

TURBO TAPE

Checking out Micro Discount's Turbo Tape Deck

If you were reading New Atari User when it was published under the title of Page 6 Magazine then you may well recall advertisements from a company called Rambit. Among several products they advertised a tape deck conversion kit that enabled cassettes to be loaded at super fast speeds, but the main drawback was that you had to be handy with a few tools in order to convert your own recorder and it was not exactly easy to convert your tapes. Now, Micro Discount have resurrected the Rambit device and can supply XC12 cassette decks ready to run at turbo speed together with a good selection of commercial games ready to load in high speed format.

THE TURBO RECORDER

If you already have a cassette recorder and are handy with a soldering iron then you can purchase a Turbo kit and install it yourself but the majority of users will be happier to purchase a ready converted unit.

The XC12 TURBO RECORDER from Micro Discount costs £43.00 plus £2.50 postage and only needs to be plugged into your computer. It will load all standard tapes as well as the High Speed format so that you have no worries regarding your existing software collection. All your present tapes will load but only at the usual speed. If you want to take advantage of the High Speed facilities then you will either have to convert your tapes or buy ready to run High Speed tapes from Micro Discount or Tiger Developments. Several games and utilities are already available.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

A High Speed tape has a special header that loads the Rambit program at normal speed taking about 25 seconds and six 'beeps'. From there on the program blasts into memory at the highest speed obtainable and the loading times are reduced by astonishing amounts as detailed in the table alongside. The load process is silent with the usual loading sound replaced by on-screen information consisting of a line at the top of the screen indicating how many bytes have been loaded into memory and a screenful of garbage showing the information being loaded. I have no idea why this is necessary as it only serves to make the process look quite amateurish, as if the programmer couldn't figure out how to shut off the screen. The status information at the top is quite adequate to show that the load is progressing properly. Still it doesn't inhibit the loading and average load times are so short that it won't bother you too much.

ADVANTAGES

As far as games go, the loading times are improved so much that you are likely to play your favourite games much more often and you will wonder how you ever had the patience to load the games before, but the Turbo Recorder also opens up the possibilities of using more serious programs like word processors.

Micro Discount sell a High Speed Word Processor on cassette which is actually AtariWriter. Now, cassette based word processors have been available before but they suffered the major disadvan-

TURBO LOAD TIME COMPARISONS

	STANDARD LOAD	TURBO LOAD
ARCADE FRUIT MACHINE	9 min. 7 secs	1 min. 34 secs
AMAUOTE	15 min. 5 secs	2 min. 21 secs
BLINKYS SCARY SCHOOL	15 min. 10 secs	2 min. 17 secs
CAVERNIA	12 min. 5 secs	1 min. 15 secs
FEUD	18 min. 25 secs	2 min. 28 secs
GHOSTBUSTERS	14 min. 40 secs	1 min. 50 secs
HENRYS HOUSE	12 min. 5 secs	1 min. 15 secs
JOCKY WILSON'S DARTS	15 min. 26 secs	2 min. 16 secs
LAS VEGAS CASINO	15 min. 12 secs	2 min. 17 secs
MIRAX FORCE	14 min. 50 secs	1 min. 50 secs
MOUNTAIN BIKE RACER	15 min. 9 secs	2 min. 27 secs
NINJA COMMANDO	15 min. 36 secs	1 min. 45 secs
STACK UP	8 min. 31 secs	50 secs
SIDEWINDER II	10 min. 43 secs	60 secs
L.A. SWAT	10 min. 5 secs	60 secs
THE LAST GUARDIAN	14 min. 5 secs	1 min. 12 secs
TAGALON	13 min. 5 secs	1 min. 6 secs
TIGER ATTACK	12 min. 16 secs	1 min. 27 secs
TITAN	16 min. 13 secs	1 min. 46 secs
ZYBEX	16 min. 35 secs	1 min. 50 secs

tage of taking ages to load and then ages to save and load any documents you have created. The High Speed Turbo format means that, at last, word processing becomes practical on a cassette based system. This version of AtariWriter loads in 1 minute 46 seconds and will save and load in high speed. The manual is on the reverse of the tape and comes in four parts with the total comprising 27 pages when printed out. The first part of the manual takes just 55 seconds to load, less time than it takes to print it out! On a standard recorder this might take up to 10 minutes to load making any word processing session a long, drawn out, affair.

Other serious programs available include PRINT LAB, a DTP style program for the 1029 printer, an excellent drawing package called PAINTBOARD and also TURBO BASIC on cassette (complete with a photocopy of the manual that Page 6 put together! Ah, well!).

WANT TO BUY ONE?

If you don't have a cassette deck at present then I can see no reason for buying a standard deck when for about £10 extra you could have the XC12 Turbo Recorder. All standard tapes will run and you have the opportunity of purchasing high speed format tapes. These work out a little more expensive at around £4.50 each but are well worth it. Spend your time playing games rather than listening to them load!

If you already have a cassette deck then you could convert it yourself, and we hope to cover the conversion procedure in a future article, but you might prefer to sell it on and buy the XC12 Turbo recorder. It is, without doubt, the next best thing to having a disk drive.

Les Ellingham