

XOS/80 COLUMN PACK

from Computer Support

Price £69.95



I have to admit that this is a review of a product that I have not personally tried but others who have used it have raved over it and urged me to do a review. Why haven't I tried it? Well, as far as hardware goes I am a complete novice and in my 800XL at least, it requires the desoldering of a chip and the resoldering of the XOS chip. That, believe me, is no job for a complete novice! Don't be put off from reading on though because if you want one Computer Support will fit for you.

At first sight an 80-column pack would seem to be of interest only to dedicated word-processors but behind the product title lies a whole host of changes to the XL/XE Operating System which you might well wish to consider. First though that 80 column mode.

You are not stuck with 80 columns. What the chip does is give you an 80 column option which is enabled by holding the SELECT key on power-up otherwise the machine defaults to normal 40 column mode. In order to ensure the maximum readability the screen is forced to black and white in 80 column mode and other standards (in both modes) include a faster keyboard response, a properly centred screen and the cursor redefined as an underline. All editing facilities remain the same but the character set has been redefined to include that elusive £ sign in lieu of the backslash. It would probably have been better to redefine the hash (#) as this is the ASCII standard for a £ sign on most printers, and put the hash in place of the backslash. Maybe they will do this on a later revision. So far, excellent changes to make the machine much more professional as far as word processing is concerned.

Most software packages that use the recognised screen and editor handlers will work fine but some that have shortcuts to the OS may not work. Computer Support have been working on a number of patches to these and can probably advise whether your word processor will work or get it to work.

Let's go back to 40 column mode. Here you will get a default screen of green with white characters and a number of other changes. Perhaps most important is compatibility with the old Revision B OS which means that virtually all our software will now run without the need for a Translator. Now, that is probably of great interest to cassette users, who up to now have had to miss out, and cassette owners will find another bonus. The cassette load and save has been adjusted to 820 baud so that all programs will save and load some 40% faster and they will be still be compatible with other machines. If you are into commer-

Programmers will benefit by using CONTROL and TAB to stop/start scrolling of listings allowing one finger control, and having full error messages displayed (and buzzed!). No more hunting for manuals. And programmers will also find many other items of interest for several features of the OS can be controlled by software.

Other changes include the halving of printer timeout and the echoing of joystick ports 3 & 4 from the old OS to ports 1 & 2 allowing programs that use these ports to run on the XL/XE.

What sort of support can you expect from Computer Support having forked out £69.95? Well firstly they offer a full year guarantee on all products and secondly will provide you with an updated ROM, whenever amendments are made, for a fee of £6 which will include the latest instructions. As far as updates go, there is a spare 3K on the chip and Computer Support invite your suggestions for its use. If there is some feature that you think is missing or you think could be improved, tell them and you may well find it on a subsequent revision. The people there are certainly knowledgeable and will try to ensure that you get the best from the product.

To sum up then, a lot of useful features are hidden behind what appears to be a straight 80 column screen handler. If you are confident with electronics or are lucky enough to have an early 800XL with socketed chips you should have no problems in fitting the XOS yourself but if you have any doubts you can send your machine to Computer Support and have it fitted. This will push up the price by a further £15 but a repair will cost a lot more.

If you would like to get a look at the XOS before buying and have a User Group nearby ask the Secretary to get in touch with John Lawson at Computer Support and he will probably arrange to give a demonstration. ●

ATARI 600/800XL

DUAL OPERATING SYSTEM

You could have a dual operating system with the flick of a switch. This will allow you to run all known software written for the 400 and 800 computers or your XL.

It consists of a small socket board which simply plugs into computer. No soldering required.

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