Happy Holidays!

We're into the third year of the
TRS-80's existence, and I think it's
interesting to note that the original
configuration of the beast (4K level I) is
still going strong. We hear rumors now and
then that the level I machine will be
dropped from the Radio Shack product line,
but that doesn't seem to be happening. The
simpler version of BASIC is certainly less
powerful, but that is often nothing but a
challenge to the programmer. Our Chief
Editor and Peanut Butter Critic informs me that the level I offering of
"Kaleido" in this month's issue is the result of a challenge to the
author - that he couldn't put the level II version on the smaller
machine. Challenges to True Computer Freaks are heady things. This one
resulted in an interesting line 9000 (no, I can't explain it either - it
just seems to work).

A handy routine for you level II'ers is Tape Test. This allows you to
do your own tape certifying. It puts a signal on the tape being tested,
and then reads it back to detect bad tape areas. It also allows you to
look at the contents of a tape, as it prints the input on the screen as
it is received. Although this is a BASIC program, it is loaded as a
SYSTEM program. The magic sequence is: SYSTEM, TEST, (load program),
<break key>, and finally RUN. This somewhat arcane sequence loads the
program in with a checksum loader - if it drops a bit on the way in, it
lets you know. If this is confusing, check the SYSTEM command in your
level II manual.

While we're on the subject of loading from the level II side, I'd
like to mention that some of our tapes load best at low volumes. We put a
larger and sharper waveform on the tape than the TRS-80 itself does,
which gives us a somewhat lower reject rate, but also sometimes requires
a low setting of the volume control during loading.

You merchants (including Radio Shack stores!) who are using the
TRS-80 as an eye-catching message machine will find the Signboard program
useful, but be sure to type "CLEAR 50" after you are ready to load and
run another program. Explanation: when you turn the TRS-80 on, one of the
first things it does is set aside 50 bytes for storage of the various
strings that may be used in the program (one byte holds one letter). If a
program needs more string storage space, more space must be allocated
with the CLEAR (number) command. CLEAR 500, for instance, will set aside
500 bytes. The rub is that this 500 byte chunk of memory is not available
to the rest of the software, either for program storage, stack use, or
numeric variable storage. If a program reserves a lot of string storage
space, there are only two ways to get it back - turn the machine off,
then back on, or reuse the CLEAR (number) command to reset it to a lower
number. Loading in a new program doesn't reset it to 50. Tip: if your
program runs out of memory, and doesn't use any strings, a CLEAR 0
command will give you those 50 bytes.

A few of you have probably noticed a new product line in the Radio
Shack catalog, an AC power controller system called "Plug 'n Power". The
system consists of a command transmitter and three different types of

remote controllers. Each transmitter and each remote module contains an 8-bit microprocessor (and little else). They communicate with each other much like "wireless" intercoms - through the 110 volt house wiring that they control. Aha! The perfect way to control the world with a TRS-80! All that's needed is an interface circuit that lets the computer act like the command transmitter. I was thinking (grudgingly) of writing up a how-to-do-it article when the November issue of Creative Computing Magazine came out with an exceptionally detailed discussion on just this subject. It's a two part article in the November and December issues. Creative is at Box 789, Morristown NJ 07960.

There must be some enterprising individual who is willing to sell a ready made version, ready to plug into the expansion connector of the TRS-80. Maybe even (dare I suggest?) Fort Worth. How 'bout it, fellas?

Announcements:

Webb Associates, Box 60 - CL, Monrovia CA 91016 has a program called T-Short which runs in both level II and TRSDOS v. 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. It allows the programmer to use a single keystroke to enter BASIC commands This is handy if you are a lightning-fast codesmith, or if you are a pore speler. It includes some cute little stick-on labels for the appropriate keys, and a debounce routine aimed at those bboouunnccyy kkeeyy-- bbooaarrddss. For an interesting twist, it is not located in high memory, it is tucked in where the BASIC program text would normally start, and it resets some internal pointers to the new start location. This allows you to continue to reserve upper memory for those printer and modem drivers so dear to your heart.

Recortec, a tape duplication company, is offering a January special of 50 cassette copies of any one program duplicated for $100. Contact Ron Troxell at (415) 968 1604.

The good folks at MicroSoft have announced a new editor/assembler package, their "Editor/Assembler Plus". I've been looking for this package for two years. Back in the "Stone Age" of personal computers, MicroSoft, through the now defunct MITS, marketed a software package called the MITS Altair Software Package II (catchy name, eh?). It consisted of a monitor, an editor, and an assembler, all designed to run in memory. The user could create a file with the editor, assemble it directly into memory with the assembler, run it under varying degrees of control with the monitor, and save both source and object files on cassette. Bouncing back and forth between the various parts of the system was instantaneous, and that made it EXTREMELY fast and easy to use. Fact is, I would rate it as the friendliest assembly-code system available that I had seen or heard of, on any machine in existence. Now there is a system, from the same folks, with all the same advantages, being offered for the level II 16K cassette based TRS-80. Contact MicroSoft, 10800 NE 8th, Suite 819, Belleview WA 98004.

Happy 1980 everybody!

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