PIPS

PIPS (Pan Information Processing System) is SORD's own unique business package. It is a general-purpose program that can be set up to handle most business tasks from accounting to presentation graphics. It demonstrates a curious Japanese approach to marketing as it is only available free with certain SORD machines. This may provide a good reason to buy a SORD, but it also limits the popularity of an exciting and useful product

business computers, and the M285 32-bit computer running VAX-11 software for CAD (computer aided design) applications.

No other company in the world has such a wide range of computer products on the market, and every one comes with a supporting set of software. Where SORD seems to fail is that it sees its products in 'turn-key' terms. That is to say, it sees its machines as fully working systems, complete with hardware and software. SORD users do not generally have the option of choosing other software products for their machines.

The company went some way towards rectifying this situation by supplying the SB-80 operating system as an option to go with its M23 series of Z80-based computers. SB-80 is equivalent to Digital Research's CP/M 2.2 operating system and it allows CP/M software to be used, for the first time, on SORD computers.

SORD's other step in this direction was to make the UCSD (University of California at San Diego) p-System available.

For users content to stick with SORD's own software, the company offers several powerful BASICS, its own operating system, PIPS, and a Wang lookalike word processor.
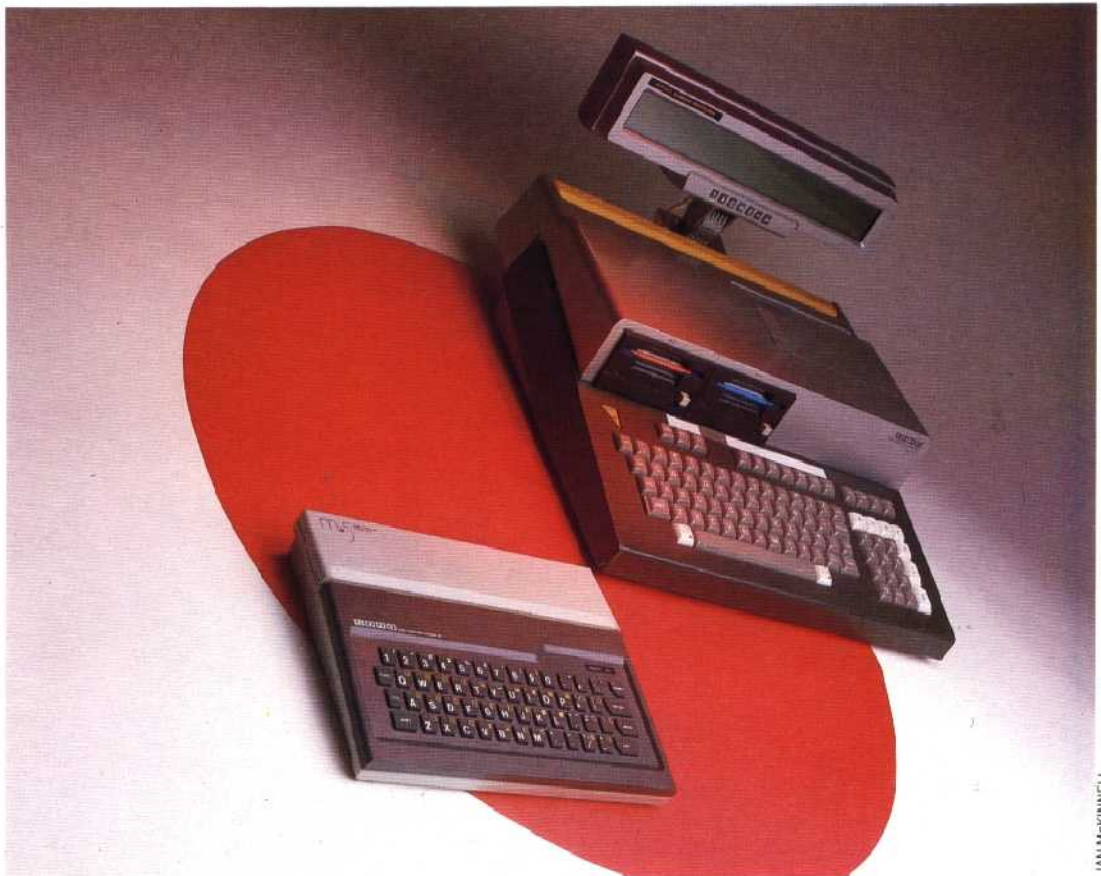
Apart from the CP/M and p-system offerings, SORD has tended to tread the path beaten by minicomputer manufacturers such as DEC, by offering systems that depend largely on in-house software for their operation. Meanwhile, the rest of the computer world has found that standardisation and inter-company compatibility is the way to generate sales. SORD has proved itself, so far, slow to adapt to this trend.

Meanwhile, SORD continues to come up with innovative hardware designs but, critics say, fails to support customers with adequate documentation for its products. Over the last two years SORD has made gargantuan efforts to provide good documentation for both PIPS and its word processor. In-depth documentation of its hardware still seems to be lacking, however, and there is still a reluctance to encourage third party software houses to develop products to run on its computers.

The next few years will probably be critical for SORD, faced as it is with the industrial might of the larger Japanese computer firms and of IBM. SORD's Shiina firmly believes in small-scale enterprise and individualism, and he has succeeded in making SORD an international company. Will it be able to stay ahead in the competitive computer world of today?

SORD Options

SORD's best-known machines are its home computer, the M5, and its portable M23P business machine. The M23P set new standards for portables by using Sony floppy disks and an 80-column LCD

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