

WELSH RARE BIT

Since its launch in 1982, the Dragon 32 has become as familiar a sight in the high street shops as the Sinclair Spectrum or the BBC Micro. But financial problems have cast doubt on the future of the company and on its plans to market the Dragon 64 and to introduce a micro to MSX standard.

Dragon Data was first established as a subsidiary of Mettoy, the toy manufacturers, in 1981. Mettoy's intention was to cash in on the boom in home computers, then just beginning in the United Kingdom. With financial assistance from the Welsh Development Agency, a factory was set up in Swansea, and the Dragon 32 made its first appearance in August 1982.

The company opted for Motorola's 6809 microprocessor, rather than the Z80 or 6502 favoured by most other home computer manufacturers. The Dragon's circuitry followed Motorola's recommended layout, which led to accusations that Dragon Data had based its design on Tandy's Color computer, another model that used the Motorola format. A side effect of this was that users soon discovered that some software written for the 'CoCo' would run on the Welsh machine as well.

The Dragon 32's major selling points were its Microsoft BASIC (the most widely used BASIC dialect) and its full-sized typewriter-style keyboard. At the time the machine was launched, the Dragon's keyboard was matched only by the Vic-20 in the under-£200 sector of the market. Dragon Data's marketing strategy also played a large part in the machine's success; in the months

leading up to Christmas 1982 the ZX Spectrum and the BBC Micro were both in short supply, and the Commodore 64 had yet to appear. The Dragon 32 was available in large numbers, and by early 1983 the company had sold 32,000 machines. This was in part due to the Mettoy connection; those major chain stores such as Boots and Dixons, which had always stocked the company's toys, were more than happy to sell the new computer.

However, in the summer of 1983, Dragon Data found itself in deep financial trouble. The company was expanding when Mettoy went into receivership, casting doubt on the future of its Welsh subsidiary. Dragon was eventually saved by a consortium of companies led by Prutec, the high technology investment arm of the giant Prudential insurance company. A £2.5 million rescue package was put together, and the firm acquired a new managing director in Brian Moore, a former executive of GEC. These changes enabled Dragon Data to overcome its cash flow problems, to invest in a new manufacturing plant in Port Talbot, and to continue its development of the Dragon 64 and disk drive.

The Dragon 64 has 64 Kbytes of RAM, an improved keyboard and an RS232C serial interface. The disk drive uses standard 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ " floppy disks running under Dragon DOS, which can be used by both the 32 and 64 models. A version of the powerful OS9 operating system is also available for the Dragon 64.

But a shadow fell across all Dragon's plans in June 1984, when Prutec and the Welsh Development Agency refused to put up more cash and the firm went into receivership. It was uncertain whether a buyer could be found for the company. At the time there were three new machines, as well as other computer-related products planned for 1984 alone. One of the planned micros was intended to meet the MSX standard being introduced by Japanese companies (see page 141). But the Welsh Dragon had become an endangered species.



Market Wizard

Richard Wadman, the Marketing Director of Dragon Data, was planning to sell a whole new range of Dragon computers when the company suddenly went into receivership.

Birth Of A Dragon

Dragon Data is unusual among British home computer companies in that it builds its own machines, whereas most companies, such as Sinclair and Acorn, subcontract the production of their computers. Dragon have recently built a new factory at Port Talbot, West Glamorgan, shown here

