



The ST in the UK:

What's New, What's Hot, and How it Gets Here

by Preeva Adler

If software could talk, First Word would have a Cambridge accent, The Pawn would sound like a Londoner, and Brataccas would talk like a Beatle (from Liverpool, not the garden). They're all products designed and written in England when U.S. ST software developers were just getting started.

When the ST was introduced in England, in September of 1985, Atari U.K. organized 30 developers to show their products. Atari U.S. couldn't organize that many developers until Comdex, two months later. And the very first U.S. developers got their hands on STs just about a month before the English (March vs. April). So when did the U.K. overcome the U.S. headstart? In 1983, when the Sage (it sells in the U.S. now as a Stride) was introduced as a business computer, and in 1984, when Clive Sinclair started selling his QL. Both were 68000-based, and neither one of them did very well. This created an excellent situation for the ST: Lots of experienced, hungry, 68000 software developers.

"They just lined up for development systems" said Bob Katz, who provides technical support at Atari U.K. "We got an amazing response." The QL's failure appears to have been the ST's gain. Psygnosis's game Brataccas, for example, was packaged and selling in September of 1985. It was a easy port from the QL version practically down to the manual, and there were some rumours of legal problems with Sinclair and development money. Ah well. VME Trade, which is a brand-new company featuring modified STs as multi-user minicomputers, is comprised of former employees of Alpha Microsystems. They sell their product through a network of dealers composed of former (and present) Alpha Microsystems dealers.

Titles you know & love from England

At the PCW show in 1985, when the ST was launched, the demos fell into two categories--languages and applications. First Word, written by GST, a systems house based in Cambridge, existed as an editor to a Macro assembler that was the product they were showing (see box). Modula-2 a high-level language, was written by the now-defunct English TDI Software and is now distributed by its sister company called Modula 2. Prospero software began selling a Fortran compiler in January of 1986, and a Pascal compiler in March. The HiSoft Devpack was not shown at the '85 PCW but is getting rave reviews now. The authors of the official Atari revision of BASIC are English--MetaComCo plc., based in Bristol. An ironic note: These are the same people that wrote the first BASIC interpreter for the Commodore Amiga. Their BASIC was not widely shipped, however, because Commodore switched at the last minute to a BASIC written by MicroSoft.

On to business

There are over a hundred vertical applications available in England for the ST--but most of them are very expensive ports from the IBM PC or are part of a different operating system called BOS for Business Operating System. Better known in Europe than here, BOS is an operating system that takes all kinds of machines--STs, PC, Sages, Apricots, etc., overrides their native operating systems and reduces them to their lowest common denominator. There is nothing graphics or mouse oriented on a BOS package. But, boy, is it business oriented--a