

Electronics Times

The weekly newspaper for the electronics industry

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Alan Sugar (left) takes the leading role at Monday's press conference while Sir Clive is left to ponder his future.

Amstrad rescue leaves Sinclair free to try again

by Steve Rogerson

Sir Clive Sinclair plans to continue as an electronics industry leader, despite Amstrad's £5 million takeover of his ailing computer business.

Sir Clive's aims are ambitious — wafer scale integration, a cheap cellular telephone and a large supercomputer. But he intends to develop two early ideas which have caused him more problems than success — electric vehicles and small tvs.

The Amstrad deal has cleared his debts, estimated at £10m, and a number of backers, most of them unnamed, have stepped in to finance these future projects.

Barclays Bank is backing the wafer scale integration research based on an original patent from Ivor Catt. Sir Clive said the first product, a 5in 40Mbit wafer, would be launched next year.

He admits his supercomputer is a few years away but he is talking about 1 billion floating point operations per second and more. This may be based on the Inmos transputer — sources say he has had lengthy discussions with Inmos.

But the next product from Sinclair Research will probably be a low price cellular telephone for the mass consumer market.

The telephone is being developed at his Winchester subsidiary and Sir Clive will soon announce the name of the financial backer for this project.

Sinclair Research will also act as an industry think tank, doing

contract research for other companies. Sir Clive said a number of firms were interested but he refused to name them.

On electric vehicles he said: "We have got designs for a full range of electric vehicles. We are negotiating for people to come in with us on that."

Meanwhile, Sinclair brand name computers will be sold by Amstrad. The firm ironically also plans to use the Sinclair name on a new range of calculators. Calculators were one of the first products for which Sinclair became well known.

Amstrad will also have first refusal on Sinclair's Pandora lap top computer which is being developed by Sinclair.

One product Amstrad is not interested in is the QL. Alan Sugar, millionaire founder and chairman of Amstrad, said: "We will be destocking the QL. There is no future for it."

He said QL production had already stopped, but added he would be prepared to sell the technology if somebody was interested. He also said he may develop a computer based on the QL but with a disc drive, not a microdrive.

As part of the takeover deal, Sugar bought existing stocks of Sinclair computers, plus work in progress with Timex, AB Electronics and Thorn EMI. He

refused to say how much he had paid for this.

Although he intends to continue the contracts with these companies for the time being, some production may be transferred overseas. Amstrad already makes some of its products in South Korea.

"The problem is," said Sugar, "that most of the parts come from Japan. There is an 18% import duty on microchips. If you make it outside the EEC, the duty on the finished product is only 4.9%."

He said he was trying to get the import rules changed and admitted that he could already get some chips without paying duty if he could prove that they are not available elsewhere.

Sugar also plans to tackle the poor quality reported on some software products for Sinclair computers by setting up a quality control body to check products. These would then carry a stamp saying they had been passed.

Sugar also plans to tackle the Japanese market. He said that cheap home computers were just taking off in Japan.

News Background — page 2

Virtues of cad/cam endorsed

Sir Terence Beckett, director general of the CBI, urged employers and trade unions to shed their fears of the "Sodom and Gomorrah of unnatural industrial practices".

Speaking at the Cad/Cam conference at the NEC, Birmingham, he said manufacturers could not afford to be without cad/cam.

There were two trends: growing internationalism and changing company strategies of scale. "Cad/cam provides the means of using technology to make the whole world your market," Sir Terence said.

It was best he said, not to look for more government assistance than the industry was getting.

There was an opportunity now for manufacturers to invest in cad/cam. Raw material costs had fallen and a change in the value of the pound against the German mark meant exports were more profitable, without increasing import costs.

Ken Gill, general secretary of TASS, shared Sir Terence's desire for investment in technology which did not always bring immediate benefits.

Economic activity should be a means to creating a better life, he said. It was not an end in itself.

The unions were ready to accept automatic manufacturing technology within a framework of "civilised commitments to full employment, training and the education that this technology demands," he promised.

B3 legal battle is settled out of court

Blair Barratt, founder and managing director of B3, is to form a new company after resolving his legal battle with stockbroker David Bream.

Although Barratt claims to have vindicated his stand, he says the City has 'cold shouldered' his company.

"We've been told B3 has a bad name among the City's financial institutions," said Barratt.

In an out of court settlement, Bream has offered to pay B3 £2500 compensation for the collapse of a refinancing deal which, according to Barratt, threatened to destroy the company.

Barratt, who has accepted the offer, said: "We couldn't afford to continue with legal action."

The new company, Interactive Decisions, will take over B3's consultancy activities, product development and support. B3 will cease trading in the near future.

"This will prevent us incurring any more of the liabilities associated with B3," said Barratt.

"Our creditors will be paid off as quickly as possible; orders have never been so good and we have over £240 000 worth of work to do over the next six months."

Barratt admits, however, that the financial problems are far

from over. Ted Shanahan, B3's finance director, believes the company's troubles were worsened by its decision to press charges against Bream.

Shanahan claims the financial institutions have closed ranks against the small company from Chatham, Kent.

"The city will have nothing more to do with us," he said.

Shanahan is particularly bitter about the City's 'old boy network'.

B3 background, page 32.

Rolm shelves UK plant plan

Rolm, the IBM telecommunications subsidiary, has postponed indefinitely its plan to build a 100 000 sq ft factory in Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire.

Construction of the plant was to have started early this year but the California based manufacturer of office telephone exchanges has scaled down its investment plans and is, instead, looking to lease manufacturing space.

A company statement said the decision resulted from a "normal on going review of expenses" which had shown Rolm could "maintain the original manufacturing schedule while deferring construction of the plant".

Rolm announced a year ago

that it was setting up a subsidiary, Rolm (Europe), to tackle the European telecommunications market. The headquarters and a development and manufacturing facility were to be built at a 150 acre site, owned by IBM, near Swindon. The company hoped to create 300 jobs within four years, and the plant was to have been in keeping with Rolm's 'relaxed' working philosophy with landscaped tropical gardens. The company's Santa Clara factory is equipped with swimming pool, squash courts and whirlpool bath for the staff.

Rolm, it is believed, is considering leasing a building on an industrial park in Swindon.

For the past year Rolm

(Europe) has composed a small headquarters staff, headed by Frank Onians, the former managing director of Philips TMC, working from an office in Swindon.

The company continues to recruit telecommunications engineers who will train in Santa Clara before returning to the UK.

The company will not reveal what it intends to manufacture in this country but it is believed to be a European version of its successful US digital switch, the CBX II which has a data transfer rate of 4.4 billion bit/s.

According to Ofotel, the European version, which will have a different name, is being examined for BABT approval.

NECTOLOGY

NECTology is what puts NEC in the forefront of technology.

The 'V' Series of microprocessors from NEC is a new family that retains complete compatibility with both past and projected generations in CMOS technology.

Up to 1.5 times faster than previous NMOS models, the new 'V' Series has a package of peripheral IC's that allows designers to construct systems entirely in CMOS.

The V20 (70108) with 8 bit internal and 16 bit external bus and the V30 (70116) with 16 bit internal and external bus are just part of the family.

It's a family that will be followed by a Super Micro range with VLSI capability and 32 bit internal bus — at an advanced stage of development.

With NEC in front, further developments won't be far behind.

NEC

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A chequered career

In 1962, a young unknown called Clive Marles Sinclair formed the Sinclair Radionics company. Today Sir Clive Sinclair is the most famous man in the UK electronics industry. This week, he sold his home computer business to Amstrad.

His rise to fame contains many successes, many in-

novative ideas and, sadly, many failures.

In the past year his name has been linked with Robert Maxwell and Robb Wilmott, but it was his closest rival Alan Sugar, who once described Sinclair computers as "pregnant calculators" who saved him.

The first products from

by Steve Rogerson

Sinclair Radionics were radios and high fidelity amplifier kits sold through mail order advertisements in popular technical journals. They were cheap and easy to make.

By 1967 the firm was a success. Its annual turnover was greater than £100 000 and the firm moved from London to Cambridge. It employed 23 people and made finished high fidelity systems as well as the kits.

In 1972 the firm moved again, to St Ives in Cambridgeshire, and later that year launched its first pocket calculator, the Executive. It sold for £79, won numerous international design

awards and earned more than £2.5 million in export revenues.

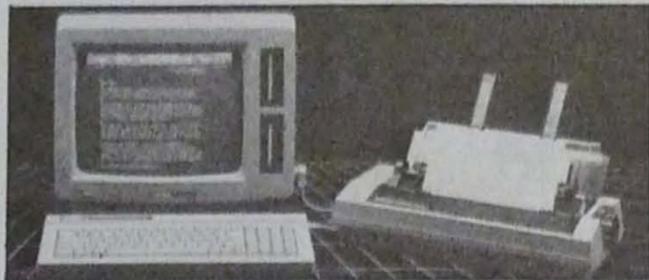
A year later the Executive was followed by the popular Cambridge range of calculators. This took Sinclair to the number one position in the UK calculator market.

In the year ending April 1975 turnover was £6.2m, profit was £330 000 and exports accounted for 37% of production.

It seemed the electronics guru could do no wrong. The optimism was short lived.

The same year saw the Japanese enter the pocket calculator market. Prices dropped rapidly and leading US and European companies suffered heavy losses.

In late 1975 Sinclair introduced a digital wrist watch using I²L



Success: Amstrad made money while Sinclair struggled.



Spectrum: one of the last computers from Sir Clive.

technology. He called it the Black Watch. It was a brilliant idea, it looked nice and it would have been perfect but for one small drawback it could not keep time.

Sinclair blamed the product for his £335 000 loss in the year to April 1976. It would have been even worse if not for the launch of a lesser known Sinclair product at the time — a digital multimeter.

The history of Sinclair could well have ended in 1976. But late in the year the National Enterprise Board (NEB) stepped in with £650 000. A month later Sinclair launched a 2in screen pocket tv. In July 1977 the NEB put in another £1.95m. In the eight months to December 1977 the firm lost £820 000.

The following year saw more multimeters, more calculators, and a cheaper tv.

The multimeters continued to do well, other products did not. Disaster loomed on the horizon.

The horizon came a year later. The NEB was fed up with continued losses. Sinclair was replaced as managing director by Dennis Taylor from Hewlett Packard.

Calculators and tvs were killed off. Multimeters continued under the name Thandar.

But Sinclair was far from finished. He formed a new company called Sinclair Research. And in February 1980 it launched the product for which Sinclair is best known the ZX80.

Before production stopped in August 1981, more than 100 000 were sold.

But by that time his second computer was on the market — the ZX81.

Sinclair was back. Everything once again looked rosy. In 1982, he introduced his first colour computer, the ZX Spectrum, which sold for £125.

In 1983 he launched his micro tv, set up his famous Metalab research laboratories, was knighted and heard that a young man called Alan Sugar had an idea.

Sugar, chairman of Amstrad, decided to take on Sinclair. In April 1984, he launched the CPC464 home computer.

In the same year Sinclair launched the Spectrum and the doomed QL. In 1985 Sugar launched a word processor and another computer, both were successful. Sinclair launched an electric tricycle. It was a flop.

Robert Maxwell announced he was going to step in and save Sinclair. He stepped out again very quickly.

Amstrad launched another successful word processor.

This week, Amstrad bought Sinclair's computer business leaving Sir Clive with flat screen tv, wafer scale integration, supercomputers and another electric vehicle.

NEWS DIGEST

End of typing?

Just talk into the microphone and printed text will come out of the other end — that is the aim of IBM which on Monday unveiled a desk top unit that does that to 95% accuracy. The unit is based on the IBM-PC with two subsystems, one to digitise speech and the other to interpret it into characters by comparison with a dictionary of two million acoustic models of characters. Both subsystems are based around a new signal processing chip designed in IBM's Swiss and French laboratories.

WAT

In Electronics Times of 16 January we ran an article about WA Technology, of Cambridge, whose founder, Dr Colin Wilson, and Barry Ambrose have had considerable success selling high technology, custom built scientific instruments to both the US and the USSR, which struck us as an unusual double success.

The headline "Selling 'secrets' to East and West" may have given the impression that WAT is in some way trafficking in classified technology with the Russians. No such implication was intended and we apologise for any suggestion that their trade with the USSR was not entirely legitimate.

Academic cuts

Science and engineering places in polytechnics face cuts of between 5 and 6% in the coming academic year.

The National Advisory Body, which oversees public sector spending on higher education, claims there will be a £23 million shortfall in government funding for polytechnics and universities in 1987/88 and that cuts are therefore essential.

The axe could fall hardest on the science and engineering departments at Leeds Polytechnic and on the civil engineering department at Sunderland Polytechnic.

'Boffin' offer

Primary and secondary schools will be able to adopt their own scientist or engineer through a national scheme launched this week.

The 'Adopt a Boffin' scheme was set up by the British Science and Technology Trust to encourage students' interest in science and technology careers.

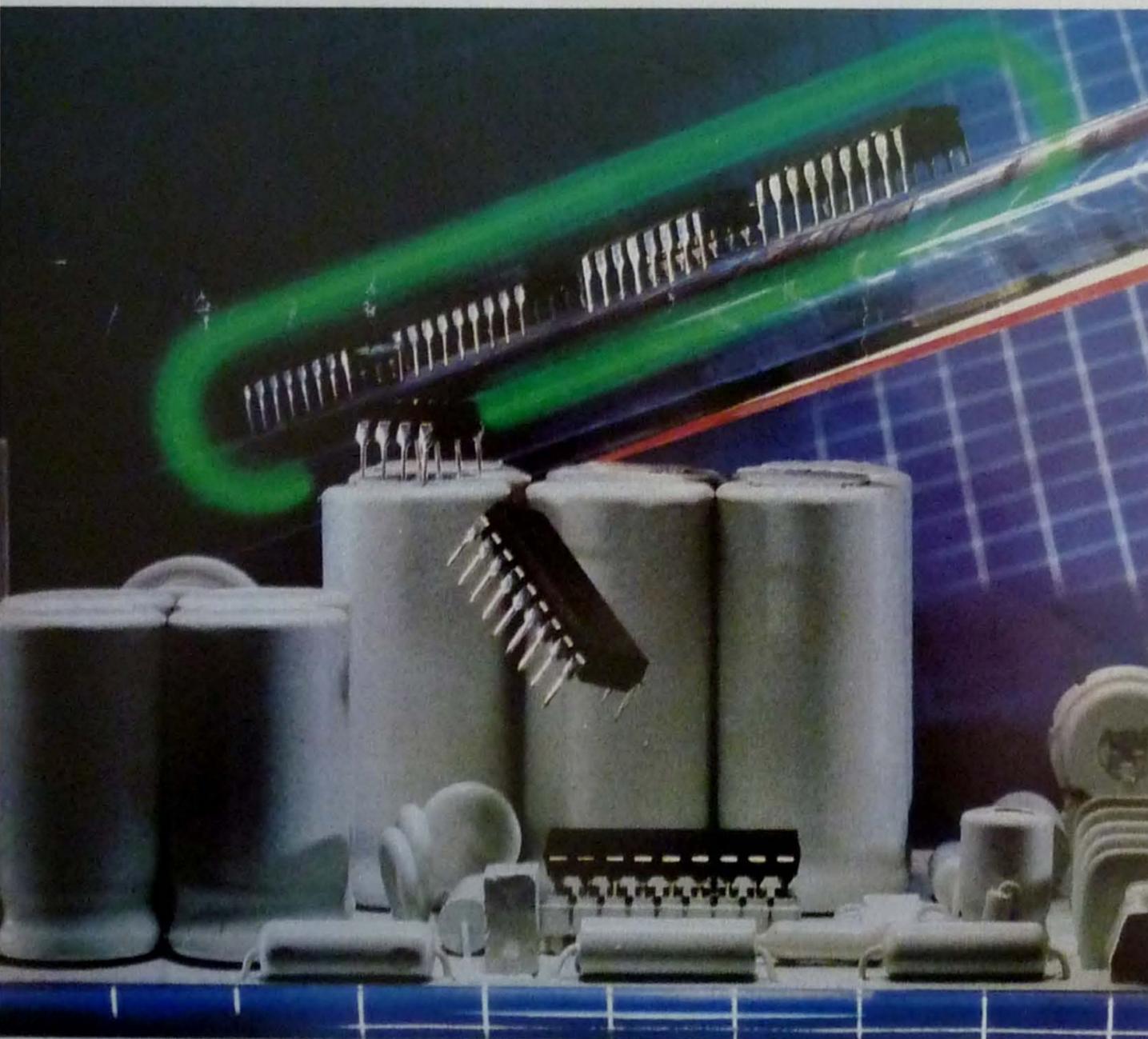
Throughout the year, the adopted specialist will visit the school to talk to staff and students. He or she may also be able to loan or donate equipment to the schools.

SMT sale

Electron House has made its third acquisition since last November with the purchase of Surface Mounted Technology. The £92 000 deal was completed this week.

The company's sales are now expected to top £35 million.

SERVING NEEDS.



SPRAGUE Sprague SMPS ICs are serving today's needs for high quality, cost-effective standard industry types. Innovative products for 1986 include the ULN-8163A/R, a Precision SMPS Control Circuit and a new universal Precision Supervisory Systems Monitor, the ULN-8130A/R. For detailed technical data on these new high-performance products and other Series 8100 SMPS products, write for Engineering Bulletin Group 27466 and 27467 to Sprague Electric Ltd, Airtech 2, Fleming Way, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 2YQ Great Britain, Tel: 0293-517878.

SMPS ICs ARE COST-EFFECTIVE.

SPRAGUE
THE MARK OF RELIABILITY

Sinclair to sell highly des res

by Mary Wilkinson

Another piece of Sinclair high technology has just been put on the market.

Sir Clive is hoping to sell his five storey Chelsea home, described by the agents as 'an architectural art form', for £995 000.

A bit expensive for some pockets, perhaps, but the price does include electrically operated solar controlled blinds, automatically irrigated plant tubs on the terraces, and some fancy kitchen equipment.

Other trimmings include a heated swimming pool in the basement, a four passenger lift, a jacuzzi in the master bedroom and electronically controlled ceilings on the top floor that glide back to reveal skylights.

Would be purchasers will be reassured by the presence of a back up generator in case of a mains electricity failure.

According to Laurence Glynne, of the chartered surveyors Keith Cardale Groves, the house has been on the market for only a week and is receiving a constant flow of clients.

"We've never dealt with a house like this - it really is a unique, modern design" he said.

Sinclair was responsible for most of the design. He bought it as a photographic studio in a



Sinclair's £995 000 four bedroom house in Chelsea.

warehouse and it took him two years to transform to its present state.

He denied he was selling the place because of financial difficulties. "I just got bored with it," he said. He enjoyed doing up houses and was now looking for something else, he added.

There are very few clues to Sinclair's personality and interests in the house. The

bookshelves, however, are crammed with electronics textbooks and even some component data books.

The only evidence of computers is a framed print of a wafer scale memory circuit design hanging in the dining room.

Music, however, must be an interest as there is a stereo on every floor.



One of the two drawing rooms in the house, complete with the optional extra of a £15 000 Steinway.

Honorary doctorate for Wang

Stirling University conferred an honorary doctorate last week on Dr An Wang, the founder, chairman and chief executive of Wang Laboratories, the Massachusetts based computer maker.

At a private ceremony at London's Savoy Hotel, Dr Wang added the Stirling doctorate to the PhD he gained in 1948 from Harvard for applied physics.

Wang set up a manufacturing plant on the Stirling campus for its professional computer products in October 1982.

It now employs 162 and is expected to deliver \$175 million worth of computers during the 1986 financial year which ends on 31 August.

Despite the slump in the US computer market last year, which forced Wang to cut costs dramatically and shut factories in the US, the future of the Stirling plant seems secure.

Although Wang's US sales last year remained steady, the European operation showed 30% growth.

Wang's long term plan is to increase revenues more than tenfold from 1985's \$2.35 billion to \$25bn. In the process, Europe's share of the worldwide operation is expected to rise from 27% to a third.

Dr Wang, now over 60, dispelled rumours he was planning to retire and appoint a successor. "I will stay on as long as I am healthy", he said, "and I hope that will be for at least five years".

A missing link at DTI

Tony Carroll, managing director of Buckinghamshire based Collective Components, has discovered that the Department of Trade and Industry is not a good example of an institution practising what it preaches.

The Information Technology (IT) division cannot be contacted by using an electronic mail system as Carroll found out when he tried to send it a message on Telecom Gold.

Carroll later found that none of the DTI's departments could be reached via electronic mail.

A DTI spokesman admitted there was no link but said there were plans to connect the IT division.

"I suppose Mr Carroll does have a point", said the spokesman but it would be even more embarrassing for you if Electronics Times doesn't have an electronic mail box."

Electronics Times This week

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Coordination of Cambridge

Cambridge Electronics Industries, the 'patchwork quilt' of the high technology base, began sewing in some coordination two years ago. Steve Rogerson checks on how the pattern is developing.

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Government stepping in?

The US Semiconductor Research Corporation has, for a long time, been run on private finance. But, according to Ira Breskin, there are signs that the US Government wants to put its finger in the pie.

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An encouraging progress report

Altos Computer Systems looked doomed to become a victim of the recession; however, appearances are sometimes deceiving. Steve Kaufman reports on the San Jose company's remarkably healthy progress.

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When ignorance is not bliss

The electromechanical sector of the electronics industry is often little appreciated. Many engineers do not even know, for example, the basics of designing a servo drive system. Portescap told Tom Wearden how it could help.

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Frenchman offers his skill

Apple, which is still battling in the US against the 'Big Blue' of IBM, has enlisted the help of Frenchman Jean-Louis Gassee (right). Lisa Raleigh reports.

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Same the world over

The man on the Clapham omnibus has never really taken Prestel to heart but British Telecom can take comfort from the fact that the San Francisco cable car rider has a similar attitude. Jeff Hecht explains the demise of the US consumer videotex service.

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Troubled times for company

Last week a small, financially embarrassed interactive video company announced it could close because of alleged corruption. Graham Bailey reports on the company's background.

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The I.C.SAGA book of strips - 190 chuckles for £3.00 (p&p inc.) To order please write 500 on card.



Sinclair QL Preservation Project (SQPP)



On January 12th 1984 Sir Clive Sinclair presented the Sinclair QL Professional Computer in a Hollywood-style launch event at the Intercontinental Hotel, Hyde Park Corner, London. This was exactly 12 days earlier than Steve Jobs presented the Apple Macintosh.

The QL still is a very good example of an innovative, stylish, powerful and underestimated product. On one hand it failed in the market in the long run but on the other it influenced many developments which ended in today's products.

2009 was the year of its 25th anniversary in which month by month new activities were launched.



Jan 12th – Congratulation to the QL's 25th birthday. Message spread to VIP, community and media.

http://www.qlvsjaguar.homepage.bluewin.ch/SinclairQL_25th_anniversary_1984_to_2009.html



Check out this 25th anniversary presentation...

<http://www.cowo.ch/downloads/SinclairQLis25-compressed.ppt>



Try QPC, a virtual QL running under Windows...

http://www.cowo.ch/downloads/QPC_a_virtual_QL.zip



Feb 19th – Massive coverage (11 pages) of the QL in the April Issue of Personal Computer World (PCW) magazine.

<http://www.pcw.co.uk>



Mar 12th – Sinclair QL Preservation Project (SQPP) launched, starting with Documents/Publications from Sinclair Research Ltd and various computer magazines of the years 1984 to 1986.

http://www.qlvsjaguar.homepage.bluewin.ch/SinclairQL_preservation_project.html

QL forever!

Urs König (aka cowo)

<http://www.qlvsjaguar.homepage.bluewin.ch>