Split The Difference

Inside the attractive QL-type case of the Spectrum+ we find the Issue 4.5 circuit board. This is essentially the same as the Spectrum 48K Issue 3 board released in August 83, with the addition of the unsightly reset button flying leads patched onto the board

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program line is being entered, the line will be lost.

As part of the repackaging, Spectrum+ purchasers receive a 'six-pack' of programs — Psion Chess, Make-a-Chip, Scrabble, Chequered Flag, Vu-3D and the excellent Tasword Two word processing software. All of these programs are of a very high standard. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the new Spectrum documentation, which, although beautifully presented, lacks the depth of the old Spectrum manual. The publishers do suggest, however, that as users become more proficient with the machine, they can send away for more comprehensive manuals, costing £7 each.
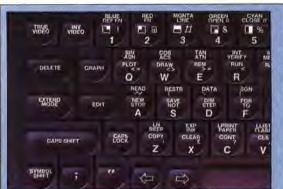
For games playing, the new version is certainly better than the original, but then most keen players will have invested in a joystick and interface. Both the Kempston and Fuller interfaces work with the Spectrum+, although, as on the older machine, the use of the Fuller Soundbox may stop some software from running. The Kempston Centronics interface performs perfectly, as well, as does the Wafadrive mass storage system.

The Spectrum+ is certainly an improvement on the original Spectrum, but Sinclair's idea of what constitutes a reasonable keyboard is not going to meet with universal approval. Although it might be considered a clever move on Sinclair's part to utilise QL technology in a bid to make the Spectrum more attractive to buyers, with a £50 price increase the new keyboard should be compared with the already available add-ons. Using such a criterion it cannot be considered good value for money. The new machine certainly looks more stylish, but the keys, despite being 'sculpted' to make keying easier, are unresponsive and too crowded.

For first-time buyers, the Spectrum+ is certainly worth considering, but the facilities offered may not be considered worth the extra £50. The cynical might say that Sinclair has introduced the Spectrum+ purely as a way of increasing prices — it would hardly be surprising if the original model was soon phased out. In fact, the introduction of this model is a strangely half-hearted gesture by Sinclair; it would surely have made more sense to have cut the price of the older version (and of the Interface 1/Microdrive package) and left it alone. On the other hand, Sinclair could have increased the price slightly more and included all the things the Spectrum *really* needs, such as proper sound facilities, a moving-key keyboard, monitor socket, and perhaps a built-in Microdrive. But then it would never have been ready in time for Christmas . . .

Key Features

Whether you think the Spectrum+'s QL-like keyboard an improvement or not depends very much on your typing style: the provision of separate keys for the more important functions, however, is a real benefit. The original Spectrum key sequences (e.g. [SYM SHIFT]+[O] for the semi-colon) duplicate the new keys' effects -

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