

PEDISK II FLOPPY DISK SYSTEM: A Product Review

by Louis F. Sander
Pittsburgh, PA

The PEDISK II is an inexpensive and expandable disk drive system for Commodore PET/CBM computers. If you're thinking about a disk drive for one of those machines, you ought to look into PEDISK II.

Unlike the Commodore drives, which use the IEEE port, the PEDISK II plugs into a ROM socket inside the PET/CBM. To install the PEDISK II, you remove one of the Commodore ROMs and plug it into the PEDISK II controller board (Figure 1). The board then plugs into the vacant ROM socket, and a cable connecting the drive or drives plugs into it. Four additional connections inside the PET are made by high-quality clip connectors. The PEDISK manual gives clear, step-by-step instructions for fitting everything together, and none of the steps are difficult at all. The controller board also contains a ROM of its own, which must be matched to the ROMs and memory size of the host machine.

Either 5¼" or 8" drives can be used with the controller board, and it is a simple matter to expand from one to three drives on a system. All you do is get the proper cable and plug in the extra drives. The PEDISK system is also available for SYM and AIM computers, and disks made on one type of computer can be easily read on any of the others. If you have 8" drives, a standard IBM format is used, allowing you to exchange disks with many other machines.

The DOS, or Disk Operating System, provided with the PEDISK is designed for simplicity and speed. It has all the most useful features, with few frills, so if your ambition is to explore and work with the DOS itself, your task is a relatively easy one. Reading and writing information to the PEDISK are considerably faster than

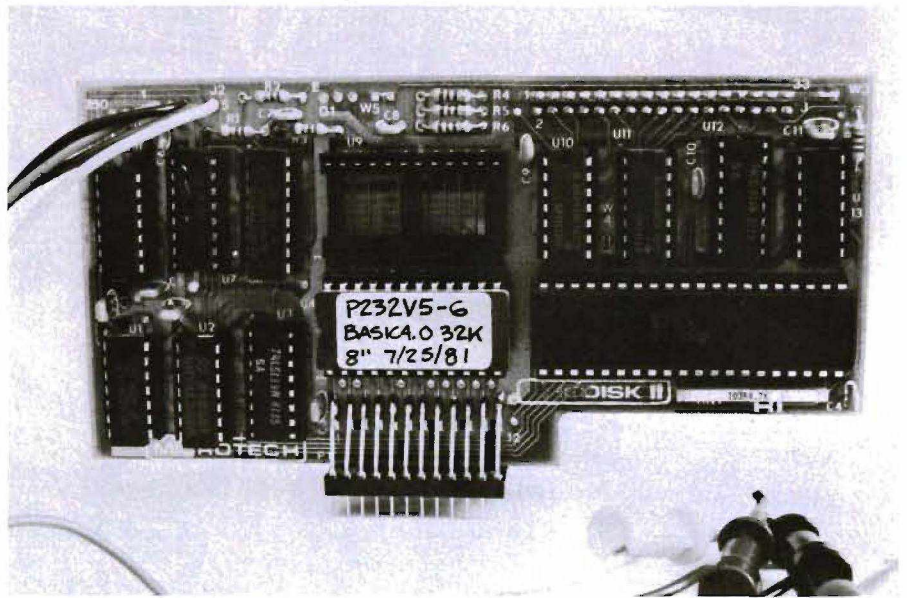


FIGURE 1—PEDISK II Controller Board

the same operations with Commodore drives. For those who want to use data files, the PEDISK supports both the sequential and the relative varieties.

To activate the disk, you do a simple SYS 59904 from your keyboard, which is rewarded by a short welcome message. At this point you have eight BASIC commands available to you, for performing the most commonly needed functions. !SAVE saves a program to disk. !LOAD loads it, and !RUN loads and runs it. !LIST gives a directory of all programs on the disk, while other similar commands are used for file handling.

The !SYS command moves the system into the so-called "PDOS Mode," in which you have more direct control over what is going on, at the machine language level. In PDOS mode, single keystrokes can be used to save or load machine language programs, to examine memory or disk sectors, etc. Using this mode, I have worked out several disk utilities that

were rewarding to write and helpful to use.

Like most manuals for computer hardware, the one with the PEDISK is somewhat difficult to fathom at first. The functions of some commands and operations are not immediately obvious, and the first-time user is likely to spend some time scratching his head. But with effort comes understanding—most of the mystery soon disappears, and the manual quickly becomes a useful guide to working with the system. There is a very useful PEDISK Newsletter, published several times each year, which gives further hints, programs, and instructions.

Other documentation, available at nominal cost, is a Programming Manual, essential for machine language dabbles, and DOS Source Listings, handy for those who **really** want to become expert.

Lots of software is available in PEDISK II format, including the famous MAE 6502 assembler, VISICALC,

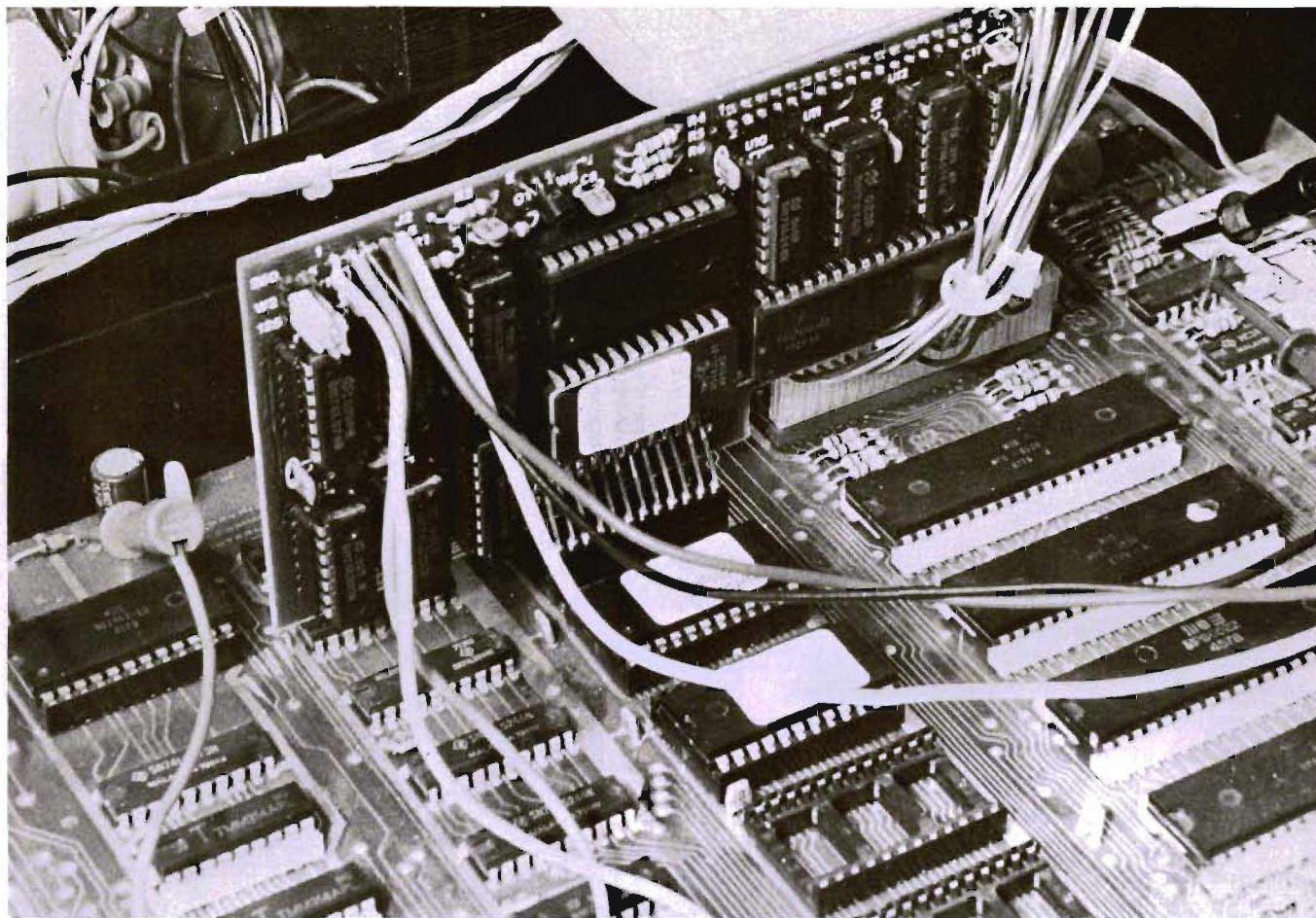


FIGURE 2—PEDISK II Controller board Installed in PET Logic Board

word processors, various utilities, etc. There is also an informal user group whose activities include software swapping. But if you plan to swap software with Commodore disk owners, you won't be able to do it by swapping disks, since Commodore and PEDISK formats are incompatible. I get around that problem by swapping on cassette tapes, which has been quite satisfactory for my purposes.

In summary, the PEDISK II is a very nice way to move beyond the cassette stage, especially if you want to save money on a multi-drive system, or if you want to learn about disk operating systems in an easy and straightforward way. Its only real shortcoming is its incompatibility with Commodore diskettes, but for me, at least, that is more than outweighed by its advantages. I'm glad I bought my PEDISK.

The PEDISK II is available in several configurations from dealers or from Microtech, P.O. Box 102, Langhorne, PA 19047. □



FIGURE 3—PEDISK II with 8" Disk Drive