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SINCLAIR QL

PRICE
£399 (inc. VAT)

DIMENSIONS
472×138×46 mm

CPU
Motorola 68008, 7.5 MHz

MEMORY
128K RAM (expandable to 640K), 48K ROM

SCREEN
25 lines of 85 characters (with monitor); high resolution graphics: 512×256 pixels (4 colours), 256×256 (8 colours)

INTERFACES
Serial RS232 (2), Joysticks (2), Microdrives, LAN, TV, RGB monitor

LANGUAGES AVAILABLE
SuperBASIC

KEYBOARD
Pseudo-typewriter-style; 65 keys, including true space bar and five function keys, but no delete key

DOCUMENTATION
The user manual (in a ring binder) is of a high standard, and includes manuals for SuperBASIC and the applications software
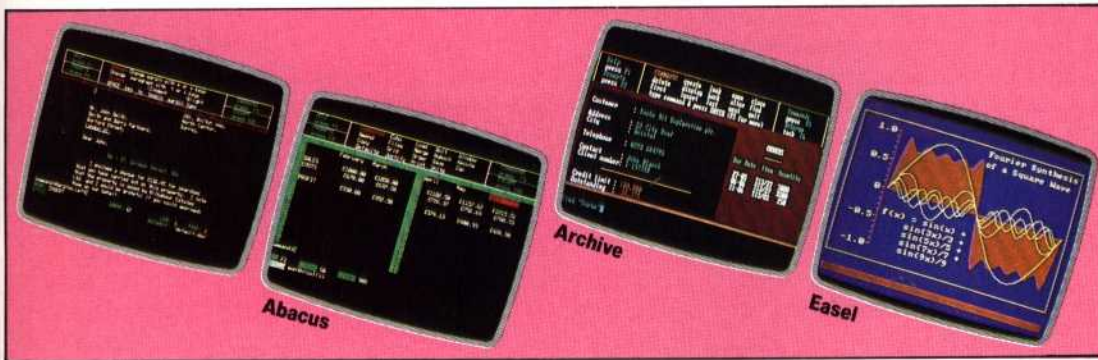
STRENGTHS
Very fast number-crunching 68008 CPU, high-quality software included, very good graphics, advanced BASIC dialect

WEAKNESSES
Built-in Microdrives slower than disks, not compatible with Spectrum, little software available, operating system not fully de-bugged
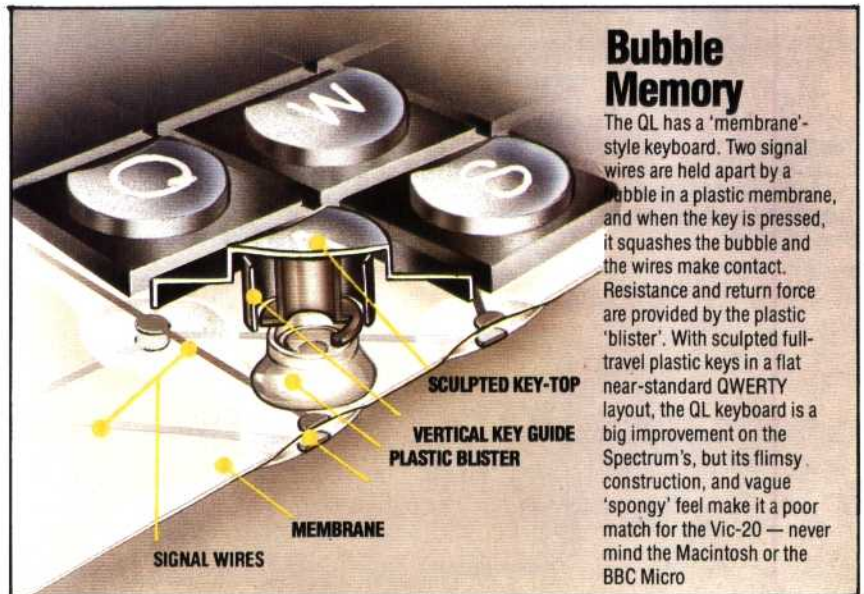
convincing: the bundled software is good value, but any business user will surely want an accounts package at the least, and the spreadsheet program leaves only 15 Kbytes of user RAM, which rules out most serious financial models. The speed and questionable reliability of the Microdrives calls the whole QL mass-storage capability into question, especially as there is no disk drive interface. The keyboard seems unlikely to withstand heavy daily use, and it's difficult to imagine proficient typists accepting its peculiarities. The lack of commercial software is even more of a drawback for the machine's business users, and that plus the mass-storage deficiencies seem likely to end the machine's business career before it begins.

Like all Sinclair products the QL is exciting, innovative, controversial and occasionally frustrating. Though it cannot fairly claim to meet any of its targets, the QL has given its competitors a new standard to meet, and a new benchmark for comparison.

Bubble Memory

The QL has a 'membrane'-style keyboard. Two signal wires are held apart by a bubble in a plastic membrane, and when the key is pressed, it squashes the bubble and the wires make contact. Resistance and return force are provided by the plastic 'blister'. With sculpted full-travel plastic keys in a flat near-standard QWERTY layout, the QL keyboard is a big improvement on the Spectrum's, but its flimsy construction, and vague 'spongy' feel make it a poor match for the Vic-20 — never mind the Macintosh or the BBC Micro

SCULPTED KEY-TOP

VERTICAL KEY GUIDE

PLASTIC BLISTER

MEMBRANE

SIGNAL WIRES

ROSALIND BUCKLAND