



# LIGHT WORK



Portable computers can be fairly large, 'luggable' machines or they may be small enough to fit into a pocket. Between these two extremes are the 'lap-helds'. One of the latest contenders in this sector of the market is Epson's PX-8, a portable machine with 64 Kbytes of RAM, CP/M and a collection of software supplied.

The PX-8 comes in a case the size of a telephone directory, and weighs approximately 2.3 kgs (5 lbs). The casing is finished in two tones of beige, with a sliding metal handle, and at first sight the package looks very little like a computer. However, part of the case slides off to reveal a full-featured computer keyboard and a folded-down display screen. The screen is released by moving a sliding switch marked 'UNLOCK', which also reveals a microcassette tape recorder. The screen panel is ratchet-controlled and may be placed in any one of 11 positions, although only five or six of these give a good viewing angle.

The keyboard has 72 typewriter-style keys, colour-coded to indicate their usage. The dark brown alphanumeric keys are arranged in standard QWERTY format on the US and UK versions (there is also a French AZERTY model for sale in Europe), with the '£' sign on the English

keyboard replacing the '#' (hash mark) on the American version. (All the 'international' characters may in fact be accessed from any of the keyboards by changing the PX-8's DIP switches. This process is explained clearly in the user's manual.) There are also four bright orange cursor control keys, Insert, Delete and Home keys, three system function keys (Escape, Pause and Help), and five programmable function keys.

The keyboard is manufactured to a high standard and is especially easy to use if the machine is lap-held. However, the keyboard is less useful if the PX-8 is located on a desktop, as the keys require a straight up-and-down pressure. Two retractable legs are supplied; these tilt the unit but fail to solve the problem. The Caps Lock, Number and Insert keys are toggle switches that are used to change the PX-8 display modes — three small red LEDs indicate which mode is currently in operation.

The Epson documentation is comprehensive and extremely well written. Two thick manuals are supplied. The first is a user's manual of several hundred pages, which covers setting up the machine, the use of the hardware and software, and CP/M operations. This manual also includes memory maps, complete lists of available characters and their associated codes, and a somewhat long machine code program for saving

#### Latest Offer

The PX-8 lap-held computer is made by Epson, famous for its dot matrix printers, the HX-20 portable, and the QX-10 desktop business computer. The PX-8 comes with 64K of RAM, a Liquid Crystal Display screen, CP/M, and several software packages for £798