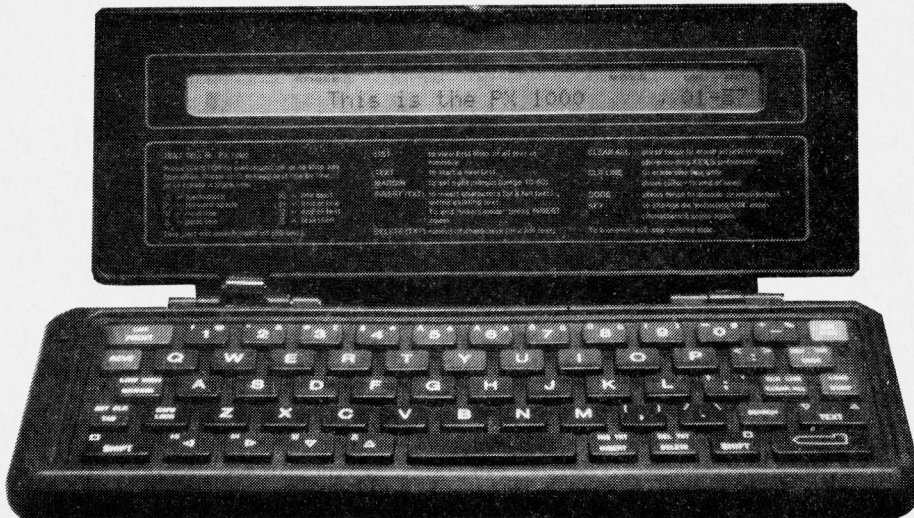


A MICRO MANQUÉ



C. Straw

For readers who flunked their French 'O' Levels, *manqué* means 'what might have been but is not'. The Text Tell PX1000 pocket text processor might have been a portable micro, but it isn't.

To be completely honest, when I first set eyes on the sub-miniature PX1000, the first thought to enter my head was 'hey, this is just what I've been waiting for'. For some time I had toyed with the idea of risking an overdraft on a portable micro-come-wordprocessor. Foremost in my mind was the Epson PX-8 (reviewed CT November '84 — Ed). I had the fortune of attending the launch of this little beast and fell in love with it immediately. However, a price tag of almost £1000 was way beyond the limits of my quite shallow pockets. The PX-8 appealed for several very good reasons, one being its very good looks (so important for the self-conscious scribbler) which gave it a definite edge on its rather too functionally-styled brother, the HX20. I soon came to terms with the fact that I'd never be a PX-8 owner, so it was with considerable enthusiasm that I seized the chance to play with the PX1000. But could I see myself paying £655 to become the *owner* of a machine capable of nothing more than word-processing?

WHAT YOU GET

For £655 you get:

- Text Tell PX1000 (in a soft, mock leather case looking not unlike that of an electric razor)
- an AC/DC power supply/charger
- Twin core cable for dumping and loading text to and from tape
- three core cable for attachment to serial printer

- 20 page instruction manual

For the purposes of this review: we were also supplied with the optional Text Tell PXP thermal printer. Unfortunately, we were not supplied with either of the two cables which made it impossible to test the tape storage prowess of the machine or its capacity for sending data down an RS232 line, so I am unable to comment on its performance in these two areas.

The one thing you immediately become aware of with the PX1000 is the beauty and neatness of its design. The black satin finish of the case is both functional and pleasing to the eye. The keyboard is extended QWERTY with two levels of shift on the upper (numeric) row (see photo). Certain related keys are colour coded to indicate a similarity in the functions they perform. For example, the standard alpha-numeric set is in black, whilst all keys concerned with outputting data to and from the display (PRINT and LIST), tape (LOAD/SAVE), and other remote units via the built-in modem/acoustic coupler, are coloured grey. All wordprocessor function keys, ie. cursor up/down/left/right are chocolate-brown. This is more useful than might be obvious at first, since the one-centimetre square keys are quite closely arranged and with such a small keyboard it is important for the user to discriminate between keys without undue fuss.

As is almost standard with portables with built-in displays, the hinged lid of the unit

contains the 40 column by one row LCD display. The area just below the display is occupied by a potted guide to using the machine, giving details of all the word-processing functions and commands.

A yellow key situated at the top right-hand corner of the keyboard switches the display on, and also acts as a brake if an operation (ie. transmission of data) is to be terminated before reaching the end of its natural cycle. The display switches itself off automatically after 50 seconds, which can be a little annoying if you are a contemplative writer — I regularly found myself switching the machine back on after a brief spell of day-dreaming — but this does help to conserve precious energy, stored, incidentally, in NiCad cells permanently fixed inside the case.

WORDPROCESSING

The PX1000 has a fairly standard set of wordprocessing functions. Text entry is quite normal, and in this sense the machine is much like a typewriter, but for the barely audible 'beep' as keys are pressed, and the carriage return/line-feed issued at the end of each line.

As has already been mentioned, the wordprocessing functions are accessed via the chocolate-brown keys to the left and right of the alpha-numeric keys. Moving anti-clockwise from the top-left, with each key's shifted function in brackets, the functions are as follows:

PRINT (LIST)	PRINT outputs an entire text 'block' to the printer. Text is stored in blocks, numbered 1 to 99. A block can store a maximum of 7500 characters (7500 characters is the machine's total capacity). As text is being sent to the printer, the words 'Please wait' are displayed informing the user that the machine is temporarily tied-up with an operation. Printing can be prematurely terminated by pressing the yellow ON (STOP) key, but as often happens, the printer continues to churn out everything inside the machine's printer buffer — something that never ceases to amaze me! LIST simply prints-out the first line of every occupied block to remind the user of what is currently held in the PX1000's memory.
RCVE.	This function puts the PX1000 into readiness for the reception of data via its acoustic coupler. Once RCVE is pressed, the 'Ready to receive' prompt is displayed, along with the machine's spare capacity. The manual gives full information on the use of this function, but we were unable to test it without a second unit.
MARGIN (LOW/HIGH)	The MARGIN key allows positioning of the right margin. The default column width is 40 characters, identical to the LCD display length. Columns up to 80 characters wide are permitted, with a lower limit of ten characters. LOW/HIGH sets the baud rate for data transmission via the modem/acoustic coupler. Three baud rates are supported; 300, 600 (V23) and 1200 baud.
TAB (SET/CLR)	Tab stops are initially set at every eighth character. Additional tab stops can be set and cleared by successive actions of the SET/CLR key.
INSERT (INS TXT)	Text can be entered and edited in either the Insert or Overwrite mode, INS TXT permits text from other blocks to be inserted into the current document — a sort of down-market Cut and Paste.
DELETE (DEL TXT)	Moves the cursor back one space and deletes the character in that position. DEL TXT deletes all of the text within the currently selected block. Since this is a fairly drastic measure, you <i>do</i> get an opportunity to change your mind, if you so wish . . .
SEARCH	The fairly standard wordprocessing search facility is available with the PX1000. Hit the SEARCH key and the prompt 'SEARCH FOR + PRESS AGAIN' appears on the display. The search string is limited to eight characters only, but this should be enough to ferret-out most words.
TEXT	The TEXT key allows the user to select the current text block. Text blocks can be skipped through in either direction (ie from 8 to 99 or from 8 to 1), and this is achieved by pressing the left or right shift keys in conjunction with the TEXT key.
CLEAR ALL (CLEAR LINE)	Means what it says! Pressing CLEAR ALL twice removes everything from store — obviously a feature to be used with caution! (CLEAR LINE) deletes all text after the cursor on the current line.
DUMP (LOAD)	DUMP puts the machine in readiness to commit text to tape. LOAD prepares the machine to receive text from tape.
CALC (SET)	The PX1000 can also be used as a rudimentary calculator. All of the usual arithmetic operators are present, BASIC style, and once an expression is entered, followed by a trailing '=', a quick press of the CALC key gives the solution correct to a maximum of 4 decimal places. (SET) defines the depth of indent for solutions given by CALC. (SET) also permits the user to define the maximum number of decimal places displayed for results of CALCed solutions.

IN USE

Although the PX1000 is a pleasure to use, it was slightly worrying to note the speed with which precious storage space was consumed as text was entered. Four small boxes at the top of the display indicate the total amount of store

remaining, each box representing 25% of the 7500 character memory. Each time 25% of the store is filled, a box is erased until finally the ***MEMORY FULL*** message is displayed. Colleagues have argued that 7500 characters isn't really enough for 'serious' applications, but by successively

dumping portions of a text to tape this problem can be overcome, albeit rather clumsily.

My only real cause for anxiety was the PX1000's annoying habit of switching out of the INSERT mode whilst text was being entered. I often found myself overwriting text which should have been opening up to accept additional copy. Presumably the designers reckoned on Overwrite being the most popular mode, but I think the choice would have been better left up to the user.

DOCUMENTATION

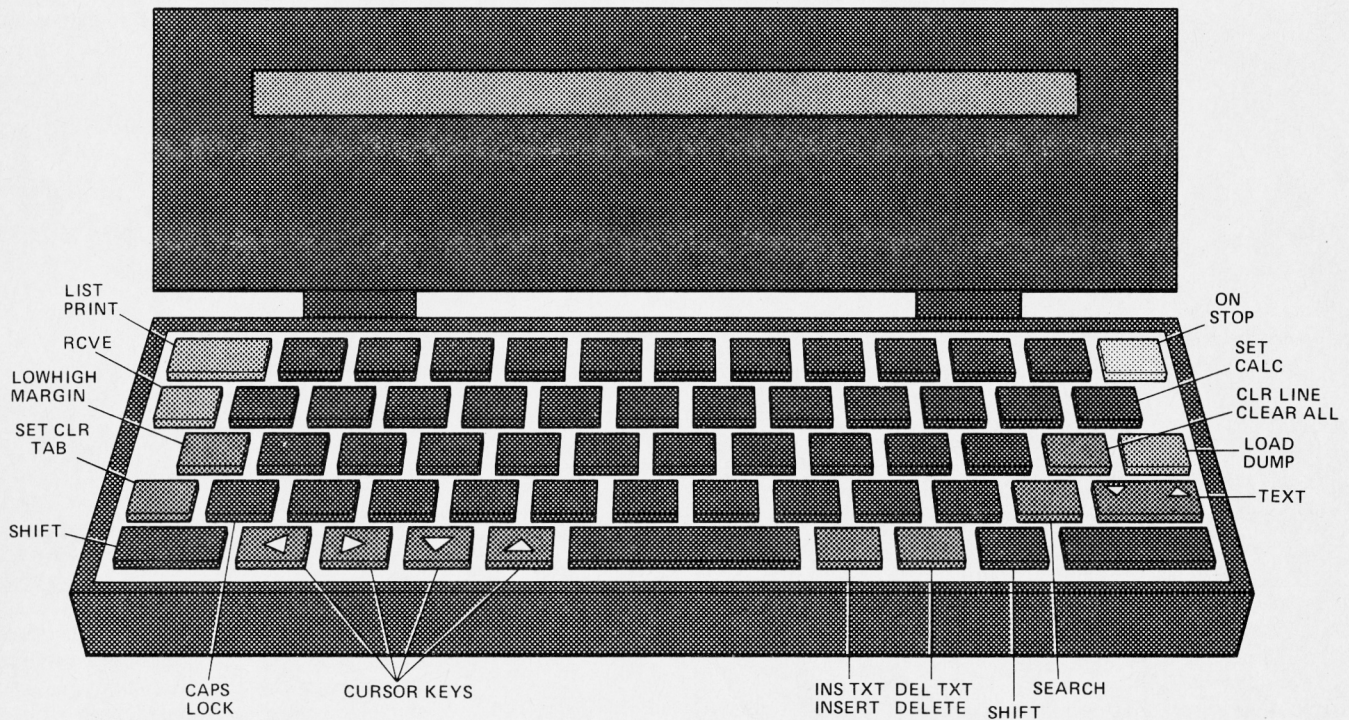
The 20 page manual which accompanies the PX1000 certainly contains all the information necessary to use the machine properly. However, the layout of the individual sections didn't inspire me at all. Large banner headings are used throughout which at first seems quite encouraging — at least you know where to look for your answers. But the descriptions are so densely packed that occasionally I wondered whether I was still reading the section appropriate to my enquiry. This being said, I have seen a lot worse in my time, but for £655 I would have expected something a little more professionally produced.

FACTSHEET Text Tell PX1000

Price:	£655
Available from:	ACS International Ltd. 175 London Road Camberley Surrey GU15 3JS Tel. (0276) 24434

USERS

The press information issued with the system claims: "The PX1000's potential market is enormous — from the obvious applications that sales executives will find..." (a curious choice), "...to other professionals like journalists, accountants and solicitors." Whilst I would certainly agree that journalists, and perhaps accountants, might certainly make use of a portable text processor, experience has shown that there are none more unwilling to touch a keyboard than those in the legal profession! As for the enormity of the potential market, it rather depends on one's concept of 'enormous' — I would argue that a portable dedicated text processor costing £650+, certainly has potential, but 'enormous' it ain't! This being said, the market for the PX1000 should be obvious, appealing to anyone who needs a portable wordprocessor and who can afford to pay for the privilege. I should make the point that I would certainly purchase a PX1000 if *only* it wasn't a *dedicated* wordprocessor. The PX1000 would have been a better and more attractive product if the wordprocessor was an option in cartridge form. Admittedly, the machine's single line display is useful for little other than wordprocessing. As it is, the machine gives the impression of being a sadly frustrated microcomputer.

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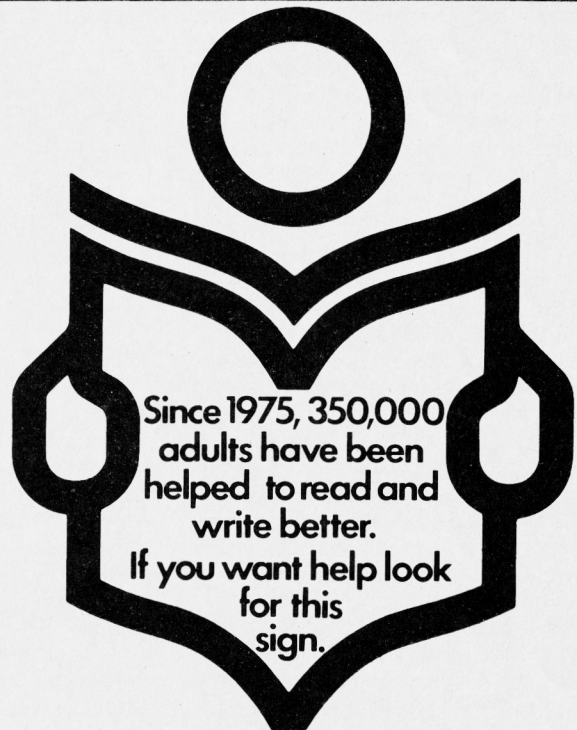
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