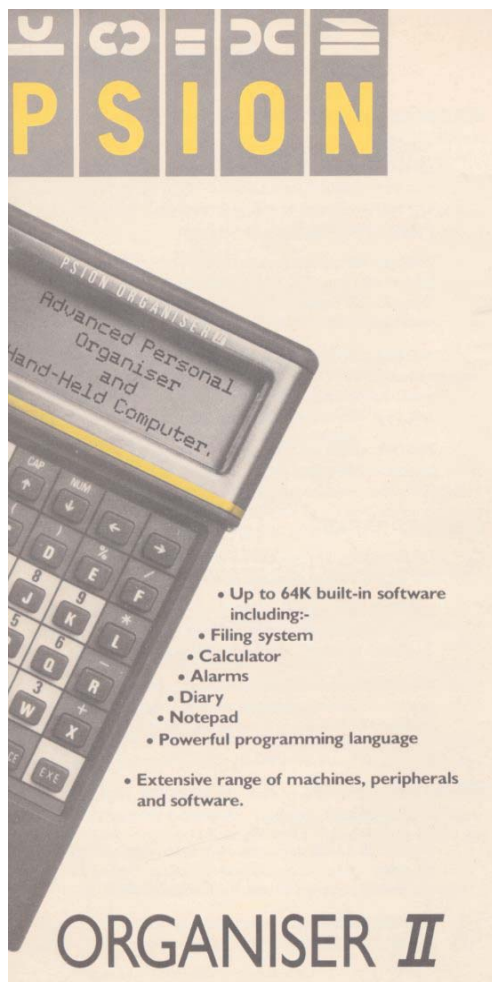


Retro-Psion

Will Green takes a look at all that's retro in the Psion world in the first of a regular fea-



The technology behind the Organiser II is a classic example of the application of state-of-the-art microelectronics, resulting in a compact machine that is 'high-powered' yet low on power consumption. I believe that 'hand computers' will become as common-place as telephones or calculators within a few years. Organiser II is possibly the first of such machines to provide real utility, versatility and breadth, the first practical computer to fit the pocket - metaphorically as well as physically.'

David E. Potter MA (Cantab.)
PhD (Lond.)
Chairman, Psion Ltd.
October 1986.

'I told you so.'

David E. Potter MA (Cantab.)
PhD (Lond.)
Chairman, Psion Ltd.
November 2003.

Actually the second quote isn't 100% authentic, but it might as well be.

The "Hand Computer", or as now it's called PDA, has become as common place as the telephone or calculator. Its interesting to note that both the telephone and calculator have been to some degree absorbed by the PDA.

The technological focus of a PDA has shifted over the years. The original devices were very much hand held computers. These computers did run database, calculator and diary software, but were fundamentally still computers.

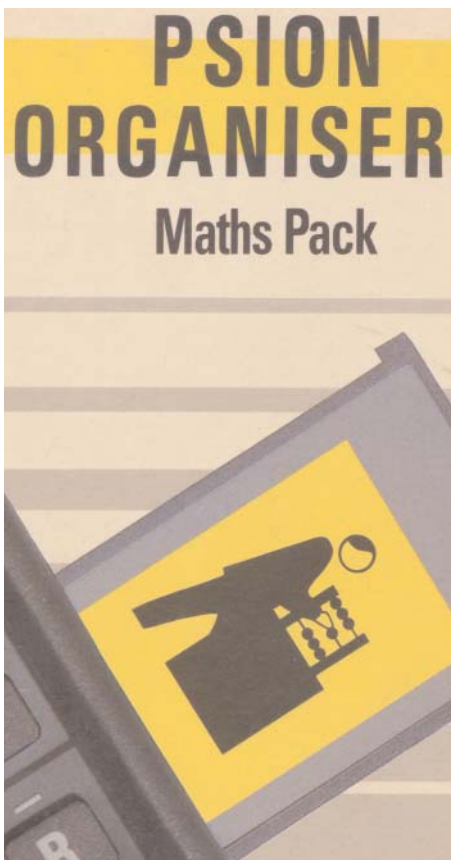
The nineties saw the re-branding of these hand held computers with the distancing of the computer part and the software part. These computers became 'Digital Organisers', with the diary and contact management features selling the devices as replacements for Filo-faxes and paper Organisers.

PDA is probably the wrong term for what these devices have now become. Their fundamental use is no longer as an assistant managing your diary and address book, digital or otherwise, but more as a communication device for email, SMS, Voice & Video.

Computing over the coming years will see the next stage, that of sharing processing power. Thanks to wireless high-bandwidth communication your hand computer will become more powerful than the worlds most powerful computer!

I'm not too sure what any of this will mean to us, but I have no doubt that the 'hand computer' will be at the very heart of this revolution.

OK. That's the future, now more about the past.



Retro-Computing

Retro-Computing is the love of old computers I suppose, in its simplest definition.

It can be many different things to different people. Like an old car, the driver can push the machine to its limits. The driver can also obtain an exact knowledge of the vehicle and be able to virtually take it bits and reassemble it. With a modern car those limits are almost unachievable, unless you fancy doing a 160mph down the motorway! The complexity of the car construction is also impossible to fathom.

This old car analogy can very easily be applied to an old computer. Other attractions of Retro-Computing include an appreciation of the design of the time, and limits of the technology at the time.

The day to day
using of



such a computer can also highlight design strengths, lessons that can be learned and applied to today's designs.

The Good Old Days!

Of course one of the most appealing aspects of Retro-Computing is that of nostalgia. The Psion Organiser II was launched in 1986, bang in the middle of YUPPIE splendour.



The Org II

manual is full of things like how to enter details of your Champagne importer, how to reserve a place in your busy YUPPIE agenda for Tennis & Squash, and remember your meeting with BJ!

Marvellous

The marvellous thing about Retro-Psion is that it is totally realistic to use a Organiser II as your day to day pocket organiser. OK, you can't receive emails or browse the web on one, but for most people that isn't really a problem.

Organiser One

You may be wondering why in reference to Retro-Psion computing I keep on about the Organiser II. 'What about the Organiser One or Series 3 Classic' you

may ask. Well the Organiser One is so very scarce that although for Psion fanatics an article covering the models features would be of interest, it is not practical to include details of it in this regular feature.

As for the Series 3 classic, I don't consider this model as true retro-computing. The 'classic' is a wonderful little computer and will have plenty of coverage in 'SIBO World'.

Models

So Retro Psion is very much for the Organiser II.

The title Organiser II covers several computing models;

Model GM.

2 line display.

8k memory.

Model XP.

2 line display.

16k memory.

Model 1A (rare).

2 line display.

32k memory.

Model 1Z.

4 line display.

32k memory.

Model 1Z64.

4 line display.

64k memory.

The Organiser II comes with a couple of expansion slots (see picture later in this article). The expansion media is either DATAPAKs or RAMPAKs.

DATAPAKs contain a EPROM (Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory) chip. Once this memory pack is full you need a DATAPAK ERASER (exposed to ultra-violet light via little glass window) to format it.

RAMPAKs can be formatted by the Organiser, but have a limited life span being battery powered.

A third version of this expansion media labeled FLASH-PAKS were used mainly for software distribution.

leaflet

The original 1989 Psion product description leaflet gives you some idea of available software and hardware.

There is also dozens of third party software available for the Organiser II series of computers.



Product Description

PSION ORGANISER II

MODEL CM: 32 character (2 line) screen. 8K RAM of internal memory. 32K ROM of built in functions including diary, filing, calculator, clock and alarm functions; OPL programming language. Optional Datapaks up to 64K, program packs, Comms Link, Mains Adaptor and Printer II can be connected.

MODEL XP: All the features of Model CM with four times the internal memory (32K RAM). Additionally, allows use of 128K Datapak, 32K Rampaks, Pocket Spreadsheet, Bar Code Reader and Magnetic Card Reader.

MODEL LZ: 80 character (4 line) screen. 32K RAM of internal memory. 64K ROM – all features of the model XP plus notepad, world dialling codes, week at a view diary, clock with stop watch and timer. Allows use of all peripherals.

MODEL LZ64: All features of the Model LZ plus twice the internal memory (64K RAM).

MEMORY PACKS

Up to two at a time plug directly into the back of your Organiser and let you build an unlimited library of data.

DATAPAKS: Equivalent to floppy disks in PCs – provide secure battery independent storage and back-up of your information even when removed. Available in sizes from 8K to 128K.

RAMPAKS: Ideal alternative if the information being stored needs to be frequently edited or revised. They use less power and are faster; RAM memory is less secure than the completely non-volatile Datapak memory.

PROGRAM PACKS

Pre-programmed software to cover many subjects.

FINANCE PACK II: Handles multiple accounts, records standing orders and carries out financial calculations. Password protection and data encryption ensure data security.

GAMES PACK: 8 Games to either play on your own or with friends:- Poker, Pontoon, Psimon, Runner, Slots, Solgor, Sub and Tenpin.

OXFORD SPELLING CHECKER: Looks up spelling of 24,000 words.

FORMULATOR: For evaluating and solving formulae and conversions. Supplied with hundreds of standard formulae.

POCKET SPREADSHEET: Full-function spreadsheet, 26 columns X 99 rows. Using Comms Link, can exchange worksheets with a PC. Compatible with Lotus™ 1-2-3™ and DIF format worksheets.

TRAVEL PACK: Translation of 700 key words and phrases between 5 languages, world clock and dialling codes, currency conversion, itineraries and expenses.

PORTFOLIO: Portfolio management for the private investor.

MATHS PACK: Solves analytical mathematical functions and provides statistical analysis.

PURE FINANCE: Professional financial calculations and problem solving.

PERIPHERALS AND ACCESSORIES

COMMS LINK (RS232): Connects the Pison Organiser II to printers, computers and modems equipped with RS232 port. Includes communications software for printers, data file transfer and terminal emulation. Supplied with 25 pin "D" type plug for IBM PC/XT/AT™. Plug adaptors available. A disk of extra communications software for either IBM PC™ and compatibles or Apple™ Macintosh™ computers included.

ORGANISER DEVELOPER: PC development system to write, test and debug your OPL programs on the PC before transferring them onto the Organiser II via Comms Link. Provided on a 5 1/4" floppy disk for IBM PC™ and compatibles and requires 512K RAM.

FORMATTER: Reformats Datapaks in 30 minutes leaving them blank for re-use. Takes two Datapaks at a time. 220-240V.

PSION PRINTER II: Rechargeable, battery powered dot-matrix thermal printer for the Pison Organiser II. Prints text or graphics, with up to 80 characters per line at approximately 1 line per second.

LEATHER CASE: Black protective case for your Organiser.

2 BOOKS: Explaining programming and file handling.

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"Apple" and "Macintosh" are trademarks of Apple Computer Inc.

Getting Started

If your interested in getting into retro-computing the first port of call has to be; <http://members.surfeu.at/org2/org2.htm>

This excellent web site is run by Boris Cornet and I'm interviewing Boris for Retro Psion in Issue Two.

The next move of course is to get hold of an Organiser II. Ebay always has a good selection, and try and go for a LZ64 if you can. Although being retro it doesn't really matter what model as retro is by definition not about 'keeping up with the Jones's'!

One or two

Datapaks or Rampaks are also useful.

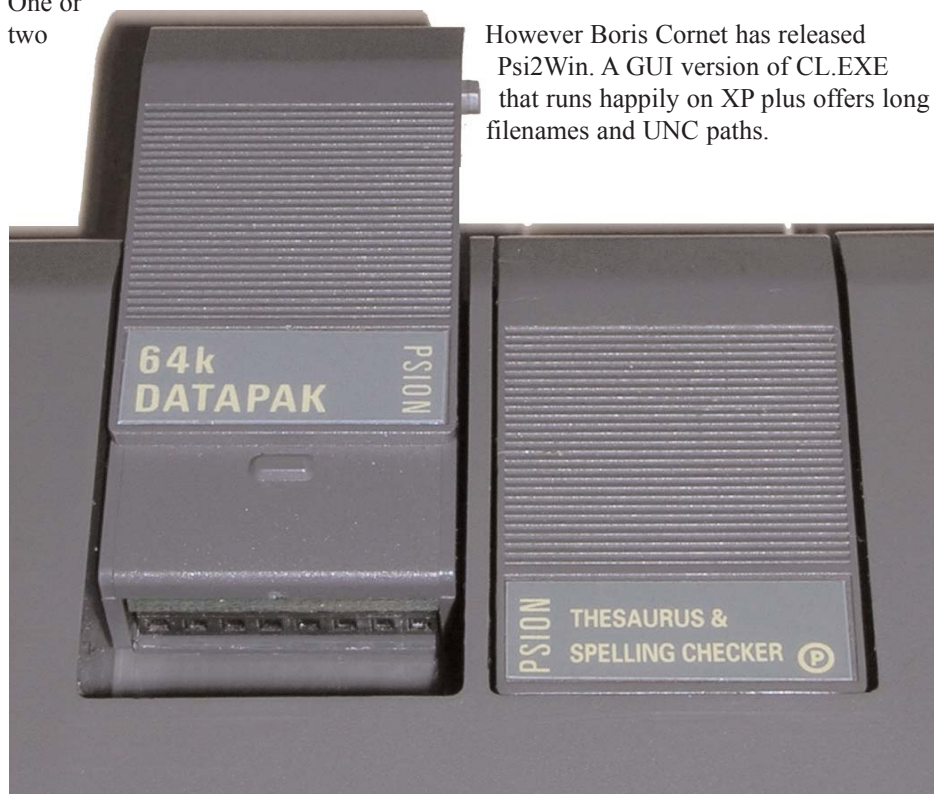
Although quality doesn't come cheap, expect to pay between 70 to 150 pounds.

Comms link

Now, Comms Link is very useful. Basically Comms Link is a cable that connects your Org II to a PC, using originally a Psion DOS program called CL.EXE.

CL.EXE being DOS based means it doesn't run on Windows XP. This could of been a real problem getting new software from Internet on to your OrgII.

However Boris Cornet has released Psi2Win. A GUI version of CL.EXE that runs happily on XP plus offers long filenames and UNC paths.





Psi2Win in action!

You can get hold of a copy from

<http://members.surfeu.at/bgc/psi2win.htm>

**look out for a full how to guide in the next issue of
Retro Psion.**

Books

Once you've got hold of your Org II the next stage is to learn how to use it!

If your Organiser comes with the original user manual then all the better, but if not a copy of the manual can also be downloaded from Boris's website.

Other books that could be useful at different stages of Retro development are;

Starter

**Using & Programming the
Organiser II by Mike Shaw.**

Intermediate

**File-Handling and other programs
for the Psion Organiser II also by**

Mike Shaw.

Advanced.

**Machine Code Programming on
the Psion Organiser by Bill Aitken**

All of these books are now out of print but do come up regularly on eBay.

Of course the other resource for Retro Psion skills is this column!

Look out for the regular tutorials over the next issues.

