

Sinclair misses second deadline

SINCLAIR has failed to keep to its own revised delivery schedule for the first of its new QL microcomputers.

Following initial production delays in February, Sinclair announced that although it would be unable to keep to the 28-day dead-line for mail-order deliveries, it expected to despatch the first production run of machines — around 1,000 units — by the end of March.

With that deadline now passed, Sinclair's design difficul-

ties are still continuing and Sinclair at present still has no more than a handful of pre-production machines. Sinclair's managing director Nigel Clarke himself suggested one shipment deadline for the end of March. A spokesman for Sinclair admitted, "It is true that no QLs have yet been despatched, but we are confident of sticking to the target dates in the letters we sent to customers." — First of these is the end of April.

Sinclair has announced that it has appointed Prism as retail distributor of the machine. It is also working on an implementation of the Prolog lan-

guage for the machine.

● PCW's QL order: Week 11. Interest gained by Sinclair from our order is now over £5. The nature of the compensation to be offered by Sinclair is still shrouded in mystery.

Microdeal dongle

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tected with the same code.

Microdeal shortly plans to launch its first title protected by the dongle — *Buzzard Bait* for the Dragon 32. The program will cost more than other Microdeal games — £9.95 — because of the additional cost of manufacturing and including the protection device.

According to Microdeal managing director John Symes, the game was picked because it was the "best Dragon program we could find". *Buzzard Bait* is written by the US Tandy software house Tom Mix — which also produced *The King*.

The title will be released in the UK under the Tom Mix banner, through a new company — Tom Mix Software formed jointly by John Symes and Tom Mix.

"The development of the software key was undertaken for us by Northern Software Consultants and we are in the process of patenting our device.

"The key is encased in epoxy resin — even if people do discover what the custom chip inside does, it will take them six or seven off-the-shelf chips to emulate its behaviour, the cost of which are more than the cost of the original game.

"Our protection device is an experiment. If we don't sell more of *Buzzard Bait* than we usually do for a Dragon game then we will know it has been a failure.

"If it does sell well then we will produce versions of the key to protect Commodore 64 and Atari material."

Robotics resignation

JOHN Reekie has resigned as managing director of Colne Robotics to set up a new company, Reekie Research. The purpose of the new company is to develop a hobby robot.

The home robot will be of modular construction and the base unit — wheels, motor and basic platform — will sell for around £150. A rack system is then used to add up to 10 additional circuit boards to give the device a variety of extra features — an arm, infrared control, ultrasonic detection, voice synthesis and voice recognition.

The complete unit with on-board system software and the capability to be controlled from a base micro using the infra-red communication link will be priced around £700.

The robot will be designed so that it will operate from any micro with either an RS232 or

Wrath of Magra delay

CARNELL Software's long awaited graphic adventure *The Wrath of Magra* has been delayed still further.

The three-part program is now not expected to be released until mid-April, some seven months later than originally expected.



Centronics interface.

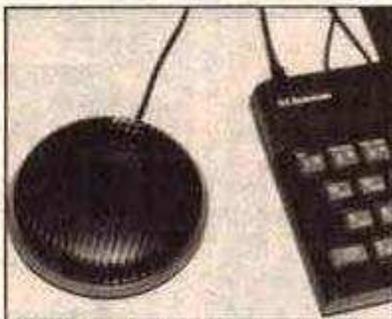
The Reekie Research robot is scheduled to be launched in the autumn.

Micro shows round-up

BOTH the Sinclair Education Exhibition and the Electron and BBC Micro User Show were held last week.

The 29 exhibitors at the Sinclair show in Westminster Central Hall had to compete for attention with Sinclair Research's own stand, where its version of the Logo programming language was being laun-

The joystick that never was



THIS rather strange looking object is a revolutionary type of joystick developed by Sinclair.

Yet it will now never go into production. Market research

conducted by the company has shown that people prefer the more traditional type of device with a hand grip.

The prototype, developed by Sinclair's research and development team, is a cross between a conventional joystick and a cursor control 'mouse'. The hard plastic pad rests on a springy cushion. To operate it the rim is depressed — pushing down on the left-hand edge will send a 'left' instruction to the Spectrum and so on.

Magic voice is launched

COMMODORE'S Magic Voice module has been launched at last.

The module fits into the Commodore 64 cartridge port, and is being launched in conjunction with two new series of software programs, which have been written to make use of it — *Talking Book* and *BJ the Bear*.

BJ the Bear features in the *Get Ready* suite of educational programs, designed for three to five year olds.

Get Ready to Read is now available — at £11.99 on cassette or disc — and *Get Ready to Think* and *Get Ready for Numbers* should be out in mid-April.

There are four learning levels on each program, and a menu of eight activities to each stage. The activities consist of question and answer games.

If the child gets the answer right, BJ's smiling head appears and confirms the correct answer. If not, his expression is distinctly grumpy.

A number of different phrases are generated by the software using the Magic Voice module, to express approval or disapproval such as "Yes", "That is not correct", and "You are right".

Each *Get Ready* package also contains a teacher's/parent's manual, and a story book about BJ for the child.

Magic Voice has a vocabulary of 187 words, the data for each letter of the alphabet and numbers. Commodore are planning to bring out a diskette with extra vocabulary in the near future.

ched, and where, on the first day of the show, a QL machine was on display. By the second day, however, the QL had mysteriously disappeared.

At the New Horticultural Hall 500 yards up the road, there were over 70 stands at the Electron BBC show. Among the companies, Pace Disk Systems launched *Fortress*, a *Zaxxon* style game at £8.95, and Alligata Software introduced *Spitfire Simulator*, following in the footsteps of Acornsoft's *Aviator*. Judging from the show, Electrons are still fairly thin on the ground.