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TECH TRENDS 1992



Tracie Earwood, University sophomore, plays around with her new Hewlett-Packard 48 SX Scientific Expandable calculator as she tries to figure out all it's capable of doing.

Calculators put computer power in palm of hand

We can imagine that the original great minds of our world used fingers or rocks or sticks, or perhaps even the sun, to calculate their most perplexing computations.

As humanity progressed in its great quest to find the ultimate in arithmetic aids, the slide rule was discovered, as was the abacus and eventually what we know as the calculator.

Slowly, even that great invention was altered and the pocket and wristwatch calculators became the tools of choice.

Since those long-ago days of the passe watch-computer, solar energy has been incorporated to power our tally-totes, but good luck in a dark room.

Welcome to the 20th century! Boundaries have been stretched and limits have been surpassed.

True mathematical devotees can invest in Hewlett-Packard's latest contribution to the calculator community: the HP line of calculators for science and engineering consumers and the 95LX Palm-Top personal computer.

Ranging in price from \$50 to \$550, these high-tech tools let math mavens experience the ultimate in computation aids.

The HP 48 SX Scientific Expandable (about \$350) offers an increasable memory of up to 288 kilobytes and actually tailors its functions to the user with up to 256 kilobytes of plug-in application cards.

The application cards can best be likened to the discs of regular personal computers. The cards sell for around \$100 each and expand memory to play a game of poker or turn the calculator into a personal organizer.

Granted, the 48 SX may eventually make your life a bit simpler, but actually weeding through the 852-page, double-volume instruction manual ain't so easy.

"It amazes me, but I really haven't figured out

everything it can do," said Tracie Earwood, a sophomore computer science major and 48 SX owner.

Earwood, who received the calculator as a Christmas gift, has only scratched the surface of her latest toy's instruction booklet but says the calculator solves all kinds of problems, including algebraic and graphical ones. And it does it all on only three AAA batteries.

"It's only about one-quarter to an half-inch thick, and it's totally compatible with a Packard

'It amazes me, but I really haven't figured out everything it can do.'

—Tracie Earwood,
University student

Bell IBM compatible PC," she said.

Even more advanced, but perhaps destined to boggle minds further, is the 95LX Palm-Top personal computer.

For around \$580, this 11-ounce calculator (if it can even be called that) has a built-in read-only memory of one megabyte and includes memory compatibility with Lotus 1-2-3, an appointment book, a phone book and a memo editor.

The liquid crystal display is 40 columns by 16 rows with a typewriter-like alphabet keypad and a separate numeric keypad.

It calculates figures, percentages, square roots and everything a basic scientific calculator might do, but this Palm-Top personal computer also displays graphs and enables the user to plot an equation or mathematical expression. It even has a feature that allows users to zoom in on chosen areas of graphs.

The 95LX also has a built-in currency converter and the ability to figure business percentages such as percent change, markup and margin.

This hand-held wonder even has the capability to do data communication and can access information networks such as a company's electronic mail system or electronic information services.

"This is a personal computer in something that's a little bigger than three inches by seven inches, and with serial interface cables, can hook up to a Macintosh or IBM computer," said University bookstore electronics associate Natalie Eggert.

"I've sold at least 10 of them," Eggert said when asked if there are really people shelling out the money for this.

Hewlett-Packard also manufactures an HP Infrared Printer for \$135 that can plug into any of the HP calculators or the Palm-Top and print out data from the user's small screen.

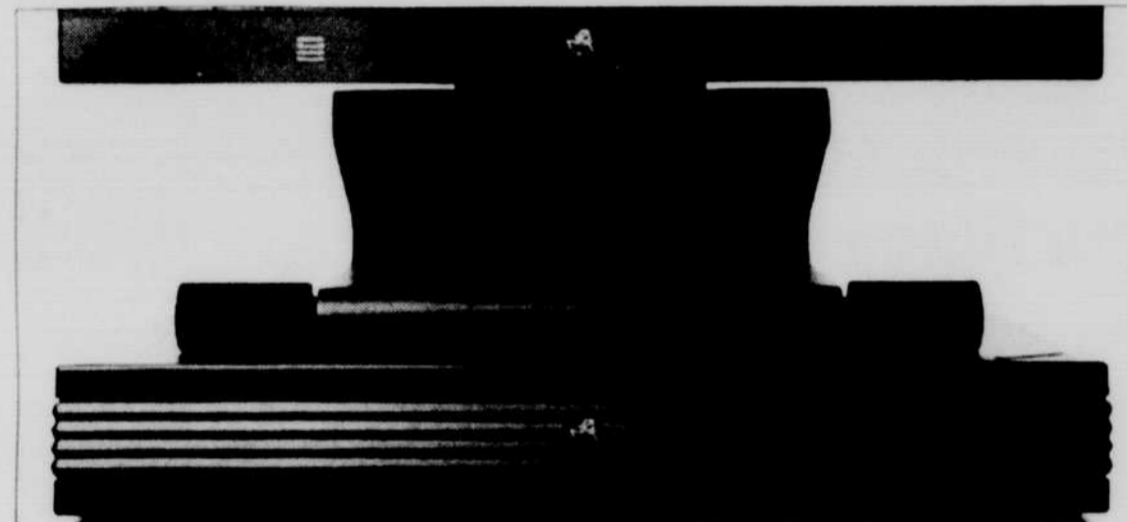
But even with all of the stuff these beauties can do, buyers must still be prepared to invest enough of their own brain time to learn how to fully utilize the calculators.

"That's one of the biggest deterrents for students," said Aryn Schaulter, the bookstore's electronics division manager.

"This advanced type of calculator frightens them, but if there is enough interest, Hewlett-Packard will gladly set up training courses — they love the students," he said.

Yep. Spend five hundred bucks on something that promises to do all the work for you, and you still have to go to class.

—Mike Freeman



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