Commodo

A matter of choice

The type of printer that you buy should be determined by the work for which you require it.

If its use is to be primarily private, producing listings and internal reports, the chances are that you will be able to get away with buying nothing more than an ordinary dot matrix printer. The quality of the output will not be outstanding, but will certainly be legible; and a good dot matrix should be able to whizz along at speeds well in excess of 100 characters a second.
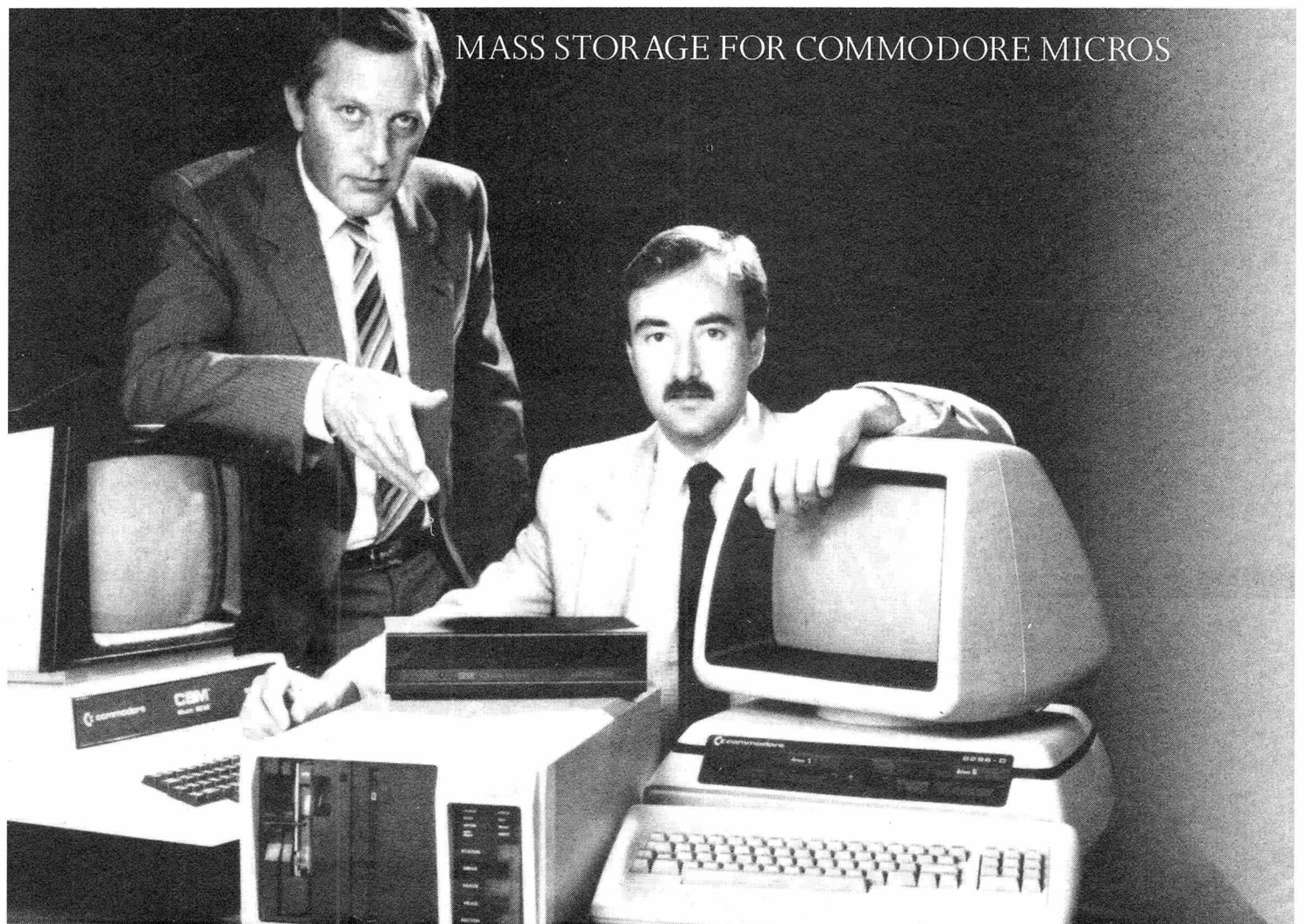
If the printed material is to be seen by anyone other than yourself; for instance, in a company using the printer as part of a word processing system, you will probably have to spend rather more money and be prepared to put up with a slower but higher quality, daisy wheel printer.

As ever, you pay your money and take your choice.

Commodore's own printers range from a relatively inexpensive dot matrix printer to a more expensive daisy wheel printer. The speed of the latter device has left some people thinking that they could type faster themselves.

Early Commodore computers, before the Vic 20 and the 64, had an unusual version of an IEEE interface which linked to many standard printers.

Owners of Commodore 64s and Vic 20s today are in a less fortunate position; the interface provided on those two computers is compatible with nothing other than Commodore's own peripherals.

If you don't want to go to the expense of buying various interfaces, but don't want to use Commodore printers, look at Ibek Systems. They have just brought out a daisy wheel printer called the Sanple Daisy Step 2000 which plugs directly into the 64.

IBEK. Tel: 0203 661162.

Dot matrix printers

Few printers, other than Commodore's own, will allow you to reproduce the graphics character sets found on the actual computer, although most of them will allow you to define characters and produce, for

MASS STORAGE FOR COMMODORE MICROS

re Printers

example, dot by dot copies of the screen. However, this requires some software to be written by you, the user, so we'll stick to straightforward printers, starting with the DRH 136, which can operate in either RS232 or Centronics modes.

The DRH 136, distributed by Triumph Adler (27 Goswell Road, London EC1, on 01-250 1717), is a 120 characters per second (abbreviated from now on to CPS) printer, with the ability to print bi-directionally. The number of characters printed per line is software selectable, and can range from 136 to 224, although this latter mode is the type that requires an extremely powerful magnifying glass.

Many character sets are available with this printer, but at a price of £675, you may care to take a look at the slower, but cheaper, DRH 80/81.

Again from Triumph Adler, this is down to 80 CPS, but only costs £540. Apart from only having a 140 column line at maximum, the only real difference between this machine

and its big brother, the DRH 136, is the print speed, and, of course, the price.

Cheaper still, at £498, is the Facit 4510 from Facit-Addo Limited (Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 3ON. Telephone 0634 401721). This is a 120 CPS dot matrix printer, with a column width of up to 80 characters, which is switchable down to 12 columns, should you so desire it.

There is a broad range of character sets available, and also a number of different print modes, including condensed and compressed. This can be linked up to either Centronics or RS232 interfaces.

Epson have long held a reputation for producing good, cheap, dot matrix printers, and the latest printers from them have done nothing to harm a hard-earned reputation.

The RX-80-FT is a 100 CPS printer with a variety of typefaces and sizes, supplied with a Centronics interface (although this can be converted into either IEEE or RS232 if required), and capable of taking either friction feed or tractor feed.

At just £319, this is worth considering, as is its slightly more expensive big brother the FX80.

This costs £438, but has the ability to print at almost twice the speed (160 CPS), and produce near letter quality output.

Epson (Dorland House, 388 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6UH. Tel: 01-902 8892).

The price of speed

Possibly the fastest dot matrix printer that is readily available for any Commodore computer is the DRS 250, again from Triumph Adler. This races along at of 250 CPS, and comes complete with either an RS232 or a Centronics interface.

However, if the computer that you own is a Vic 20 or a Commodore 64, there seems little point in paying around £200 for a computer, and then paying out another £1,495 for the printer to go with it.

If you're extremely rich, obviously the DRS 250 has a lot to recommend it. If you're like the rest of us...

▷