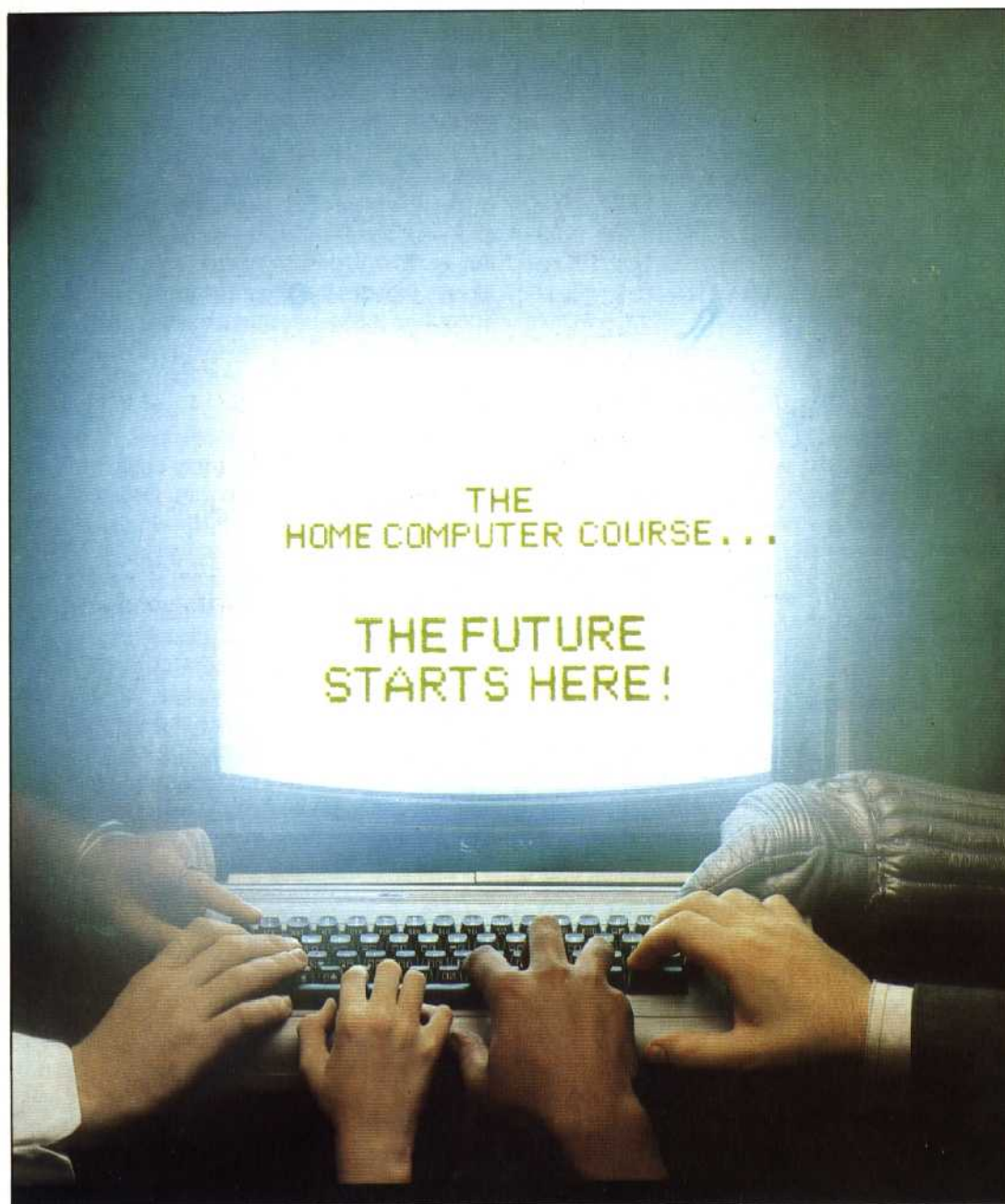# What Is A Computer?

**How do computers 'think' and how much do they 'know'?
The answers are vital to understanding computers**

The question "What is a computer?" is not as easily answered as "What is a television?" or "What is a washing machine?" because the computer, unlike these other appliances, has no single purpose. Digital computers, including those you can buy for £50 in your local high street, are a new breed of machine that can perform an almost infinite variety of jobs, according to the program their owners give them.

The idea of programmability is not altogether unfamiliar to the modern home; after all, many devices such as washing machines and cookers now have a number of different programs built into them so that you can use them in different ways. With a computer, though, the whole function of the machine can be changed by putting in a new program: from a word processor, to an arcade game, to a machine that looks after your accounts, in a matter of minutes.

How does a computer perform so many different tasks? We shall be learning more about that as the course progresses, but first of all let's take a