

Atari over the Airwaves

Radio rats, alert! There is a network for Atari hams. It is called the Atari Microcomputer Net Amateur Users' Group and is composed of ham radio operators who own Atari computers. It is run by Jack McKirgan II-WD8BNG, an enthusiast who publishes "Ad Astra" the group's journal. McKirgan estimates that 14,000 ham radio operators who own Ataris have contacted the net which has 800 members.

What ham radio hobbyists do is operate small low power broadcasts stations, usually out of their homes. One of the properties of short radio waves is that they bounce off the atmosphere. As they bounce, they go great distances. This makes it possible for a ham operator to talk to anyone around the world.

Ham radio operators form networks by agreeing to tune in to a specified frequency at specified times and talk. With the proper equipment, they can connect their computers to the radios and proceed almost as if they were on a phone line network. Interfaces are available for connecting the radio to the computer for data transfer. Cantronics—1202 East 23rd St., Lawrence, KS 66044—has a number of products with software that is Atari compatible.

According to McKirgan, the average ham radio for low-end operations

would cost about \$800 new. A lot of hams give away old units to new initiates, however.

Ham radio operators as a whole, not just Atari Users, are represented by the American Radio Relay League, Newington, CT 06111. About 300,000 amateurs in the U.S. belong to this group. The League holds contests in which its members set up various types of radios and try to make as many contacts with as many countries as they can.

McKirgan is enthusiastic about the other services that ham operators do, like bringing families together through phone patches to the airwaves. "There is a group of Americans at the South Pole that interface their radios with local operators in the U.S. Then the local operators call up the families of the guys at the South Pole and they can talk almost free of charge."

The Atari Microcomputer Net Amateur User's Group has meetings on the air for various geographical areas of interest:

The National net-meets Sunday at 1600 Universal Coordinated Time (Greenwich Time) at 14,325 Mhz.

International Net—meets alternating Thursdays, 2330 UTC at 21,400Mhz.