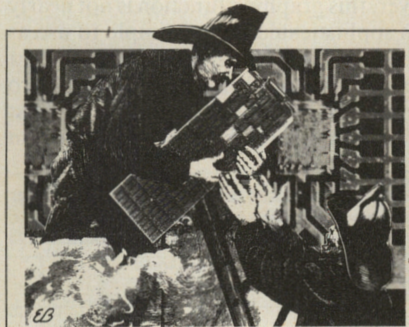# IBM IMAGES

Lower prices, new XT configurations, new buying strategies, and PCjr withdrawal/**Will Fastie**

To say the least, I am stunned. I thought that IBM would go to the ends of the earth rather than risk the embarrassment of having a product fail, especially one for the high visibility home or educational market. But that, indeed, is what IBM has done. The PCjr is no more; frankly, I am saddened. I seem to be alone among my editorial peers when I say this: PCjr was not a bad computer. It is clear in retrospect that IBM made a few early mistakes that cost it dearly. The keyboard was one (IBM fixed it, but initial sales were slowed by the error) and the price was another. Had IBM offered a more competitive price to begin with, there might have been more interest. Of course, the biggest problem may have been that IBM missed Christmas '83 because of late delivery and thus missed a good, early market opportunity.

In making the announcement, IBM said that the machine would continue to be supported. I think you can be sure that IBM will provide service, at least for some number of years; that is simply sound business practice. Software additions are likely, but that is not a problem considering that PCjr is a full-fledged member of the PC family and thus will run much of the software for its bigger siblings. Hardware additions are unlikely, in my opinion, because an installed base of 250,000 machines is not large enough to interest IBM, whose attention will be focused on the four million PCs sold to date. I might also suggest that IBM will continue to make PCjr available through OEM channels. I know of one such deal in the works: the buyer will use the basic components of the machine as the controlling computer in their product. They are looking at a quantity in excess of 10,000 units. Given that the machine would be sold direct in such cases, IBM can lower the price and still collect a tidy profit.

There is always a silver lining, the old saying goes. In this case, it may be that the price of the remaining PCjrs in the retail channels will hit rock bottom and thus present an attractive buying opportunity. For those looking for a

What may really be happening is a fire sale on all 8088-based products.

cheap, IBM-compatible computer, now just might be the right time to think jr. A word of warning to owners: consider buying add-on equipment soon. Because the market is suddenly so limited, and because not all PCjr owners will expand the machine, add-ons will become less attractive as a business, and that means some of the companies who have products today will discontinue them tomorrow. A few smaller companies will be able to make some money building expansion hardware for a while, however, so all is not lost if you own the little guy.

Caveat Emptor!

The second big piece of news from IBM is that prices for the PC and XT have been reduced, and the XT has become available in two new models. The two new XTs are not really new: in a fairly standard marketing adjustment, IBM is offering two new *configurations* of the same computer. The first model is an XT with one floppy but without the hard disk, and the second model has two floppies and no hard disk. You might ask how that makes the machines XTs; after all, XTs are supposed to have hard disks, aren't they? Actually, the answer to that question is no. What makes an XT is its system board (8 slots, XT BIOS chips) and its power supply (130 watts). Each of these new machines is so equipped. The hard disk controller and the disk drive it-

self have been lowered in price and are available as products, not just as spare parts. The prices for all of these are shown in Table 1, along with new prices for the PC Portable and the PC. Some price adjustments are not shown: other IBM products based on the PC or XT (like the 3270-PC) were also reduced.

These price reductions are interesting. I suggest that IBM is phasing out the PC and will soon sell only the XT. This allows them to build only one 8088 system board instead of the two they now build (the PC Portable already uses the XT system board). The hard-diskless-XT is also preferable to the PC because with more slots and a bigger power supply, just about any kind of expansion is possible. I'd much rather have an XT-based system at home than the PC. I could still use my Kamerman disk and I'd have empty slots again for adding other boards, including my game port (which had to come out when I bought the Kamerman). Many businesses are also feeling the slot crunch by now, and IBM needs to be sure that additional enhancement products, such as internal backup tapes, network boards, or other IBM communications products, can be added.

IBM may also be responding to having painted themselves into a corner. Some recent add-in board products (such as the Professional Graphics Controller) have required two adjacent slots for a rigidly connected two-board combo. Slot spacing in the basic PC remains at 1 inch, but in every other machine, as well as expansion boxes, the spacing is .8 inches. Something that might require two boards (given IBM's tendency to be conservative and have wide appeal) might be an IBM-supplied accelerator card, a device that replaces the 8088 processor with a faster chip and thus delivers AT-like performance in a PC.
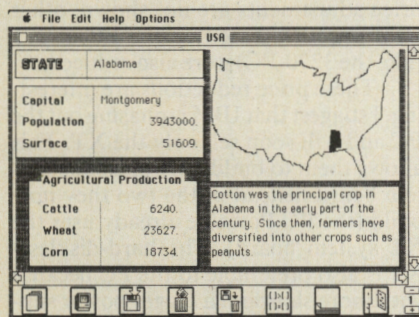
Fire Sale or Market Strategy?

What may really be happening, however, is a fire sale on all 8088-based products. This theory is widely held because most analysts believe that IBM's

easily. And it also will let you write text so that you can have a complete arsenal of weapons at your command when it's time to hand in the monthly report.

Ensemble is a relational database that will let you link up to three files. You can do calculations on the data, but *Ensemble* lacks its own language. Some of its other features are mail merge and labels.

Like most Mac software, *Ensemble* is slow and protected and supports only the Imagewriter. However, I did get it to work with an Epson FX-80 by modifying it with *Epstart*. But I couldn't make a

A typical Ensemble record includes a MacPaint drawing.

backup copy that didn't need the "key" —the *Ensemble* Master disk.

Ensemble comes with three disks, the Master disk, an Examples disk, and a Guided Tour disk (there is no audio accompaniment). It runs on a 128K or 512K Mac with one or two drives or a hard disk. Suggested retail price of *Ensemble* is $299.95.

Quartet from Haba Systems is in the tradition of the integrated products some people have come to worship. It uses the spreadsheet as its source of strength and delivers a product with some punch. When I first saw an integrated product from Haba Systems I was immediately suspicious of its quality. Not that Haba doesn't produce fine products, it is just that I suspected they had bitten off more than they could chew, trying to beat Lotus to market with an integrated product. But Haba did not write this software—they are just marketing it. The software development team goes by the name MBA Software.

The product is an interesting one. It doesn't offer the vast spreadsheet of *Lotus 1-2-3*, but it does have a cell matrix of 62 x 999. And it appears to be lightning fast. (Please, this is not a full review since I had the product for only a day before I wrote this.) Compared to *Multiplan* on the Mac, it does some things better and

some worse. It has a GOTO cell feature for those times when you don't want to guess with the scroll bar, but it also requires you to type an apostrophe whenever you type a label. But *Multiplan* is not integrated, and that's where *Quartet* has a big edge.

Quartet can draw pie, bar, and line graphs of up to four sets of data. However, this graphing function is not nearly as sophisticated nor as simple to use as the one from *Ensemble*. It has a text capability, too. Whenever you want to insert text into the spreadsheet, you just designate an area for it. With the built-in

In the Quartet database, records are rows and fields are columns.

editing capabilities of the Mac, you wind up with a fair word processor. The final integrated feature is a database capability, which allows you to set up records in rows, and fields in columns. Then you can manipulate the data through creative sorting.

Quartet supports Apple's Imagewriter and LaserWriter, and can be used with the Mac numeric keypad. I was able to modify the disk for use with an Epson printer. The disk is copy protected, so I couldn't make a backup copy that didn't need the "key."

Quartet comes with one disk— the master disk, which does contain some sample files. The program runs on either a 128K or 512K Mac with one or two drives or a hard disk. Suggested retail price is $199.

Of the two products, it appears that *Ensemble* has more power, but *Quartet* has the features that everyone is looking for.

SuperCalc 3a for the Apple II

Although the Apple II was the first microcomputer to have a spreadsheet, it was ignored by companies such as Lotus, which produced more powerful integrated spreadsheets for the IBM PC. Well, it may be too late but it's certainly not too little—*SuperCalc3a* from

Sorcim is now available for the Apple IIe and IIc computers. It is a dandy package with all the trimmings.

Now Apple II users can purchase a powerful ProDOS-based spreadsheet that integrates graphs and database management functions. The spreadsheet offers a matrix of 254 rows and 63 columns. There are numerous formatting commands, built-in functions, and pointing capability.

Eight graph types are available: pie and exploded pie, bar and stacked bar, area, line, hi-lo-open-close, and x-y. Graphics can be viewed on the screen in up to 16 colors, printed, or plotted.

The database has a capacity similar to the spreadsheet. It has space for up to 253 records with 65 fields per record. You can sort the database using primary and secondary keys.

Unlike the products for the Macintosh, *SuperCalc3a* supports 15 printers and six plotters. Additionally, *SuperCalc3a* includes Sideways, a program that allows you to print wide reports sideways on your printer.

You know that Sorcim has been in the game for a long time, because they have also included a send/receive utility that lets you transfer *SuperCalc* files to and from an IBM PC. The program also reads *VisiCalc* and *AppleWorks* data and logic files, and reads and writes DIF files.

SuperCalc3a comes with three disks, Program, Graph, and Tools, which are not copy protected. It requires 128K RAM and one disk drive, and runs in either 40- or 80-column mode. The program has a suggested retail price of $195.

This program could have been a blockbuster a few years ago. It will be interesting to see how well an exceptional program like this does in today's market. ■