



it can be used to move the cursor around the screen, but if the Num Lock key is pressed it can be used as a calculator.

The screen is a standard 17.7cm x 13.3cm green monitor, giving an 80 x 25 character resolution. The text is easily read and there is a brightness control on the right-hand side of the screen. On the left-hand side are the twin 5 1/4 inch floppy disk drives. As the standard configuration of the Compaq Plus is a single disk drive, the MS-DOS system master disk will assume this to be the case and will ask for all disks to be placed in drive A — this can be a nuisance when a disk is being copied as the user must continually swap disks. However, MS-DOS may be configured to make full use of both drives. The drives themselves appear to be quieter than their IBM counterparts.

### OUTSIDE CONNECTIONS

Beneath a panel on the right-hand side of the machine are the interface ports. The Compaq Plus is fitted with a Centronics-type parallel printer port, an RGB interface and an RF port. Three expansion slots are also provided, allowing IBM plug-compatible boards to be fitted. Typical additions are extra memory boards, a VDU colour card or a modem that allows the computer to communicate over the telephone network. Beneath another panel on the left-hand side is the power input — a standard three-pin Eurosocket — above which is the on/off switch. To the side is the fan that keeps the inside of the machine cool. Inside the computer, the circuitry is protected by a metal casing (which accounts for the machine's weight); this not only provides protection against rough handling but also shields the machine from radio interference that might disrupt processing. The metal also acts as a heat sink.

Accompanying the computer are three manuals — an operations guide, and MS-DOS and BASIC reference guides. Unusually for this type of machine the guides are paperback books, instead of the more usual ringbinders. The books are held with the system disks in 'mock suede' plastic

folders. Of the three manuals, only the operators' guide is tutorially based. Thus anyone wishing to be taken through the various steps of using BASIC or MS-DOS would be advised to buy other instruction books.

As one of the older IBM-compatible machines the Compaq, like the PC itself, uses the Intel 8088 processor instead of the more advanced 8086 chip used by some of its newer rivals such as the Olivetti M25. Although the 8088 is a 16-bit processor with a 20-bit address bus, it has an eight-bit data bus as opposed to the 16-bit bus used in the 8086. This means that the Compaq is much slower in retrieving data than its 8086-equipped competitors, although of course it runs at the same speed as the PC.

On the all-important question of compatibility with IBM software, the Compaq Plus scores highly. Even a notoriously difficult program such as Lotus 1-2-3 will run on the machine. However, as the chairman of Compaq is also on the board of Lotus Software, this is perhaps not surprising. One of the few things that the Compaq Plus will not run is the IBM diagnostic disk, but as that program interrogates the BASIC Input-Output System (BIOS) ROM directly, this should not raise any eyebrows either.

The Compaq Plus is definitely one of the most reliable IBM compatibles on the market, with a proven track record. This counts for a lot to someone who is going to spend £2,524 on a compatible machine. Obviously no one wants to spend that kind of money only to find that a particular program required by the user will not run.

On the negative side, the machine is beginning to show its age — and not only because of the outdated 8088 chip. It is beginning to look as though the days of the 10kg-plus 'transportable' are numbered. With lap-held computers becoming ever more sophisticated, the lap-held IBM-compatible machine is inevitable and 'transportables' such as the Compaq Plus will become redundant.

#### Printer Board

This board with a parallel printer interface allows the machine to be connected to a Centronics-type printer

#### VDU Board

This board slots into one of the expansion ports of the Compaq, and provides the circuitry necessary to drive an external television or monitor

#### Main Circuit Board

Contains the 256 Kbytes of RAM, the 8088 processor and the input/output chips. There are also spare slots available for extra chips like the 8087 maths processor

#### Power Supply

The power supply is fitted here with a fan beside it to keep the inside of the machine cool

#### IBM-Style Keyboard

The keyboard is identical to the IBM version, down to the sloping layout of the keys. Note the function keys on the left and the numeric keypad on the right

### Value For Money

The main selling points of the Compaq Plus are its IBM compatibility and, therefore, access to the enormous IBM software base. Here we show the cost of an IBM PC system that matches the basic Compaq Plus specification:

Feature	Compaq Plus	IBM PC
Basic price	£2,524	£1,310
Twin 360K disks	Standard	Extra £341
Hi-res colour monitor	*Standard	Extra £300
Monitor output card	Standard	Extra £208
Colour graphics card	Standard	Extra £223
128K RAM	Standard	Extra £86
Disk-based operating system and BASIC	Standard	Extra £61
Keyboard	Standard	Extra £213
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,524</b>	<b>£2,742</b>

\*The Compaq's built-in monitor is hi-res monochrome, but the machine has RGB colour monitor output as standard.



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