

CORNER CARTRIDGE

In the ever-present search for the Ultimate plug-in aid we put the power cartridge under the magnifying glass

By S. Wickham

Since the days of caves and fire axes, man has struggled to make life that much easier for himself. He invented fire so that he could cook food making it easier to eat. Later he invented the wheel so that getting around was much better. Eventually he made himself a computer that would take care of a thousand tasks, thus leaving him with plenty of free time to pursue more pleasurable activities.

Not content with having this wonderful grey box sit on his desk, bed, lap or wherever he might have it, he decides that he needs something to make using the box easier. Hence the dawning of a new age. The name of this new era... Cartridge Age.

Over the last 4 years or so we have seen many different kinds of these Toolkit aids appear. Some have come and gone overnight. Some have been with us for some time.

I personally am a great believer in these little pieces of programming wizardry. Though I must confess, it was some time before I actually got round to using them. Once the step was made, I wondered how I ever managed without them.

The latest to come out of the 'Cartridge factory' is POWER CARTRIDGE from MCS, distributed in the UK by MICRO DEVICES LTD. In case you are wondering who or what MCS stands for, it is ROUPE COMPUTER SUPPLIES BV OF Dordrecht, The Netherlands. The mere fact that they are a Dutch based company should inspire confidence. As most of us already know, our European friends tend to be that much better in producing

quality utility software, just like they produce better spummen and women. So what has this latest cartridge got to offer?

There are 5 main areas of programming catered for. First and foremost there is the POWER TOOLKIT. This is a powerful Basic Toolkit that greatly simplifies programming and debugging. DIR, TOOL, and TAP, TOOL are two modules that speed up the loading and saving of programs. The commands that are available with these two modules can be incorporated in your own programs. POWERMAC is an extensive machine code monitor with around 20 commands at your fingertips. It also works in Basic-PCs, Kernel and UC areas, as well as loading ALL of the computers memory available to you. Finally there is PREFERENC. A very good printer interface. There are many printers catered for and this makes conversing with different printers a pleasure instead of the usual chore.

The cartridge has one other function, which I do not see as a router function, the POWER RESET. This function will be explained in more detail later.

Power Toolkit

The toolkit has the usual batch of extra commands you would expect, such as AUTO, DEER, DONE, DUMP, FIND and REMINDER. There are two in particular that I found very useful. The first being PAUSE. Delays in a program do not now need to be cumbersome to program. You simply state PAUSE x ('where x' equals the number of seconds you want to pause for). The second being SAVE. By using this statement you can disable or enable the RUN/STOP and RESPOND keys. There are 27 toolkit commands providing a fairly comprehensive aid in the development of your programs.

Disk/Tape Tool

The disk and tape tool commands are fairly standard. Nothing really unusual or outstanding. You can load programs, up to 6 times

quicker using the **LOAD** command or the normal **LOAD**. One little extra feature is that non-commodore compatible disk drives are catered for by two new drive numbers. They are 48 for device 8 and 49 for device number 9. The tape operations are similar but with the addition of being able to **SAVE** up to 10 times quicker than normal.

Powermon

The powermonitor is once again very useful, but fully stand by comparison to other Cartridges/Monitors. There are 17 functions in all ranging from Assemble, Disassemble and Compare through to Register display and Walk. (It's always a bit nice to add that my Dolphin DOS monitor does not have a Disassemble command!).

Printerool

This is perhaps one of the more outstanding attributes that this cartridge has. It detects whether you have a printer connected to the serial bus or the user port. All Commodore characters can be printed on Epson and compatible printers and the interface allows for many set-up possibilities. You can produce hardcopies of **HIDES** and **LOADS** screens, not only on the usual serial printers but also terminals like **EPSON**, **STAR**, **AMASONIC** etc. The **HARDCOPY** command detects whether it is a **HIDES** or **LOADS** screen that you want to print. A number of sub-functions of the **PRINT** command which allow a number of different effects to be set up.

Power Reset

How we come to the Power Reset. As stated earlier, I do not consider this as a useful function or programming aid. In my own opinion this is really a 'hacker's' tool. The primary function of the **RESET** is to freeze a program and then save out the whole of memory. You may then select **CONTINUE** from the menu and the program will carry on as if nothing had happened.

When you initially press the **RESET** button a sub-menu appears giving you the option to select from:

CONTINUE - allows you to return to your program
BASIC - Return to Basic
RESET - Normal reset

TOTAL BACKUP DISK - Save the whole of memory onto disk. The program may be reloaded later with **LOAD** followed by **CONTINUE**
TOTAL BACKUP TAPE - As for the above but to tape
RESET ALL - **RESET** of any program
HARDCOPY - Prints out a copy of the screen. You can return to the program by use of **CONTINUE**
MONITOR - Takes you into the **POWER MONITOR**.

Final Analysis

Compared to some of the cartridges on the market, this may at first glance appear to be somewhat primitive. Unlike some of the products around you cannot doable sprites, find character sets,

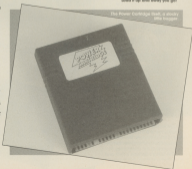
Compress programs, Make coffee and lift a jumper. However, what it does do is make the life of the serious programmer and not hacker, somewhat easier. For it's price I would have to say that the Power Cartridge is money well spent.

At a Glance

Title: Power Cartridge
Supplier: Bitcon Devices Ltd, 88 Dewick Road, Gareshead, Tyne and Wear, NE8 1RS
Telephone: 091-490-1975



Good thing and every you get!



The Power Cartridge has a really little trigger

Turn your C64 into the most hip thing since flower power, make your friends green with envy, have bright red things hanging out of the back of your computer - Win a Power Cartridge!

Power Up Your Commodore

No correspondence will be entered into regarding the competition. The closing date of the

competition is 31st January 1990. Entries received after this date will not be included in the draw.

Since we at YC realise what a handy fan you are, we thought it would kick good if a number of you, 25 to be exact, could really make your computers stand out by having a bright red Power Cartridge plugged into the cartridge port.

So, we chatted to a very nice man at B.D.L. and he also thought that the best thing that any Commodore owner could have was a Power Cartridge, well he would, wouldn't he, he tells the thing.

Anyway, the very, very, nice man at B.D.L. is putting 25 brilliant red Power Cartridges up for grabs. All you have to do is answer a few simple questions about it.

If you already own a power cartridge or obtain one in the meantime and win another one in this competition, B.D.L. will refund your purchase price. Proof of purchase will be required before a refund will be given.

The Rules

Write your answers to the questions on the back of a sealed envelope or postcard together with your name and address and send it to:

YC Power Cartridge Compo
Aegus House
Boundary Way
Hemel Hempstead
Herts HP3 7ST

Entries will not be accepted from employees of B.D.L. or Aegus Specialist Publications. The restriction also applies to employees, families and agents of the companies. The Editor's decision is final and

The Questions

1) What colour is the Power Cartridge?

- a) Blue
- b) Green
- c) Purple
- d) Red

2) How much does a Power Cartridge cost?

- a) £99.99
- b) £14.99
- c) £34.95
- d) £34.95

3) What printer mode does the P&T 1 command select?

- a) Smith-Corona
- b) HP5803
- c) Epson
- d) 1530

4) How many buttons does the Power Cartridge have?

- a) none
- b) 1
- c) 2
- d) 3
- e) 4

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