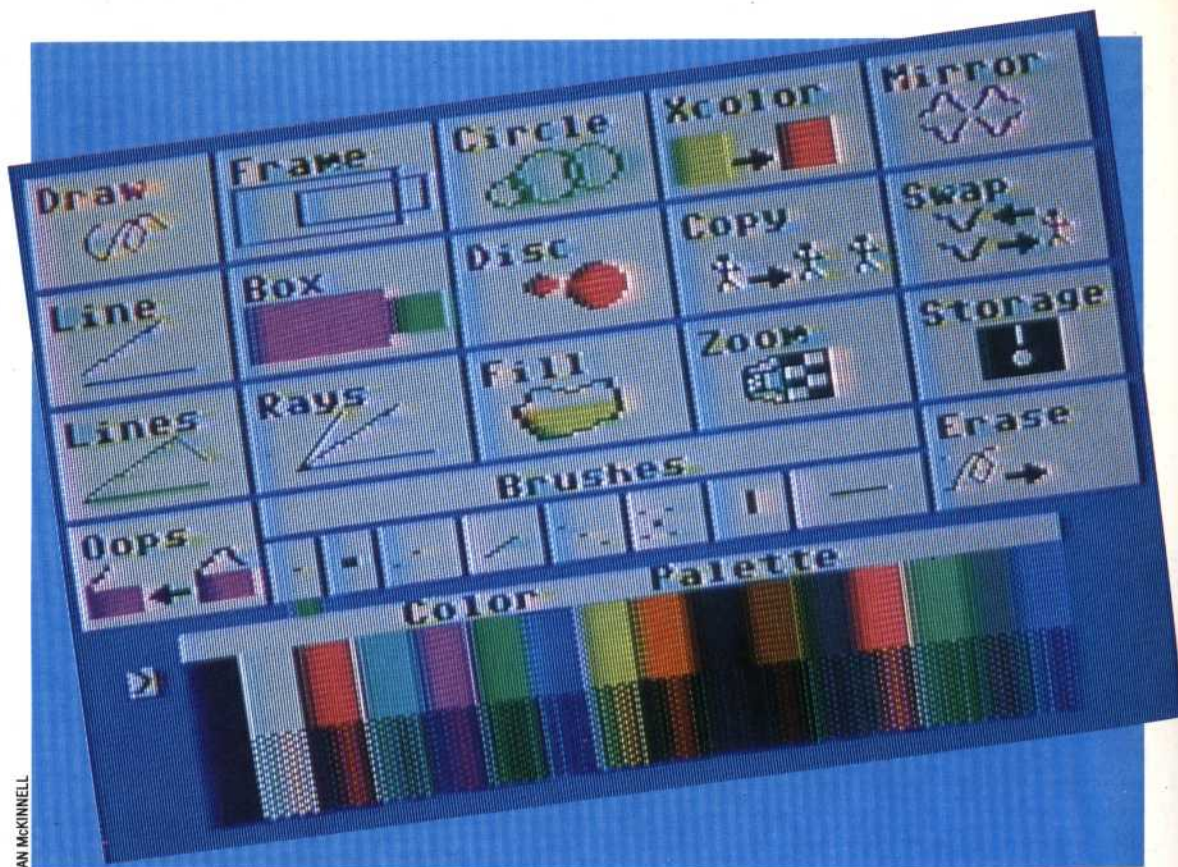


**Take Your Pick**

The main menu of the Koala-pad consists of boxes containing both the name and an explanatory icon. Although the icons are intended to aid understanding, some of the illustrations are perhaps confusing. The cursor arrow is moved into a box and the 'Select' button is pressed. The name of the selected box will flash to remind the user which mode is in use



IAN MCKINNELL

quadrant will automatically be copied to the corresponding area of the other three quarters.

Highly detailed pixel plotting is achieved by using the ZOOM command. The user may choose any part of the screen, and this is then displayed as an expanded 'window' at the bottom of the screen. The individual pixels are displayed as eight by eight pixel, character-sized squares. This feature makes the production of fonts and sprite-sized figures quick and simple. These figures are then placed anywhere on the screen by using the COPY command; this allows the user to define an area of the screen, the contents of which are copied to any other position.

After these options have been selected, the cursor arrow is moved off the screen and the Select button is pressed. The screen then changes to the 'canvas' on which the required picture is built up. By moving the cursor arrow and pressing the Select button, lines and shapes may be drawn anywhere on the normal Commodore 64 graphics screen.

MINOR NIGGLES

The quality of the graphics produced by this device is excellent, rivalling high resolution screens produced with commercial software. However, one disappointment - also shared by other graphics packages - is the quality of the freehand DRAW command. The membrane matrix resolution does not match that of the 64's high resolution screen, so the user's stylus (or fingertip) will often not be directly over a grid intersection and may in fact be triggering two points at the same time. The computer, in trying to interpret this, will plot a point, which unfortunately is not always at the position intended. This can result in what was planned as a

straight line appearing as a messy scrawl. Another criticism is that, apart from the ZOOM command, there is no option to change the colour without returning to the main menu. But these are minor complaints that are more than offset by the speed at which the LINE and FILL commands are executed.

A further software limitation that could have been better thought out is the method used to erase mistakes. When a mistake is made, it is removed from the screen by use of the OOPS command, which is accessed from the main menu. However, using OOPS will erase all the work that has been performed since the user last exited from the main menu. This means that perhaps half an hour's work may be erased, simply because of a single error. The alternative is to erase a mistake by using the ZOOM command and correcting the error pixel by pixel, which in the case of a badly placed disc or box could take some time. A welcome amendment would be to restrict the extent of the OOPS command to the last press of the Select button rather than the last exit from the main menu.

As may be suspected from a device that plugs into the joystick port, it is possible to use the Koala-pad as a joystick, thus allowing users to access the Koala-pad from their own programs. The position of the cursor can be obtained from BASIC by PEEKing locations 54297 and 54298 for the co-ordinates of X and Y respectively.

Screens may be saved onto disk and can easily be transferred to the user's own programs, allowing the development of 'Hobbit'-style adventures with text at the bottom of the screen and a picture above. By using the Koala-pad it is possible to save and recall up to 16 different eight-Kbyte screens on a disk. Although it is not possible to load a screen from disk