

Reviews

Five Commodore 64 Word Processors

Review by Michael Quigley

The following five word processors are all for the Commodore 64. Although none of them is good enough to take the place of **PaperClip**, one of the most popular word processors ever created — or even Cardco's **Write Now!**, which I use extensively — some of them have interesting capabilities, as well as a few oddities.

All of them are disk-based, and all but one are in machine language. **TextEd** is the only one not protected, while **Textomat 64** has some fancy DOS routines that make it impossible to use with the Epyx Fastload cartridge. The others contain the now-archaic, 1541-destroying errors that cause a knocking exactly like disk-formatting sounds.

Textomat 64

Textomat 64 comes from Abacus Software, the same people who brought us all those nifty books like *The Anatomy of the 1541 Disk Drive*, wretchedly translated from the German. **Textomat** seems to have come from the same factory, but its 105-page, three-ring binder manual is logically organized and almost completely free of spelling, grammatical and translation problems.

Unfortunately, the manual's ease of use is not duplicated in the program. While the overlying design concept is a good one, there are a lot of annoying little idiosyncrasies. For one thing, you have to hit a shifted **RETURN** at the end of a paragraph. And the delete key doesn't work normally — you have to put it on the character you want to delete, instead of deleting the character *before* the cursor. The manual says this is "more convenient, since most of the time the cursor is positioned at beginning (sic) of the unwanted text so you don't have to move to the end to delete it." Uh, sure...

The program performs most of its functions with menus and prompts, many of which appear at the bottom of the screen. These are accessed with the cursor keys and the **f1** key, which is used along with the **f2** key to jump back and forth to the main text area ('Write Mode'). The **CTRL**

key is used to enter the 'Command Mode', in which one can edit and move through the document. One problem with many of these menus is that you really have to think in advance about what you are doing. For example, when you want to search and replace, you cannot see your text; and when you want to rename a file, you cannot see the directory.

One part of this program I really disliked was customizing **Textomat** for my particular printer. (The program is written for use with a 1525, 1526 or MPS 801, for which no such modification is necessary.) This involves two things: converting the *entire alphabet* (upper and lower case) to the corresponding ASCII codes of the printer, and defining control characters to produce things like subscripts, superscripts and bold type — in hexadecimal! I tried to do this, with little success on printout. Considering **PaperClip** includes setup files for just about every printer on the market, I don't see why **Textomat** couldn't at least include some for the popular makes of printers. (Two of the other programs reviewed here — **The Whole Bit** and **Word Commander 64** — do just that).

Textomat does have some interesting features, like the ability to make calculations in the text and print foreign language characters. However, in light of the printer hassles I encountered, I find it very hard to recommend.

Textomat 64 (\$39.95), from Abacus Software, PO Box 7211, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49510.

The Whole Bit

The Whole Bit is not all that bad, though it's not without its share of little peculiarities.

Editing is literally of the full-screen variety — if you want to go beyond the boundaries of the screen, you have to use the function keys to scroll. The function keys have different... er... functions, depending on whether you are in 40-column or 80-column mode (the latter scrolling text from left to right). Pushing **RETURN** while typing in text makes a double space, while the 'up arrow' is used for a single return at the end of a paragraph.

The speed of the cursor has been increased, which makes manipulating it easy when editing text. However, in other parts of the program where you are

supposed to place the cursor on something (like a file name, to load it in the directory), this can be a disadvantage — especially when coupled with the fact that the cursor only moves down in this kind of situation.

One of the major characteristics of **The Whole Bit** that is either annoying or reassuring depending on your viewpoint is that most of the prompts are double-checked — the *Are you sure?* syndrome, which is no guarantee that mistakes will not be made. One nice touch is that a shifted **RUN/STOP** will get you out of virtually any situation, and back to the main menu.

DOS commands are limited to 'new', 'scratch', 'resave', 'rename', 'save' and 'load'. Each file is saved along with various parameters, such as margins, tab settings, lines per page and justification, as a 'master file'. In order to merge one file into another, you have to save the parts to be merged as a 'non-master file' — that is, without the auxiliary information. You can also copy or chain together up to four files, and save them under a new file name.

Eight printer functions are supported — bold face, double strike, italics, compressed, underlining, wide type, superscripts and subscripts; and there are another six user-definable keys, which have to be entered as hex numbers.

The Whole Bit is generally well-designed and relatively easy to use. (One major oversight is that if you hit **RUN/STOP** and **RESTORE**, it's bye-bye to everything.) Aside from a few grammatical atrocities, the manual for the program is very good.

The Whole Bit (\$39.95), Applied Technologies, Inc., Computer Products Div., Kittery, Me. 03904.

Bank Street Writer

Bank Street Writer is a limited word processor that seems to have been designed with novices in mind. Text is created in the 'Write Mode'. If you want to edit it, you have to enter the 'Edit Mode', which allows you to move the cursor around. Then you have to return to the 'Write Mode' to actually make the corrections. The 'Transfer Mode' allows you to do various DOS operations, such as 'new', 'rename', 'scratch', 'load' and 'save'. File names can be a maximum of eight characters long, since the remaining let-

ters are for an optional 'password', to prevent others from accessing the material. (I'm sure that examining the material would be a relatively easy task for someone who really wanted to see it).

Compared to many other word processors, **Bank Street Writer** is strictly 'meat and potatoes'. Block manipulation is limited to fifteen lines of text at a time, and no printer tricks (like italics, condensed print, and so forth) are supported. There isn't even a character to indicate where paragraphs end!

Although prior to printing you can establish such parameters as the number of characters per line, pagination, spaces between lines, page heading, pause between pages, and ejecting the last page, there are other things that can only be changed in the 'Utility Program'. These include lines per page, the top and bottom margin, printer device number and secondary address, screen colours, line and form feeds, and an audible clicking when keys are pressed. You cannot make use of the 'Utility Program' when **Bank Street Writer** is running — instead, you have to access it while the main program is loading by pushing the 'left arrow' key.

Personally, I don't like **Bank Street Writer**; and especially not the business of jumping back and forth between the 'Write' and 'Edit' modes constantly. I can see, however, where it would be well-suited to educational applications. The program is extensively menu-driven and crash-proof; it comes with a lengthy tutorial on the disk, instructing the user in the fundamentals of word processing (according to **Bank Street Writer**); and the manual for the program is excellent.

Bank Street Writer (\$49.95), Broderbund Software, 17 Paul Drive, San Rafael, CA 94903. The package contains two copies of the program disk.

Word Commander 64

One of the first things I try to do with a new word processor is to 'make it screw up'. One of the nice things about **Word Commander 64** is that it makes it easy to access many printer features, like underlining and boldface, by using the Commodore key with a single letter — for example, 'U' for Underline — before and after the section you want to change. So I threw in everything but the kitchen sink, and **Word Commander** performed without a moment's hesitation — even when mixing double-wide and normal print in justified columns!

While there are many aspects of **Word Commander 64** like this one that I like

(including the ability to move the cursor all over the place), there are quite a few that are disappointing — starting with the knock-knock noise while the program loads.

While there is full-screen editing, the cursor is in the 'eternal insert' mode, and there is no way to correct words by typing over them. The cursor colour is the same as the border and, while you are allowed a wide range of choices, I found it difficult to get satisfactory colour combinations.

DOS commands (aside from 'save' and 'load') are limited to 'new', 'scratch' and 'directory'; and if you save a program under a file name that already exists, the previous one is replaced without warning, which may not be what you want. File names are limited to ten characters. You can't merge a file on disk with one in memory — instead you have to chain them together while printing.

I wrote to the manufacturer about these problems, and they sent me back a reply (at least give them points for customer support) saying that most of the complaints were 'design features'. To this, I can only say 'too bad', since in **Word Commander 64** there are the makings of a really first-class word processor.

Word Commander 64 (\$49.95), NMG Micro Software, P.O. Box 131, Marlboro, NJ 07746.

TextED

In its ads, **TextED** is described as a "powerful text editor for document processing and program design" that allows you to "create, modify, and save cassette data files and disk SEquential files", as well as "convert program files to and from SEquential files". Among its features are a "line image editor using simple commands", "full screen editor (uses cursor control keys)" and a "print command with indentation and margins (which) supports COMMODORE printers".

Sounds pretty good, eh? Well, I got the shock of my life when I received **TextED** for review. The program is written in BASIC! This means that it's slower than molasses. I tried compiling it, which improved matters slightly, but in doing so, I found an error — an **ON...GOTO** a line that didn't exist!

To make things worse, the documentation for the program is unusually bad, written in a style reminiscent of bibliographical footnotes, and full of peculiar phraseology the program's author seems to have invented to make life more complicated. Consider the

following: "A file is a bounded text which is written on tape or disk"; and "By default, **TextED** uses the line-image editing mode. Line-image commands are instructions to **TextED** which direct the program to carry out some operation, such as **LOADING** some file into a buffer."

Terrible! Terrible! And then there are commands like ".+n addresses the nth line after the current line", ".-n addresses the nth line before the current line" and "\$-n addresses the nth line before the last line". As Charlie Brown would say: "Good Grief!"

I can't see much use for **TextED**, except for someone who wants to study how a word processor works prior to writing their own. At least it comes on a high-quality Maxell disk.

TextED (\$19.95), APCAD, PO Box 83, Saline MI 48176. VIC 20 or C-64 versions on disk or tape. □

The PX-80 printer
from TEO
Epson-compatible
dot matrix printer

Review by Doug Chisholm

Last spring, just before school ended, I purchased a Commodore 64. Not long after that, I discovered a sophisticated word processor called **PaperClip** (from Batteries Included), which introduced me to the joys of word processing. I quickly became an addict, and my neighbours soon tired of my frequent use of their printers. It soon became apparent I needed a printer of my own: school would be starting soon, and I couldn't bear the thought of going back to rough copies and pens.

I looked at various styles of printer, and opted for dot matrix, so I could do graphics. I also needed one with high-quality print, to use when writing essays. In short, I wanted the best of both worlds — letter quality printing, and graphics too. I'd heard some horror stories about the Commodore 1526, and it seemed to lack the advanced features of other printers (such as double strike, subscripts, superscripts and underlining capabilities). I looked at the Epson line of printers, which were very nice, but very expensive. Then, much to my great delight, I discovered the TEO PX-80!

The TEO PX-80 is an Epson clone that has all the features of the Epson MX-80