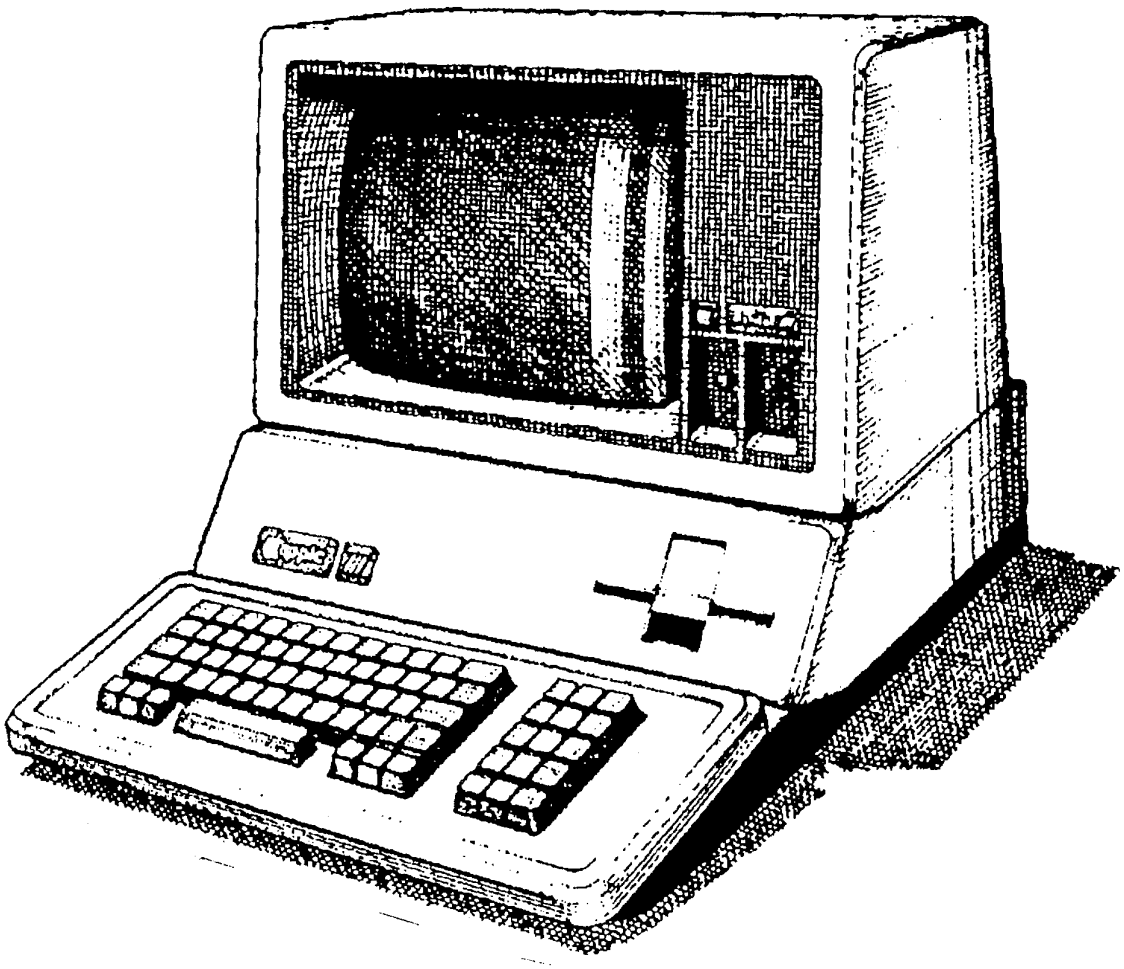
Apple /// Computer Information



DOCUMENT NAME

THE APPLE /// — DEATH BED OR NEW FOUND LIFE ?

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Ex Libris David T. Craig

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The Apple /// - Death bed or new found life?

By: Paul Campbell

The first Apple /// I ever saw sat on a cart in the back of the storeroom where I worked, equipped with only 128K of memory and two floppy drives, it was waiting to be sent to the warehouse for storage and then disposal. At the time I was only interested in it because I needed something at home to fool around with, and it was so different from the scores of MS-DOS machines that seemed to be everywhere.

I bought the computer after it sat around for a while, was given one piece of software and sent happily on my way. My next job, after getting more familiar with the system, was a shopping trip to load up on software and supplies. At the time I only had the one application, Quickfile, and was using it for everything, even forcing it to do word processing (a two-field data base, with one field for text and the other for line numbers, yes,... I was desperate!).

I recall the following visit to my local area computer store. When I was greeted by a salesperson who asked what type of system the items were being purchased for, he immediately burst out in laughter and suggested that I get a "real" computer. Being the new Apple /// owner back then, I was a little discouraged by the statement, how could anyone compare a little 128K computer with nothing but floppy drives, to one of the ominous MS-DOS monsters sitting in the showroom?

But things change, and with that first Apple /// no longer a bare bones computer, the shoe can often find itself on the other foot, imagine a salesperson stepping defensively in front of a 286 computer after hearing what an Apple /// can do, and claiming the comparison unfair!

This actually happened and I was told by the manager that I should go to another store to continue my comparison with the "Top of the Line" model, which I did. For some reason, most people have a perception of the Apple /// as a useless computer that is best used as a door stop, so let's have a look at some real world comparisons.

Something old, Something new,
Something borrowed, Something Blue....

I'm sure most of you have seen the ads that tout Tandy's Deskmate as the Friendly Face in the crowd, being both easy to use and powerful. All this is true and Deskmate has received good reviews in such publications as Home Office Computing, but what about a face to face confrontation against a similarly equipped Apple /// with it's Desktop Manager - /// E-Z Pieces environment?

As I sat down with my notebook at the Radio Shack Computer Center, it was rather ironic that the very helpful and friendly person who assisted me remarked that Deskmate was Tandy's "answer" to AppleWorks. I smiled and proceeded to put Deskmate through its paces.

Deskmate's graphics are nice and you can paste an image into a document for printing, which is something that you must use a separate utility for on the Apple ///. But the battle goes downhill from there for the IBM compatible Tandy as the Apple /// reveals itself to be faster, more powerful, and easier to use on virtually all counts.

Spreadsheet capability is where the most glaring differences occur. A person who has used /// E-Z Pieces will find Deskmate's numbered columns and rows much more difficult and complicated to use. If you like large spreadsheets, /// E-Z Pieces has 126,873 empty cells, 16,400 of which can be filled with formulas at the same time. Running your Apple /// under a program switching utility and The Desktop Manager at the same time decreases the number of filled cells to 13,066. Deskmate has 9,801 cells, period.

You must also tell Deskmate that you are entering a formula or it will not recognize it as such. The Apple /// automatically recognizes formulas, values,

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and labels as you enter them, and formats each cell according to the Standard Values which can be set differently for each spreadsheet if desired. You can also change the format of individual cells.

In some cases the shortcomings of Deskmate seem like oversights, like the lack of global search or record copying in databases and no spreadsheet sorting - functions which I use frequently in my business, and when you ask for help,... it makes a good time to get a cup of coffee.

It should be mentioned that these tests were run against the best computer offered by Tandy. It should also be mentioned that the Apple /// was equipped with an old 5 Megabyte Profile with a 180ms access time. There are new SCSI drives made for the Apple /// that are well over 100 Megabytes in size and faster than hard drives found in brand-new 486 machines. On Three Inc. will even build a custom SCSI drive for you.

I adore the Apple][, I've owned both a][+ and a][e, but SARA (code name for the Apple ///) is nearly twice as fast and has eight times the power. Having only four expansion slots in the Apple /// is not quite the disaster that some believe it to be, it would take no fewer than ten slots on an Apple][to match the Apple /// system that I'm typing this article on right now, and what would ProDos8, which can only recognize two hard drive partitions, do with the five hard drive partitions currently in use?

I've spent many hours doing benchmark tests with both machines side by side using almost identical programs and the Apple /// just walks away from the][e in every test, no exceptions.

The Commodore 64 has only 38K of memory left for program space and files after booting, compared to over 400K on most Apple /// applications, and yet there is a vast world of software available for the Commodore 64, even in some department stores. This gives us a clue to the reason why software companies would create programs for some smaller computers and ignore the Apple ///, the answer is money. Commodore 64 and Apple][owners buy new products, a lot of Apple /// owners don't.

The Case of the Hungry Hardware.

To encourage you when considering the purchase of something new for your computer, it may help to know that a 512K Apple /// computer still commands a higher price than an IBM PC, IBM XT, or even an IBM AT. There already are some great applications out there, for example the Graphics Manager for the Apple][has been called the best printing utility ever, and the /// version is even better, but nobody is going to continue making the truly neat software for us if nobody is going to buy it. On the other side of the coin, new software products will increase interest,... and buyers.

Take a look at the limited emulation modes on SARA, what is their sole purpose? To run software that is not otherwise available to us in the natural Apple /// environment. It would be nice to have a wordprocessor with graphics capability if not an entire desktop publishing program (if Apple][e hardware can do it, SARA can do it better!). Even nicer would be if someone like Claris Software (nudge nudge) would modify versions of AppleWorks 3.0 and other programs to run in the native Apple /// mode, it would open a whole new marketing niche with just a few modifications to already existing software.

In closing, we can support what is available for our computer and look forward to renewed interest, some new products and maybe even a few full blown applications that really use some of the advantages of the Apple ///, or we can let one of the best computers made by Apple die a slow death in basements and closets around the world while lesser systems live on. From this Apple /// users standpoint, remember that, although the "Meek shall inherit the earth",... the weak shall not inherit my computing tasks!

THE END

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