The Interface

Fresno, California October/November 1998

Taking 8 Bits to the 21st Century

New meeting place
and time
See page 7

"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

--Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943

The Wheels Saga, Mile 2

Cruising With the New Wheels

by Dick Estel

Wheels is a bit like some unusual foreign version of a familiar food. It's intriguing. You know you're going to get used to it, and probably like it someday. But the familiar taste and appearance--the colors and textures, are not there.

Wheels is certainly very GEOS-like. But for someone who has GEOS set up just so, it's a bit unsettling at first. The comfortable icon colors, each with its own meaning, are gone. The background color is different and the pattern is strange. The printer and trash can icons--gone. The desktop "pad" and border area--gone. The clock area flashes the message "SET CLOCK."

None of this should be taken as an overall negative opinion of Wheels. Although I have many complaints and a long wish list for the future, Wheels is a sensational program. For many users it will be like upgrading from the old GEOS to 2.0, to the 128 version, adding a mouse, a 1581, a RAM expander, a hard drive. Someday we'll ask, how did we ever get by without it.

Wheels is the latest brainchild of GEOS programer extra ordinaire Maurice Randall, creator of geoShell, geoFax and numerous other GEOS and Commodore software products.

Wheels must be installed using an original GEOS disk. Your name is entered and displayed as a permanent part of the program in case you choose to participate in piracy. RAM expansion is required, but there is a full range of choices; any type of RAM including the very limited Commodore 1700 will work.
Once you have chosen your REU and input device, and set up the

program with the drives you want to use, it boots up with a row of menu headings across the top, an icon for each active drive, and an otherwise blank screen. There can be up to four active drives, and they can be any Commodore or CMD brand floppy disk drive, CMD's hard drive or RAM-Link, or any of the various RAM expansion units that have been developed for Commodore over the years. Clone versions of the 1541 and 1571 are untested and not recommended.

To access a drive and any files it contains, you must first open the drive by double-clicking on its icon. Here is where Wheels makes its most dramatic departure from the standard GEOS screen. GEOS has been called "Windows for Commodore," but it would be more accurate to say "window," since only one drive could be open at a time. Wheels lets you open up to 16 windows. Why so many if only four drives are supported? The additional windows can be partitions on the hard drive, RAM-Link or disks formatted with the CMD FD drives.

With one or more windows open, you can perform any of the usual GEOS operations, using the standard point and click method, and most of the keyboard commands. You can copy one or more files directly from any window to another. I found this particularly convenient for copying from one hard drive partition to another; this method is much simpler than the program included with the HD. Best of all, the hard drive partitions are not limited to the standard floppy emulation size. I have a partition with over 16,128 blocks--equivalent to a little over five normal 3.5" disks.

It might seem that such a large partition would be unwieldily, and it would be if you were to put all files in the root directory. However, Wheels supports the creation of subdirectories, opening the door for a major improvement in organization. It is possible to have the usual GEOS application programs (geoPaint, geo Write, etc.) and fonts in the main directory, and use a series of folders for various projects--such as labels, newsletter, artwork, etc.

Copying a group of files is a little different in Wheels. In the standard GEOS, you can copy files to another disk in the desired order by clicking in the order you want them copied. This is often convenient for rearranging files on a second work disk, for example. Wheels copies the files in the order they appear in the directory, regardless of the order you select them.

There are some things missing from Wheels--some of them just till the first (free) upgrade is issued; some of them for who knows how long. Standard GEOS features missing and planned for the next release include printer driver and ash tray (equivalent to trash can) icons on the desk top, auto clock setting from any available real-time clock (both the CMD hard drive and Smart Mouse have this), access to the Info files, a built-in screen saver, and the ability to change system colors and patterns.

I have been used to having the printer driver in memory, a feature that is unique to GEOS 128. I thought Maurice would have incorporated this into Wheels 64, but no such luck. The driver must be on the disk you are using, just like "Old GEOS."

My first attempt to print with Wheels was a failure,

so I sent Email to Maurice. The things he suggested did not apply to my problem. I was trying to print with geoLabel. Since this is not an original program from Berkeley, I tried printing with geoPaint. Everything worked fine. A lengthy Email exchange followed, in which Maurice insisted that he was able to print with geoLabel, and I insisted I was not. Finally he had the wisdom to ask if I was using geoLabel V1.0 by John White. No, I was using the commercial, copyrighted program geoLabel by Roger Lawhorn. Maurice promised to speak to Roger. Meanwhile, another program I use a lot joined the list of programs that won=t work with Wheels.

In fact, Wheels does not work with many of the useful third party programs that have been written for GEOS, and there is no word on when or whether they can be made to work, or whether Wheels will incorporate these necessary features. Wheels does not support most directory sorting programs, geoCanvas,
geoWizard, and the batch file copier I use that lets you select a list of files to be copied to the REU when you boot up. Support is needed for something like the pad color manager, that lets you color code your icons.

How much you need the missing capabilities and incompatible programs depends on what you do with GEOS and how much you do. Over the past few years, I have processed over 20 double-sided disks of scanned graphics. These were converted to GEOS format and put in their final form with extensive use of geo-Wizard and geoCanvas. This project is essentially completed, but if I were to continue with it, I could not use Wheels in its present form. For more routine use of GEOS with its original BSW applications, on a basic system with one or two drives and an REU, I=m not sure this version of Wheels offers enough to justify the learning process. On the other hand, for someone who does a lot with GEOS and uses a hard drive, or even more so a RamLink, Wheels is the only path to making full use of its capabilities.

The manual is well written and clear for the most part, although it could use an index. Maurice has been using some parts of Wheels for several years, so things he takes for granted are not so clear to the new user. I found a couple of features were not explained at all. On the other hand, Email to the president and chief programmer usually gets a same-day response. Try that with Microsoft Publisher and see how soon Bill Gates gets back to you!

There=s a lot more to say about Wheels, and as I use it over the next few months, and collect reports from other users, we=ll continue to report on the Wheels Saga.

Wheels is available for $36 plus $4 shipping in North America; $6 elsewhere. A special group offer is available: Six or more copies to one address are $32 each with no additional shipping charges.
Maurice Randall, Click Here Software Co., P.O. Box 606, Charlotte MI 48813; Email Arca93@Delphi.com; web site: http://peo-

Book Review:

The Internet for C64/128 Users by Gaelyne R. Gasson

by Bev Harvey (bharvey@the.link.ca)

If I were to be limited to one single word in describing this instruction manual, I would have no hesitation in choosing the word ACOMPLETE.@

As a hobby Commodore user since way back in 1984, I have been wading through instruction manuals; some I could master, others with perseverence I managed, with great difficulty, to get

something somewhat close to what was supposed to be. It seems while for the most part Commodore programmers were ever brilliant in writing computer programs, I had difficulty following their instructions. For me, these important people were under the assumption the reader had several degrees in computer science, or was at least on a computer intelligence level of the writer. How wrong some of them were.

I had heard Gaelyne was writing this manual quite some time before it was available. I waited with anticipation; I made discreet inquiries. Finally, my good friend Tom Adams sent me e-mail and told me the instruction manual was ready and gave me Gaelyne's address. I immediately contacted her and gave her my Visa number, and within a week the book was in my hot little hands.

Quickly, I thumbed through it. I expected volumes of instructions similar to the "Dummy" books -but no, here was a neat little book, about half the size of those other instruction books mentioned, ring bound for easy handling and the whole works outlined in seventeen chapters with the usual Appendix Resource Listings and Index.

Further study showed this lady certainly knew her stuff. The workings of the Commodore Computer, both C-64 and C-128, were clearly outlined. She shows an exceptional knowledge of the Internet as related to the Commodore, and has organized her book in such a manner that it could apply to the beginner anxious to "Surf The Net" as the saying goes, or to those who have been on the Net for considerable time, but never fully realized the potential of our often maligned Commodores. All the reader had to do was go to the index at the front of the book, figure out about where his knowledge level was, and jump on board. She has covered the most used terminal programs -Nick Rossi's Novaterm (there's even a sort of a demo to get you started), Desterm, Dialogue, and Bob's Term for complete coverage. Strictly your choice.

"I HAVE LEARNED MORE IN TEN DAYS THAN I EVER DID THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF"

I can't speak too highly of this book. To me it's a relief to follow instructions aimed at the average Commodore fan. I think she should have named it "Everything You Wanted o Know About The Internet Using a 64 or 128 but Were Afraid to Ask."

I was pleasantly surprised to learn procedures that other platform users were bragging about are available on the Commodore. She even outlines the dialogue to use if the Internet provider has any doubts about the capabilities of the Commodore. A source list of providers is listed complete with voice phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Free-Nets are listed by State including Hawaii and even two locations in Canada.

I have used this book extensively for the last ten days now and can say I have learned more in that time by referencing the manual when I logged on than I ever did the last year and a half I have been using the World Wide Web. The only disadvantage I can think of, and that's difficult to do, is the price, including Nick Rossi's Term Program, was over $50.00 Canadian. Of course, at the present

rate of exchange US to Canada the American price would be much cheaper. However when you compare this cost and the valued content to the "Dummy" instruction books there is no comparison. The value is obvious.

For any Commodore user presently using the Internet--or those thinking of jumping on the Net, I personally recommend this instruction manual. Once you start to use it, in conjunction with logging on, it will become your constant reference for easy access and use in the complicated world of cyberspace.
(Reprinted from *Mailink*, newsletter of Meeting Commodore Users Through the Mail, July 1997)

The book has been updated to a third edition, now available. The following ordering information was obtained from Gaelyne in late July 1998 for this reprint:

If mailing a personal check or bank draft from the US, the price is: $29.95 US each plus shipping. ($12 Express /$9 Airmail /$7 Economy Air)

If ordering using a credit card (Phone/Fax/Email/ Web orders) we must charge in Australian dollars.

The price is $36.95 AU and the shipping options are the same--but in Australian dollars, it's: $15 Express / $11.50 Airmail / $9 Economy Air

Based on today's currency exchange rates (16 July '98), one book shipped Economy Air using a credit card would cost $45.95 in Australian, and US customers would have $28.69 US debited to their credit card.

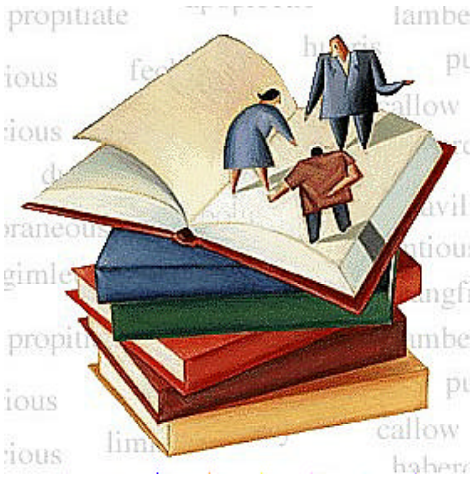
A Currency Conversion utility is available on the web at: http://www.xe.net/currency/

We can accept Master Card, Visa, Bankcard and American Express. Personal cheques are welcome -they should be made payable to: "VideoCam Services."

VideoCam Services
90 Hilliers Rd.
Reynella SA 5161
Phone: +61 (08) 8322-2716
Fax: +61 (08) 8387-5810
Email: videocam@videocam.net.au
WWW: http://videocam.net.au

For those who prefer to order from a US company, the book is available from Loadstar in the USA (1-800-831-2694). Item #900920. The price is $35 including shipping in the USA. Loadstar accepts credit card, check and money orders. (VideoCam Services can not accept money orders).

The 3rd Edition has an additional chapter covering TCP/IP Connections (such as PPP or SLIP), so the number of chapters has increased to 18, plus appendix material.



What the Editor Said

QUOTE/UNQUOTE

The quotes that appear on the front page each issue (starting in May-June) come from a variety of sources. Some of them came to me without any credit; these are taken from the book *Computer Wimp*, a delightful guidebook to buying a computer by John Bear. Although the shopping advice is outdated (published in the late 80's), the quotes and the author's witty approach to the subject never go out of style. You can read a full review of this book in an old Interface (I could not track down which issue). Or you can wait for the January Mailink, newsletter of Meeting Commodore Users Through the Mail, when an updated review will appear.

If you've noticed an interesting quote relating to computers or technology, please share it with the editor.

LOADSTAR 128

The following Email was received from the new editor of LOADSTAR 128:

Thank you for including me on your club's mailing list. Living in the hinterland as I do, it is difficult to keep up with what is going on in the Commodore community and information such as that contained in your newsletter is a big help.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with suggestions and comments regarding LOADSTAR 128. And please encourage your members to do so as well. I am also buying original 128 programs if any of your members have written anything which may appeal to our subscribers.

bob@loadstar.com; Bob Markland Box 1535 Gillette, WY 82717

PRINT SHOP MAGIC

Last issue when I left the master at Office Depot downtown, the clerk took it upon himself to make a copy of my original, and use that copy as the "master." This meant that the issues sent out were a 2nd generation copy, which resulted in serious deterioration to the quality of the graphics. I sent a letter to the manager, with no response so far.

VACATION

Being in Banff, Canada, with a two-hour rainstorm the first night, cool nights, pleasant days, and a high of 90 one day only beats being in Fresno with highs of 105. Not to mention no phones, no work, and no computers.

—DE

Easy Connector Labels

by Cecil Serfent-Chesapeake Beach

Like most computers, mine sits on a desk underneath an overhanging shelf, attached to a rat's nest of wires and cables. It's hard to see the back panel at all, let alone well enough to plug in another wire. So when I need to work with the plugs, it's very hard to locate them.

I've solved the problem by labeling each connector on the TOP surface of my computer, way at the back, immediately above the connector itself.

Now, when I need to locate the serial bus or some other connector, I know it's right below it's label. Once I have it located so precisely, it's easy to re-

How to Get There From Here

PICNIC
Saturday, October 10
Ingrid & Sandy Dippollet
Home
5656 Indianola Avenue

Go East on Shaw from Clovis Avenue, turn left (north) on Indianola; home is on the right.

Maps downloaded from http://city.net/maps

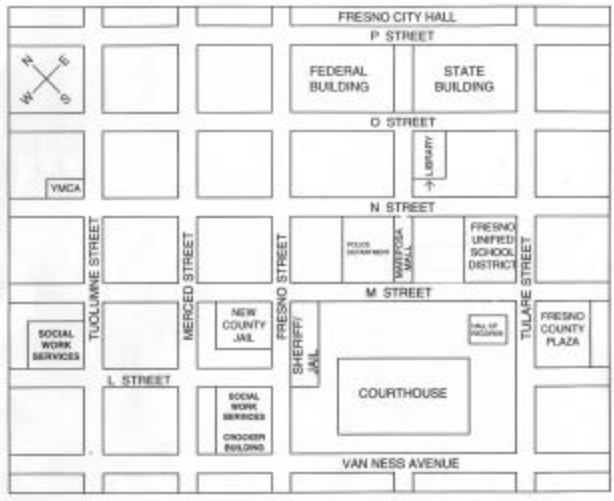
New Meeting Location

Nov 7, Dec 5

10 a.m.

Fresno County Library
2420 Mariposa, between N and O St.
(Sarah McCardle Room - Upstairs)

Enter on N Street
(for elevator, use main Mariposa St. Entrance)



From north or south on **Highway 99,** use Fresno Street exit and go NE, then right on O, right on Tulare, right on N. From **Hwy 180** (Ventura) (going west), right on O, left on Tulare, right on N; from **Hwy 41** going south, take Ventura exit; left on Ventura from exit, right on O, left on Tulare, right on N; from **new Freeway 41** going north, get on **99 north** and see above; from **north Fresno**, go south on Blackstone, half-left on O, right on Tulare, right on N. For all: **Park on N Street or turn**

Scape

by Robert Bernardo

With all of the late-breaking activities happening in our club and in the Commodore universe in general, I couldn't delay my year-end summary until the November/December issue. Like Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert in their movie reviews on television, here are what I consider to be the highs and lows.

THUMBS UP

Thank you to the hospitality of the Lane County Commodore User Group in Eugene, Oregon; the Albany-Corvallis Commodore User Group in Corvallis, Oregon; and CWest/Awest of San Francisco, California. During the summer, I was able to attend their meetings and gather more information for a future Bernardo on the Road article. I'm indebted to these people from LCCUG, Karl Stone, membership secretary, for his kindness; Charlie Andrews, developer of the CMD hard drive, for showing me his prototype--CMD HD number 1; and Ron and Ruth Hackley of the Fun Graphics Machine for their continuing friendship. I owe the Hackleys a lunch! I'd like to thank Bob and Christine Stom, respectively president and treasurer of ACCUG, for their patience and friendship in helping me. Finally, I'd like to thank Bobbie Sellers of CWest/ Awest for her continuing correspondence and info about what's happening with her club. All of these people work hard to keep their clubs functioning.

Thank you to FCUG members, Del Contreras and Bill Gilbert, and to vice-president Helen Silvas for working hard to get our club a new meeting place. Ever since Manchester Mall started charging $20 a month for use of a meeting room, we've been on the lookout for a new place which wouldn't charge and drain our budget. On September 14 Del called to confirm that our new meeting place would be the Fresno downtown library, just off of Tulare Street. Starting on November 7 and continuing on the first Saturday of every month, we will meet there from 10 a.m.-12 noon. We can even run over to 1 p.m., if need be. Thank you to the Manchester Mall for having us meet at their location all of these years, and thank you to our new hosts at the Fresno downtown library.

Thank you to those programmers, writers, and companies that still support our Commodore computers, especially Maurice Randall--creator of the GEOS upgrade, Wheels; Arndt Dettke--co-creator of the graphics conversion and manipulation package, GoDot; Gaelyne Gasson--author of The Internet for Commodore 64/128 Users and keeper of the FCUG web page; the above-mentioned Ron and Ruth Hackley--creators of the graphics manipulation package, the Fun Graphics Machine; Matthew Desmond--creator of the C128 terminal program, Desterm 3.02; Nick Rossi--creator of the C64/128 terminal program, Novaterm 9.6; Jeff Jones and Fender Tucker--the dynamic duo of the disk magazine, Loadstar; Guenther Bauer--writer and layout editor for Germany's GO64! magazine; Jason Mackenzie and Jason Kelk --editors of England's Commodore Zone magazine; Allan Bairstow and Richard Bowen--current and former editors of England's Commodore Scene magazine, Tim Hewelt and David Witmer--two of the hosts of Genie's Commodore Chat area; the many hosts of the very active Commodore area on the Delphi on-line service, and all of the people at Creative Micro Designs for being a source and builder of hardware for our Commodores. To those people and companies I have forgotten, my apologies...

THUMBS DOWN

Not all is positive, though. The Commodore Roundtable area of the Genie on-line service has been severely neglected. The Internet Launchpad is full of old, outdated links. The news reader function to the Usenet groups does not work anymore. The monthly, activities calendar does not get updated for months, the last time being June. The download library has not been updated with any new files since April. The chat hosts seem to be the only ones who still care, and they can't repair/update the system.

Who's responsible for maintaining the Genie's Commodore Roundtable? It's emblazoned every time you enter the roundtable--Creative Micro Designs. I remember several years ago when CMD took over the roundtable from John Brown. In the last few months of his tenure there, Brown was not doing anything with the roundtable. CMD took charge and said that they would maintain the site and improve it--in other words, make it into a place where Commodore people would love to gather. CMD is now failing to keep its word.

Example--when the download library started suffering from neglect, I sent an E-mail to CMD's Doug Cotton. No response. Later I telephoned Doug at CMD and offered my services as the new download librarian (Lou Schonder, former librarian had departed Genie). Doug said that he would have to figure out the library system first before he could turn it over to anybody else. He also assured me that in the next 1 or 2 weekends he would post any new files to the library. I knew that there were new files to post; I had uploaded between two dozen and three dozen files to the library since April. A few weeks later, upon my return from my travels, I checked the library. No new files.

I telephoned CMD again and spoke to a different man (who sounded like Charlie Christiansen). I asked for Doug Cotton, and the man responded Doug was not in. I explained the situation. The man said that he didn't know that that had happened to the roundtable and that he would pass my concerns onto to Doug. No response.

After a week or two I telephoned CMD again and got a hold of Doug. Once again he assured me that he would get the download library updated the following weekend. Nothing happened.

Now it was mid-August; I wanted to have good news about the situation for the upcoming FCUG newsletters. I faxed Doug a letter, telling him about my disappointment and his unkept assurances. Nothing.

In summary, CMD is not maintaining the Genie Commodore Roundtable. The library's 17,000-18,000 files are now stagnating, frozen at that number. Will the download library go the way of Quantum Link's library or Compuserve's CBMAPP library, i.e., into oblivion? Will CMD find the time to fix the Commodore Roundtable? With its business and hardware projects, has CMD stretched itself too thin, too thin to concern themselves with the roundtable?

Commodore SX64
(C-64 with built-in monitor and disk drive)
$175

Call Ralph Parrott
229-9912

Cartridge Port Expanders: Getting Plugging In

by Dick Estel

When Commodore Business Machines released the original Commodore 64, they wisely included a cartridge port. Originally this slot was primarily used for game cartridges, but programmers soon came up with numerous other devices to plug into that spot to improve the capability of the machines.

One of the first was the Fastload by Epyx, which not only improved the notoriously slow loading rate of programs, but also gave users a built-in DOS wedge, eliminating the need to load it as a separate program. RAM expanders (REU's) from CBM and other utility cartridges followed, and soon a Commodore user could find himself with three or more items in regular use, all vying for the single cartridge port.

Realizing that removing and inserting different cartridges was a lot of trouble, as well as a source of wear on both the computer and the plug-in device, Aprotek and other companies soon came to the rescue with cartridge port expanders. These devices plug into the cartridge port and have several slots to allow several cartridges to be plugged in at once (usually three or four). They have switches to allow a specific cartridge to be on or off, and even permit the use of two or more cartridges at once.

This was particularly useful for combining the services of a utility cartridge with a REU (attempting to use two or more utility cartridges together usually produces conflicts).

I have the Aprotek 4-slot unit, and find that the REU and the Super Snapshot function together in perfect harmony. The only serious drawback is that the expansion slots require the cartridge to be inserted vertically. This is not a problem with most game and utility cartridges, which usually measure about 3 1/4 by 2 3/4 inches. However, the REU is a much larger device (CBM's unit is 6 1/4 by 5 1/2 inches), and is a bit wobbly this way. Even so, barring earthquakes and sudden hard bumps to the computer, the REU seems to "stand up" to this configuration with no problem.

Another problem affects these units in some conditions. I had experienced some problems with my Pacman cartridge not working, and asked Del Contreras if he thought it was due to wear on the slots. He pointed me toward the solution--some programs demand to be in the first or second slot. I moved Pacman to the number one position and it worked fine.

Recently there have been solutions to the other problems mentioned. Not surprisingly, they come from Creative Micro Designs. With no other expansion units still in production, about three years ago CMD brought out the EX3, priced at $34 and the EX2+1 at $39. The first is similar to earlier devices, with three vertical slots. But the EX2+1 has two vertical and one horizontal slot, the latter at the end, allowing the larger Commodore REU to plug in and lie flat. CMD also produces their own variation on the RAM expansion units, the CMD 1750 and 1750XL (reviewed in our October-November 1997 issue). Both are the size of a standard game or utility cartridge, allowing stable vertical installation.

Other than the CMD units, the only way you can obtain a cartridge port expander is to find one on the used equipment market. If you use a utility cartridge and REU extensively, or find yourself pulling some of your old game cartridges in and out, it's worth investing in one of these useful devices.