

WATER SPORT

With the software market currently dominated by space invaders-type 'shoot-'em-up' games, it is refreshing to find a new game that shuns the well trodden path and heads off into virgin territory. Durell Software's Scuba Dive is such a game: an underwater adventure that has soared high in the software pop charts.

There are three versions of Scuba Dive available: one for the Spectrum (priced at £5.95) written by Mike Richardson; one for the Oric-1 (£6.95) by Ron Jeffs; and another for the Commodore 64 (£6.95) by Nigel Dewdney. The Oric-1 version is being adapted to run on the Oric Atmos as well.

The player takes the role of a scuba diver collecting treasure from the seabed, and risking life and limb to do so. Our intrepid hero's main objective is to collect points-accumulating pearls, which are taken from oyster shells and giant clams. At a more advanced stage of the game you must collect treasure from chests deep within the cavernous seaworld.

However, there are many good reasons for exercising caution as you go. The water is heavily populated with creatures that have a detrimental effect on scuba divers: jelly fish, octopuses, squid, electric eels and, in the Spectrum version, sharks! If you touch any of these creatures you lose a life, although none of them will attack you on purpose. You must simply avoid them at all costs. Another danger is discovered when you start retrieving pearls from the giant clams. These have the ability to slam shut on you, trapping you in their grasp.

The narrow entrances to the main cavern and the lower-level depths are guarded by giant octopuses. Passing these can be tricky, as their tentacles are constantly waving about. But every now and again you can manage to sneak past. The

Commodore version is octopus-less. Instead, a trap door bars your way. This is constantly opening and shutting and you have to slip through without being knocked unconscious.

The program allows you three lives per game, and has a difficulty gradient from one to four. A life is lost if you touch any of the aquatic wildlife or if you run out of oxygen.

Each version of the game starts off with a view of the surface of the sea and a large portion of the depths. The boat from which you dive is bobbing on the surface. It is possible to get caught under the boat as you dive, so care is needed from the moment you go down. On the Spectrum version it is an advantage to have a good sense of direction because your boat can drift when you are underwater. In the Oric version this isn't so much of a problem, as the boat always moves from left to right in a screen 'wrap-around' fashion, and thus is never out of sight when you surface.

The quality of the graphics on the Spectrum version (which is by far the best of the three) is superb. Good use has been made of colour, and the creature and cavern design is realistic. Control over the diver is achieved by using the X and Z keys to turn clockwise and anti-clockwise, and the Space and Shift keys move the diver forward. Spectrum owners can also use joysticks, although the program will not work with the Kempston joystick interface. Commodore owners also have the choice to use joysticks, but Oric players must make do with the keyboard.

The Oric version is far less exciting than its Spectrum counterpart in several respects. Movement of the diver and the creatures is very jerky, and the graphics — especially the cavern walls and the chests — are far less detailed. The Commodore version also lacks the Spectrum's detail, but it performs far more satisfactorily than the Oric version.

Quality Control

These screen pictures illustrate the difference in quality between versions of the Scuba Dive game.



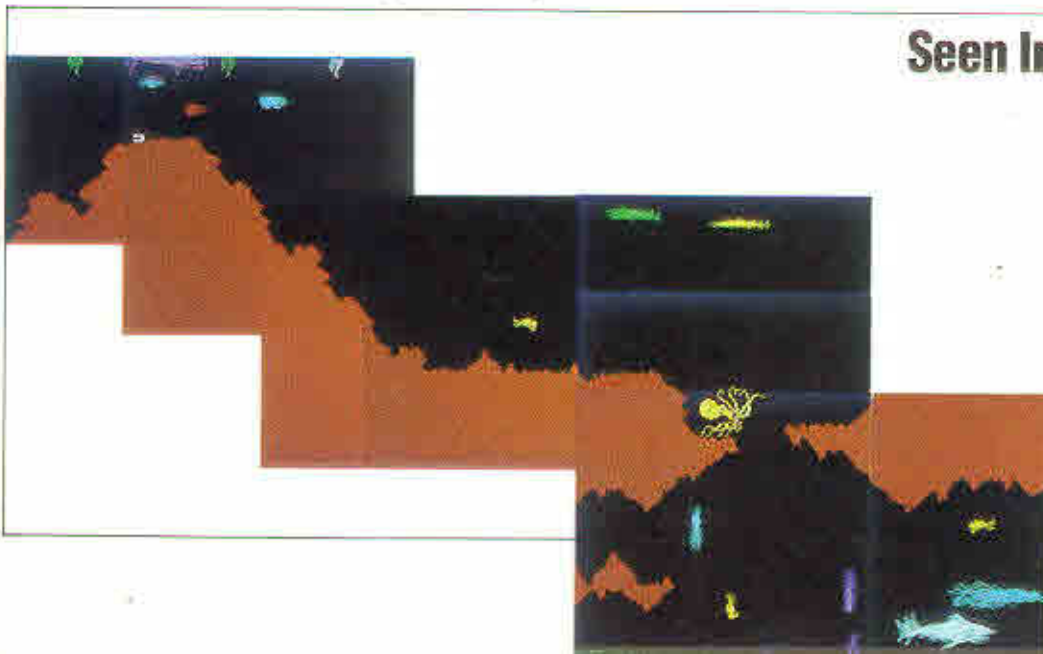
Sinclair Spectrum



Oric-1



Commodore 64



Seen In Perspective

This image is composed of several screen dumps of the Spectrum version of Scuba Dive. The images are joined together to show the diver's view of the underwater caves.

SCREEN SHOTS BY IAN WAINWELL