilobaud, and this is the first letter to those responding to that ad. We have a loosely-knit group of 35 or so (as of now) starting from an ad in ON_LINE just after the San Jose Computer Faire. We consist of owners-in-fact, owners-on-order, and possible owners-to-be. Personally, I received my unit from JS&A on Feb 28.

As it stands, the Bally "Arcade" or "Home Library Computer" is a powerful TV game with 4 hand controllers to operate the various game players and moves. Buried inside is a Z80 chip, that, along with other components, allows the future expansion of capabilities. There are two connectors inside, hidden behind punch-out panels. A 3-pin connector is a power output, while the 50-pin connector gives access to the Z80 chip (plus 10 more pins). A combination of connectors is needed to operate the various add-ons, as the cassette interface, needed to run a recorder for the storage and retrieval of data with the Tiny BASIC cartridge, needs the power connector plus one of the hand controller connectors for its use. The light pen is similarly attached. The Add-On keyboard will plug into the 50pin connector and have its own cassette interface.

Our main problem is in not having hardware. There was a problem with the first units because of overheating (after anywhere from 15 min to 3 hrs operation) and the resultant rebuilding has delayed everything else. I suppose they considered a second source. Currently the most optimistic schedule for the TBASIC is September, while JS&A is saying October (maybe hedging). The general Bally scheme is to build up a big inventory and ship to everyone at once.

As a group we won't be able to interact on a meaningful level until the TBASIC becomes generally available, when I expect the correspondence and discussion to increase. I will probably go to some kind of subscription system when the load gets too big. Meanwhile, thanks for the support.

In case you hadn't noticed, the TBASIC Manual is available from NCE, Box 8610, Ann Arbor, MI 48107, free. They sent me a few & I can supply also. (This is an authorized copy.) They will carry the full line.

The latest Wards catalog lists the Bally and the same cartridges as reported before. The unit's price went up to 269. with 2 controllers.

I just purchased the #2002 Sea Wolf/Bombadier from Schwenk Enterprises, 6988 Lincoln Creek Circle, Carmichael, CA 95608, with instant delivery.

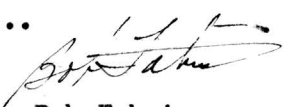
On a more positive note, local Arcadians and I took part in a market research project in late August, sponsored by Bally. We, and others (owners & non-owners) met at 7 pm and sat around a table, a dozen or so including the Bally rep, and discussed what we wanted to do with such a machine, its desirable features and accessories, etc., all on a personal basis. Of course we had ample chance to complain about the service (to no immediate good, but who knows after the tapes get back to Chicago). At the end of an hour and a half, we were treated to a review of an operating Add-On module. In prototype form, they haven't decided everything to go into it yet, or the final packaging. They stick to the February delivery date for this. The programmer of the Tiny BASIC, Jay Fenton, was there and demonstrated some of the capabilities of the Module. Page two has some words on the things we saw and heard.

pre Kilobaud ad - Arcadians who live near large cities may be contacted by a local market research firm to join one of these discussion groups, as they have your addresses from me. Please attend if you can, you will enjoy it, learn from it, perhaps influence the final product(s), and even profit from it as there is a 25. stipend plus mileage for the attendees.

I now have the code describing the identity of each pin in the 50-pin connector and the associated data regarding routines available and the 5x7 character format. Access to the z-80 can now be made.

Here's looking to some really positive news next time...

408-742-6048 days
408-272-2364 home


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Report on the Market Research Experience...Dick Strauss

The initial discussions were generally centered around non-product directed questions aimed at assessing the level of understanding (of personal computers) by the attendees. The group was fortunate in that the cross-section represented individuals that knew nothing about computers, to those who had experience on others systems, or had even built a system from scratch.

The big moment of the evening was the unveiling of the prototype expanded Bally system. The unit was a rack mounted approach with the keyboard on an extended shelf, the TV above, and a disc unit below. The attendees were also asked to evaluate alternatives to the basic Bally Arcade that fits on the unit and approached in appearance an integrated 'desk top' system. Some comment was made about swapping the guts from the Arcade into a new package. All participants stressed the location of the keyboard and the type of keyboard used. It looks like they are headed towards the standard keyboard, a la IBM type. Our group favored a professional black/grey unit with 'no frills' like phony walnut grain/gold trim, etc.

Back to the prototype, which Jay did work. The unit had a video operation monitor mounted above the 15" Sony color set. Some discussion was held about the availability of the instruction monitor and TV outputs - tends to indicate that the monitor might not be an option. Jay demonstrated that the instruction could also be displayed on the TV (as would be expected) at the same time as the operating display. The floppy disc system was not operating - something happened on the trip out.

When asked about memory, I recall something in the area of 44K in the expansion module, which indicated some memory mapping on top of that already in the Arcade. Bally has not ruled out the capability for additional memory via subsequent add-on.

When asked about the music, Jay demonstrated three voices (not the 6 in the JS&A ad).

When asked about time base(s) - they were still working on their scheme.

When asked about the light pen - the interface could be available thru the RS 232 interface. This is the same interface the IBM typewriter and other peripherals use.

A few final words about the program language planned for the expansion unit. Jay calls it ZGRAS. It looked to be as simple as BASIC only more powerful. It seems to include instructions to the user on how the computer 'likes' to see statements - a great help to the novice programmer.

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A note on the last, Jay showed (on the screen) the menu of commands. If you wanted to dig deeper into a command, you punch in "HELP GOTO", and the machine goes into a tutorial as to how to use GOTO with an example, if necessary.

Thinking as I transcribe Dick's note...maybe I'll keep the TBASIC and tape drive interface after the Add-On comes out, to use all the goodie programs I'll invent or get from the magazines in the meantime. Depends on how easy it will be to transcribe.

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