

■ FROM THE EDITOR'S SCREEN ■ BILL MACHRONE

FINISH THE JOB, IBM



The Personal System/2s are among us. The line has some remarkable features and some remarkable holes. If IBM won't fill them, the aftermarket will.

Quick. Which is the biggest winner in the PS/2 lineup? The Model 50, of course. Its small size, relative to its power, makes it extremely desirable. What's the biggest flaw in the Model 50? The number of slots? The clock speed? The amount of RAM? No, no, and no.

It's that blasted hard disk. Oh, it's cute enough, the way it snaps in and out. But what a pig. Eighty-millisecond access time and a stinking 20 megabytes? Give me a break.

IBM kisses off the problem with a disk-caching program. It's fast and it's sophisticated, but it's no substitute for a faster disk. I'm glad IBM has blessed the concept of disk caching on PCs, but I'll take lower access times any day. Then I can use the cache program and get some *real* performance.

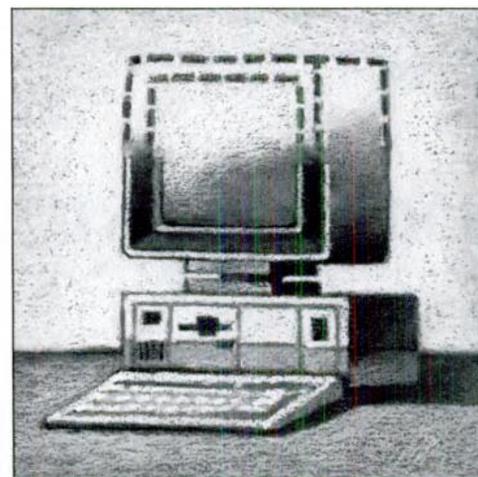
What this machine needs is a bigger, faster disk. But the marvelous snap-together design of the Model 50 is your worst enemy. It precludes anything but a 3½-inch half-height disk drive. Fortunately, several drive manufacturers, most notably Rodime, stand poised to fill the gap. Expect to see 30- and 40-megabyte half-height drives with 30-millisecond access times sometime soon. The street prices are likely to be under \$1,000. Once 70-megabyte drives become widely available with the Models 60 and 80, expect 30- and 40-megabyte half-heights from IBM.

DISPOSABLE DRIVES Three years ago, people shelved their full-height floppy disk drives in favor of a pair of half-height floppies and a hard disk. Trouble is,

what do you do with the 20-megabyte drive that came with your Model 50? Throw it in the trash can? No way. I predict a boom market in little rubber feet that you attach to the bottom of the old drive. That way you can replace the 20-megabyte 5¼-inch CMI drive on your desk with a state-of-the-art paperweight or conversation piece. What do you do with the CMI, that bane of the PC AT? Get even: open it up and put a big, greasy thumbprint on the top platter.

Seriously, IBM's bundling the 20-megabyte drive into the Model 50 is a disincentive to the drive aftermarket, but not a fatal one. The full-height floppy conversion cost a lot more than the one we're talking about now.

MONITOR MANIA The view of the future is clear—and in 16 colors with 640-by-480-pixel resolution. But as John Donne reminded us, "We see now as through a



glasse darkly." The dark glass in this case is the new lineup of color monitors. Contributing editor Charles Petzold refers to them as the "too" series: too fuzzy, too small, and too expensive.

The bottom-of-the-line monitor is a generous 14-incher, but it suffers from too-large pixels with its .43mm dot pitch. The result is fuzzy text and ill-defined 640 by 480 graphics. This monitor is best suited to looking at the pretty pictures in 320 by 200 mode. Also, it's a stripline tube, like many television CRTs. That's great for TV, but I prefer round pixel clusters for characters and computer images.

Next in line is the 12-inch model, with .28mm dot pitch. Before that bowls you over, remember that you need .28mm dot pitch to resolve 80 characters' worth of dots on a 12-inch screen. With a 13-inch screen you can get by with .31mm pitch.

At the top of the heap is the magnificent 16-inch 8514 monitor, a \$1,500 beauty with (check this) .31mm dot pitch and 1,024 by 762 resolution. Do you really want to spend \$1,500 for a monitor? How about for a whole department full of them? Me neither.

Before you get the idea that I hate the new monitors, let me remind you that no one has ever before produced an analog monitor at these prices. Even the 16-incher is a bargain compared with what you'd have spent for an equivalent monitor a few months ago.

The multiscanning monitors are sitting pretty, with their 13-inch screens, analog mode, and high resolution. Those of us who bought them are congratulating our-

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selves. Of course, we'll need special adapter cables. Not only is the new IBM pinout different, but new signal pins tell the computer whether the monitor is color or monochrome and what its resolution is.

For you product planners, I see some opportunities in the lineup. The first is a 14-inch high-resolution color monitor. A .31mm dot pitch should do the trick. The second one I would add is a 17-inch mono-

chrome monitor for desktop publishing page composition and CAD. On a 17-incher you can lay out two pages side by side, and it avoids the incredible bulk of the 19-inch screens. IBM is on the right track with 64 shades of gray on its existing monochrome monitor, but 13 inches isn't big enough for page composition.

Thanks for the megabyte, IBM, but it just isn't enough. The Model 80 will ship with 2 megabytes on the motherboard. It should have 4. And Models 50 and 60 should have 2 megabytes. There're too many hungry mouths to feed: The disk

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■ The marvelous snap-together design of the Model 50 is your worst enemy.

cache program wants the 384K above DOS. *Windows* wants a RAM-based swapdisk. *1-2-3* wants expanded memory. And you want a RAMdisk for your batch files and often-used programs.

I know you can add memory on the Micro Channel bus, but IBM's big tout for these machines was throughput, remember? Actually, IBM has half of the solution in the form of the single-inline memory modules (SIMM). The Model 50 has two sockets and the SIMMs are a half-megabyte apiece. The Model 60 has four sockets and the SIMMs are 256K bytes apiece. So you'd think you could put the modules from the 50 into the 60 and you'd have 2 megabytes. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. The BIOS doesn't recognize the extra RAM.

The 50 should have four sockets, too. Third-party manufacturers may be able to solve the problem with megabit surface-mount chips, but it will probably be cheaper to combine memory with I/O ports on expansion cards, the same as memory boards for the existing PCs. There's no performance penalty, but it does use a slot.

The Model 50 is a good computer. And it'll be a great computer when it's finished.

CIRCLE 299 ON READER SERVICE CARD