

Sharp MZ-711

A low-cost home computer that allows its optional peripherals to fit inside its case

The Sharp MZ-711 is an interesting machine with some quite unusual features. In construction it's up to the usual high standard of Japanese design, and it performs well. The colour is good — very steady and bright — and apart from a slight fuzziness when certain colour combinations are used, it produces extremely readable text.

However, there are aspects of its design that are quite extraordinary. The keyboard, for example, would be highly agreeable if it were not the exact opposite to what you would normally expect: upper case is the default mode, while lower case is obtained by pressing the SHIFT keys. Although this is unquestionably handy for BASIC programming, it makes any other operation extremely difficult. However, it is a simple matter to convert this to the usual arrangement. Pressing CTRL and E simultaneously changes the keyboard from upper case to lower case, while CTRL with F converts it from lower case to upper.

The cassette unit for the Sharp MZ-711 is

intended to be an optional extra, as the unit slots into the main casing, but most users will require it. This system is slow but reliable, and every tape seems to load first time. Nevertheless, the cassette operation system does have several weaknesses. There is provision for only the most rudimentary of filenames, and nothing by way of motor control — which could easily have been included. This restricts the usefulness of the deck to virtually one-file-per-tape storage. The limitations of this system are surprising, considering Sharp's expertise in other fields, particularly the hi-fi industry in which their solenoid-controlled tape decks are commonplace.

The built-in printer/plotter (again, an optional extra that fits into the case) has an extremely delicate and vulnerable print head mechanism and pen units. These must be taken out of the machine and capped if they are not going to be used for any extended period. Unfortunately, they are very small units and could get lost when



Keyboard

The Sharp MZ-711 keyboard gives a professional feel to the machine. The keys are correctly spaced, full-travel, full-sized, and suitable for word processing. Five programmable function keys, responding to the SHIFT keys, offer ten functions and this makes operation easy. The graphic symbols are arranged in logical sequence while the other keys — being in the QWERTY format — are not. This means that it can be difficult to find which key combinations produce the required symbol.

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