

Buying a computer? You'd better watch out!

Guard against sales pitch just a smart shopper tip

For many years they were the object of scorn and fear — ominous and unwelcoming blobs of plastic and metal manipulated by myopic scientists.

But now, as a popular television commercial suggests, even a monk can crawl out of the middle ages and own and operate a home computer. This Christmas, a record number of Americans will also crawl, usually unprotected, into the confusing and exasperating world of computer sales.

As you browse through area shops in search of the ultimate machine, remember those advertising messages that promise buying and operating a personal computer "is so easy, a child can do it."

Also think back to the time when you first went skiing. Remember lying on the frozen ground, skidding down "Bone-Crush Hill," watching all those cute children who whisked by you, cutting their edges and sending razors of snow at your face.

Such is the joy of learning the ropes of buying, and attempting to operate, a personal computer. Ideally, these tips will make the going easier:

Face the music — Once you learn to control your personal computer, it's a marvelous tool or toy. But until you reach that undefinable level of mastery, there's no way of avoiding the misery of the learning process. No matter how easy the salesperson says it will be, there is no escaping the sinking feeling that will occur when you accidentally delete a file.

And there's no avoiding your "user-friendly" computer's trite reply. "Sorry, that file not found," it will happily inform you. "Please try again."

Resign yourself to this humiliation, knowing that one day you will control the computer and not the other way around.

Listen, but don't believe — If you watch *60 Minutes* you know that anyone connected with computers will be a millionaire by the time they're 30 anyway, so don't be in a hurry to pad their pockets. Ask a lot of questions, visit a lot of stores. But operate on the theory that everything a salesman will tell you, except for the price, could be a lie or distortion.

A slander against a noble profession? Kurt Thomet, a salesman for Midland-Cascade Corp. in Eugene, has no illusions about how his contemporaries operate.

"I've had a lot of people complain that salesmen are lying to them," says Thomet. "Or they'll give misleading information. You have to watch yourself out there."

Meat vs. motion — Remember the "It's not the meat it's the motion" theory. With sports cars and sexual glands, it's not the size of the machinery that matters, it's what the operator does with it.

That is also true of computers — a reasonably talented computer programmer can do much more with 48K internal memory than a mediocre programmer with a 64K memory, although it may take a little longer, paying an extra \$1,000 for real or imagined prestige can be more expensive than it is worth.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the people that use the "meat vs. motion" argument are often those who own and operate Volkswagens, small sexual

glands and small personal computers.

The point is, decide how much you can or want to pay for a computer before you go shopping. Then stick to that price. You can pay little as \$89.95, choose to mortgage the house, or spend any increment in between. Don't let the salesman give you a feeling of inadequacy because you're not independently wealthy.

Study before you buy — There are many trustworthy sources available for beginners to learn enough about computers to make an intelligent purchase. The best avenues are magazine articles. The November issue of *Money Magazine* has an especially enlightening piece.

Also available through various computer distributors are beginners classes. You are at a disadvantage in one way because these classes often serve as propaganda sessions for specific brands, but on the other hand they offer good background at a cheap price.

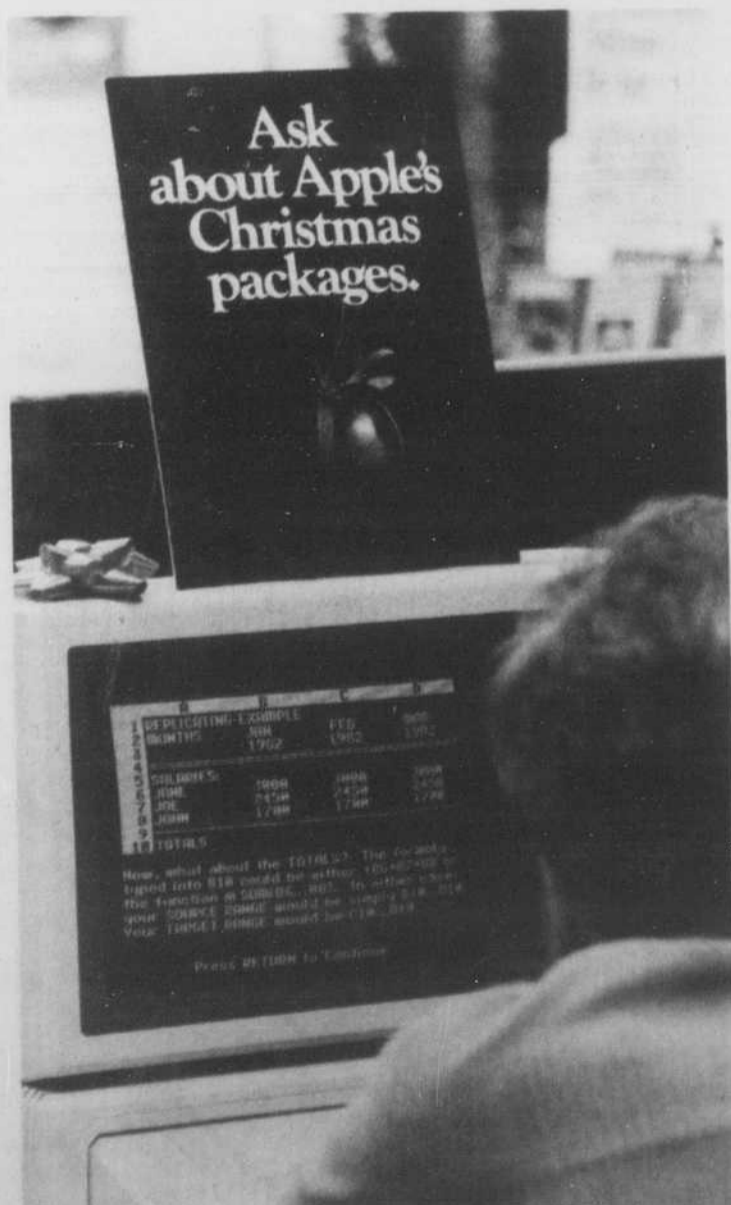
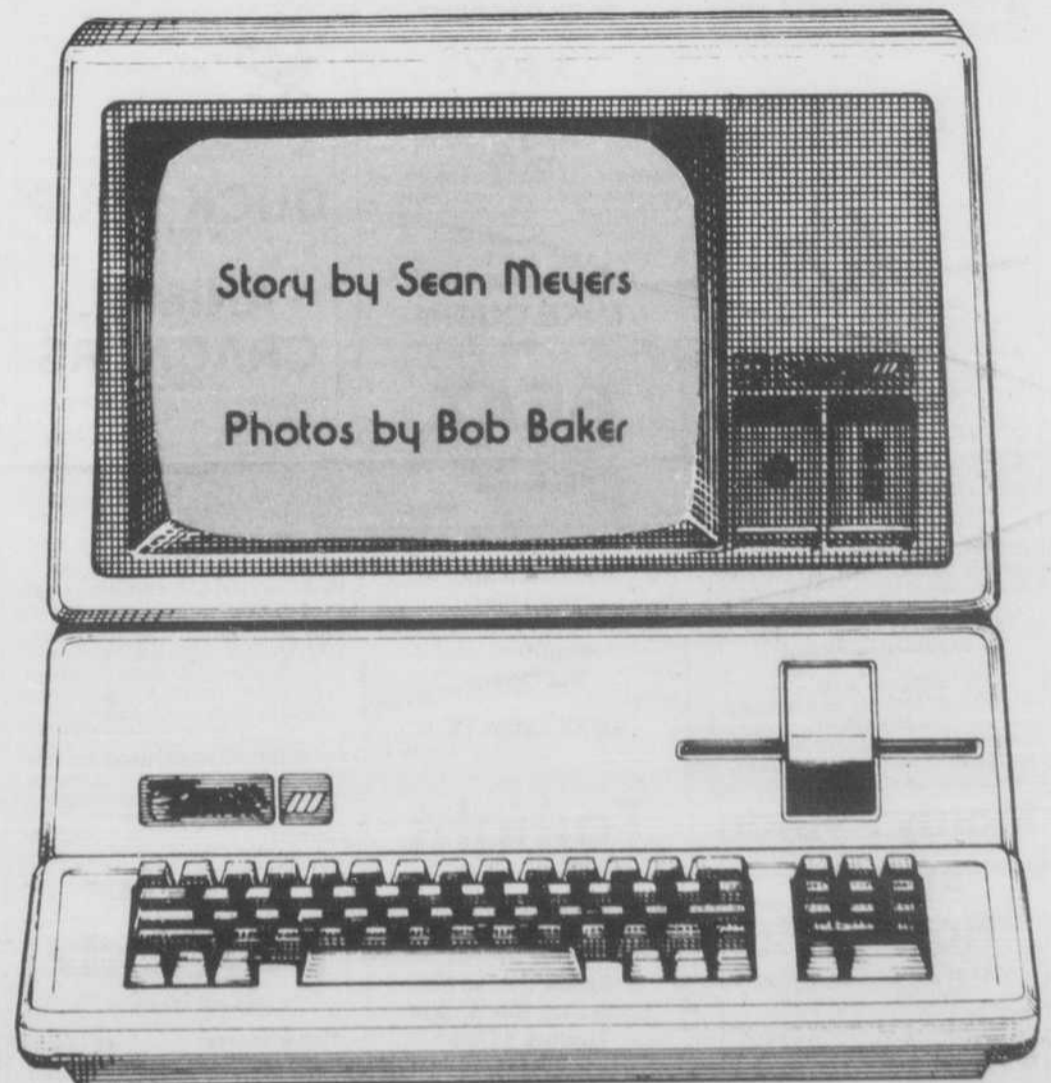
Realize limitations — Yes, with proper adaptations, a computer can balance your checkbook, teach you how to fly an airplane, feed the cat and fetch the paper.

But unless you are a writer, accountant, or legal secretary, there's a good chance that your personal computer will never be more than an expensive toy. An intriguing, exciting, wonderful toy perhaps, but a toy nonetheless.

As the salesman tells you all the wonderful things your personal computer will do for you, keep in mind that you have to teach the computer how to fetch the paper. But first you have to teach yourself how to teach the computer to fetch the paper, or else



Computer popularity is soaring among every age group and religious persuasion. But don't shop with the mind of a child — it's a silicon-chip jungle out there.



Sharpen those elbows when shopping for computers.

by a software program that can cost up to \$500.

The point being, it might be cheaper in the long run just to buy a dog.

Sharpen those elbows — Computer stores in Eugene are reporting brisk sales this holiday season, so be prepared to fight the crowd. Micki Bessler, of The Computer Store, says sales are "a lot better" this year compared to 1981. That store sells Apple II Plus outfits for \$1995.

Carl Watkins, manager of Computer Solutions Inc., which also deals in Apple Computers, agrees that "sales are stronger this year than last year. I think it's because the overall knowledge of society about computers has increased in the last year, and the interest generated by the media."

Thomet, who has a Commodore computer display at the University Bookstore, says student interest has been "crazy and wild." The prices of his models range from about \$200 to \$600, and he says because of new technology and because they produce their own microchips, the new Commodores can compete with the \$2,000 Apple II.

Uh... uh... uh! Caught you with your pants down — don't believe everything you hear or read coming from a salesman, remember? And people... be careful out there.