



TAKING ON BOARDS

Realising that an absence of built-in disk drive interfaces may have detracted from the otherwise highly-regarded Memotech 500 series of micros, the company has recently released the RS128, with full interface facilities. The new machine is a stylish addition to the Memotech range.

Despite being highly regarded machines, the Memotech 500 series of microcomputers — the MTX500 and MTX512 — has been largely overlooked by home computer buyers. Attractive features — such as high resolution graphics, a built-in assembler, a sophisticated BASIC and a unique text-handling language called NODDY — have certainly not detracted from these machines, but their failure to achieve great popular success could be attributed to their falling between two distinct segments of the home computer market.

On the one hand, priced at around £300, the machines are a little expensive for the games player who may think that more sophisticated features are not worth the higher cost. On the other hand, the 'serious' user (Memotech says that the series is aimed at the small business user) may have been deterred by the fact that the 500 series lacks built-in interfaces, which would allow it to be connected to disk drives. These interfaces were available, but they came as separate boards, designed to be fitted to an edge connector inside the machines. This is not altogether surprising coming from a company that made its name by providing add-on boards for the ZX81 (see page 580), but it seems to have failed to impress users who wanted a machine that they could just plug in and run. Memotech seems to have recognised this problem and has introduced the RS128, a machine with interfaces built in.

THE LOOK OF THE MACHINE

At first glance, the RS128 looks identical to the 500 series — it gives the impression of being stylish and a little up-market. Like its siblings, the machine is cased aluminium, instead of the usual plastic, and this makes a Memotech machine considerably heavier than most other micros. There is a standard QWERTY keyboard and a numeric keypad, which holds some of the commands for the NODDY text programming language. There are also eight programmable function keys to the right of the keypad. The keys have an excellent feel and are built to a high professional standard.

There are a few minor niggles with the layout: the Return key is not much larger than the



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ordinary keys and touch typists may at first have difficulty in locating it, and the Delete key is not on the typewriter keyboard itself, but located on the numeric keypad instead. There is a Backspace key in the top right hand corner, but unlike most computer keyboards, where the Backspace also acts as a Delete-left key (known as a 'destructive backspace'), on the Memotech it is simply a cursor-left.

On the back of the machine there is a number of interfaces. Some of these were provided with the 500 series, and others are recent additions. On the far left of the machine is a pair of RS232 ports, which enable the machine to be connected to FDX floppy disk drives. These ports can also be used for other purposes, such as serial printers and networked communications. To the right of the RS232s is a composite video jack and a hi-fi jack — the latter allows the computer's sound to be amplified through a normal stereo system. The power socket and RF jack come next, followed by a Centronics-type printer interface. The cassette interface consists of a pair of microjack sockets, for EAR and MIC, in the same style as the Sinclair Spectrum. Finally, there is a pair of nine-pin Atari-style joystick ports.

The interface ports are labelled in white lettering, which can be clearly read from the back of the machine. This would seem to allow peripherals to be plugged in without having to lean over to look at the back. Unfortunately, Memotech has set the ports into depressions in the

Much Improved

The Memotech RS128 is an improved version of the MTX500 series. This new model is fitted with twin RS232 sockets, which enable the machine to run the FDX floppy disk drives. This means that the computer is especially attractive to the serious home micro user or the small business user.