



however, is capable of quite useful word processing. After the purchase of a printer, the main hardware problem becomes one of having enough memory in which to store your text. It is possible to run a word processing program using a cassette for storage. However, a cassette storage system limits the amount of text you can write because the memory quickly fills up. This is unlike a floppy disk that automatically takes text from the memory leaving it clear for further entry of text. Cassette storage allows letters and short documents to be stored and printed, but the handling of large chunks of text isn't really feasible.

Sinclair's new Microdrive storage system makes word processing on the ZX Spectrum more practical. The Microdrive is a cross between a

of a letter or a poem. (See our feature on printers on page 74.)

Manufacturers are striving to produce inexpensive word processing systems and some chip programs are now becoming available for home computers. These store word processing programs' instructions on a chip that can be plugged into the computer's circuit board. They are very useful when there is no disk drive unit available. The advantage is that the program may be loaded quickly and is ready for instant use without waiting for it to load via a cassette tape or disk. If the computer's RAM is large enough (from 32 Kbytes upwards), you will be able to create a document of up to perhaps 5,000 words in length and edit it to your heart's content.

MICROCOMPUTER	PRICE	SOFTWARE	SUPPLIED ON CASSETTE	SUPPLIED ON DISK	TYPEWRITER STYLE KEYBOARD	PRICE
Sinclair Spectrum	£125	Wordprocessor	●			£9.95
Commodore Vic 20	£130	Vicwriter	●		●	£19.95
Dragon 32	£175	Gemini	●		●	£19.95
New Brain	£269	Propen	●			£40.25
Commodore 64	£299	Visawrite		●	●	£79
Atari 800	£300	Keyword		●	●	£115
BBC Micro	£399	View		●	●	£59.80
Epson HX20	£486	Deckmaster	●		●	£34.50

The Price Of Word Processing

The table above shows a selection of the word processing packages available for a range of microcomputers at both ends of the market. If you plan to use your word processor for long periods of time, make sure that you can type comfortably on your computer's keyboard. Calculator or membrane-style keyboards were developed to reduce the cost of manufacture and are best suited for games playing and writing short programs. It is also an advantage if your computer has the special programmable function keys. These are often employed

on the more sophisticated word processing packages and reduce the number of commands you need to type into your keyboard. The prices quoted are typical of what you can expect to pay. Obviously the purchase of a printer is essential if you want a printed copy. Printers vary tremendously in the way of print quality and speed of execution (see page 74). Ensure that your word processor and printer are compatible for the various tasks you wish them to perform. If you wish to write letters, a reasonably-priced word processor and printer would be adequate. But for lengthy text, a more expensive combination would be necessary.

cassette and a floppy disk. It uses an endless loop of tape and can quickly load and save programs at about a quarter of the price of a disk drive. Undoubtedly many Spectrum owners will use the Microdrive system to run word processing programs, but storing and recalling pages is likely to take six or seven seconds, compared with the one second or so required by a conventional disk drive system.

Word processing is effective because it separates the act of composition from the act of printing. Both handwriting and typing demand that the word is written down at the same time as the thought process occurs. With word processing, no words appear on paper until the composition on the screen is right. But getting the words onto paper demands a printer, and the cheap printer that is adequate for listing computer programs is unlikely to be able to produce a satisfactory copy

If you wish to store the edited text after you have printed it, you will need to save it onto a cassette tape; a process that will take some minutes. The word processing chip is unable to store the text you create. If you want to write your novel with a word processing program, you need to know how well the program can handle very large chunks of text.

Some sophisticated word processing programs can perform useful extra functions. The automatic dictionary, or spelling checker, is among the most popular inclusions. For this facility you really need a disk system. The dictionary checks the words contained in a document against its own stored words. It indicates the words it doesn't recognise, and invites the user to correct them.

As the use of word processing spreads, it is likely to be regarded as an essential office skill and an ideal device for correspondence.