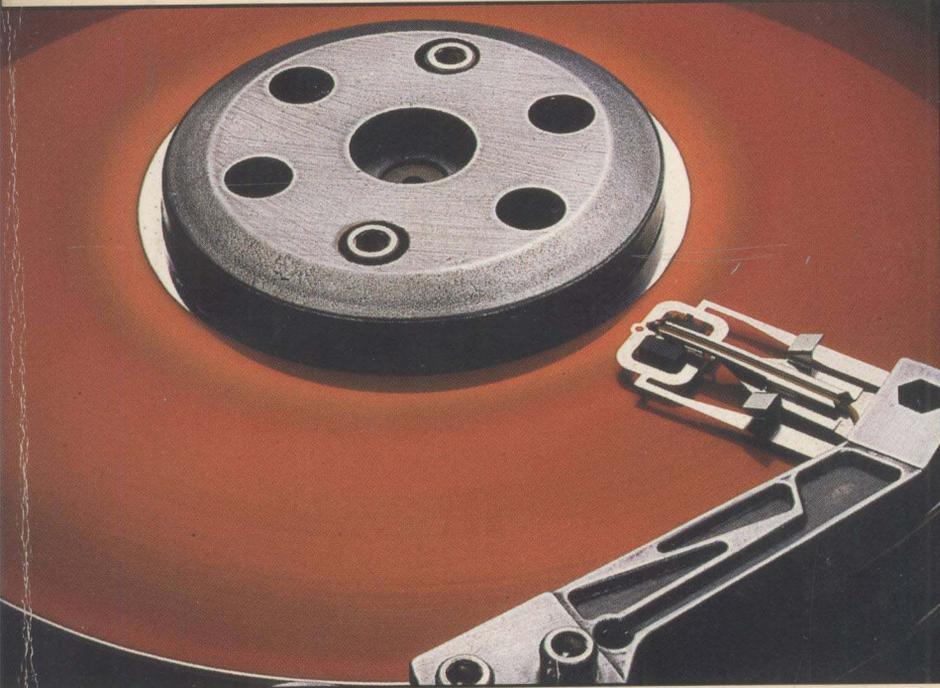


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The Complete IBM Personal Computer:

*The Authoritative Guide
to Hardware
for Expanding the
IBM PC, XT, AT,
and Compatibles*

Seth Novogrodsky
Frederic E. Davis
and the Editors of PC World



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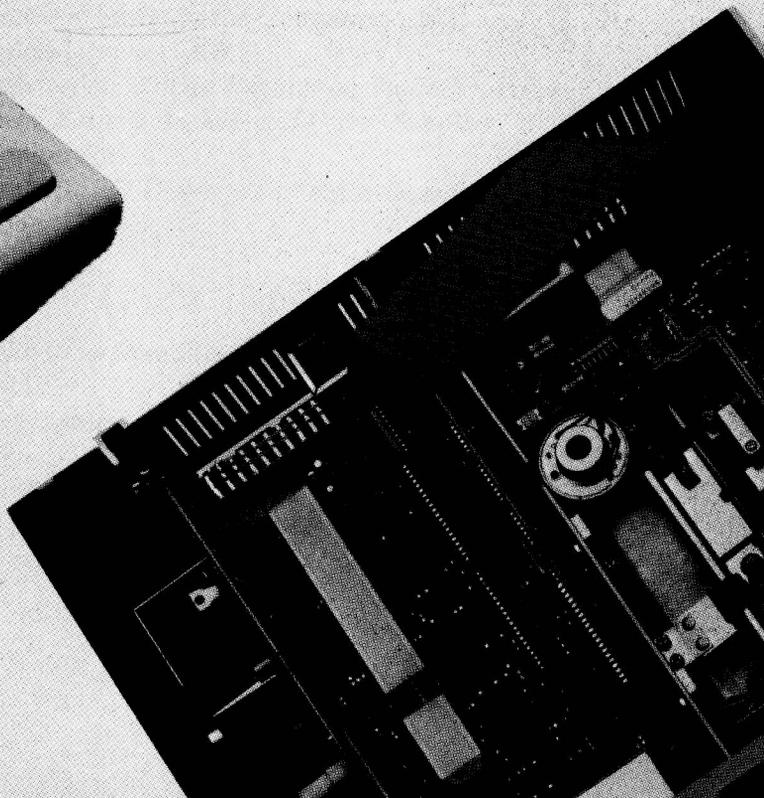
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S.N.
F.D.

The Complete IBM Personal Computer



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Contents

Introduction 1

1

An Overview of the IBM Personal Computers 7

System Unit 8

*CPU; Memory; Expansion Slots; Mass Storage Devices;
Switch Settings; Other System Unit Features*

Monitors and Display Adapters 17

Keyboard 18

Additional Plug-in Boards 20

Printers 22

The Big Picture 22

2

Plug-in Boards 25

Opening the System Unit 27

Care and Handling of Boards 28

DIP Switches 29

Memory Expansion 30

Adding RAM Chips 31

RAM Boards 32

CMOS RAM 35

Bubble Memory 36

ROM Expansion Boards 37

I/O Boards 38

Serial I/O Boards; Parallel I/O Boards

Clock/Calendar Boards 43

Multifunction Boards 44

ComboPlus; 2nd MATE; Combo II; PC Master; Sandstar
Expansion Units 46

3

- Display Boards 51
- The IBM Monochrome Display and Printer Adapter 55
- The IBM Color/Graphics Adapter 57
- IBM Enhanced Graphics Adapter 60
- Bit-Mapped Graphics 61
- IBM PC Professional Graphics Controller 63
- Non-IBM Display Boards 64
 - Monochrome Display Boards; Color Display Boards; Combination Display Boards*

4

- Monitors 71
- Monochrome Monitors 72
 - TTL Monochrome Monitors; Composite Monochrome Monitors*
- Color Monitors 77
 - RGB Monitors*
- Special-Purpose Displays 81
 - Large Monitors; Plasma Displays; Photographing the Screen*
- Ergonomics and Accessories 85

5

- Printers 89
- Dot Matrix Printers 92
- Letter Quality Printers 99
- Color Printers 103
- High-Speed Line Printers 104
- Ink Jet Printers 105
- Laser Printers 107
- Typewriter Interfaces 108
- Plotters 109
- Accessories 111
 - Sheet Feeders and Paper Tractors; Sound Enclosures; Print Buffers and Spoolers; Printer Stands*

6

- Disk Drives and Other Storage Devices 117
 - Floppy Disk Drives 118
 - High-Density 5¼-Inch Floppy Disk Drives; Eight-Inch Floppy Disk Drives; Microflops*
 - Hard Disk Drives 123
 - Fixed Hard Disk Drives*
 - Hard Disk Backup Systems 128
 - Removable Hard Disks 130
 - Sharing a Hard Disk Drive 131
 - Half-Inch Tape Drives 131
 - Miscellaneous Storage Devices 133
 - RAM Disks; Optical Disk Systems; Disk Copiers*

7

- Communications 139
 - Modems 140
 - External Modems; Internal Modems; Line-Driver Modems*
 - Micro-to-Mainframe Communications 146
 - Protocol Converters*
 - Local Area Networks 151
 - Network Topologies; Networking Hardware; PCnet; Ethernet; ARCnet; Omninet; IBM Personal Computer Cluster*
 - IBM PC Network 156

8

- Input Devices 159
 - Keyboards 160
 - Game Paddles 165
 - Joysticks and Track Balls 166
 - Mice 167
 - Light Pens 169
 - Touch Pads 170
 - Touch Screens 172
 - Digitizing/Graphics Tablets 172
 - Bar Code Readers 173
 - Optical Character Readers 174

9

- Voice, Music, and Sound 177
- Speech Systems 178
 - Speech Storage and Playback Systems; Speech Synthesis Systems; Speech Recognition Systems; Advanced Voice Systems*
- Music and Sound Synthesizers 185
 - Professional Music Systems; Sound Analysis*

10

- Special-Purpose Hardware 191
- Coprocessor Boards 192
 - Eight-Bit Coprocessors; High-Performance Coprocessor Boards*
- Prototyping Boards 197
- Remote Sensing and Scientific-Monitoring Hardware 198
 - Lab Tender and Lab Master; Geologger; Dash-16; BSR-X10 Controllers*
- Encryption and Security Boards 203

11

- Power Protection, Diagnostic Tools, and Miscellaneous Hardware 207
 - Port Connectors and Switching Devices 207
 - Supplying Electrical Power to the Computer 208
 - Power Protection Devices 209
 - Surge Suppressors; Voltage Regulators; Isolators; Power Interrupters; Battery Backup and Power Supplies*
 - Diagnostic Equipment 212
 - Tools; Cables; LED Displays and Patch-Boards*
 - Troubleshooting 215
-
- Appendix: Guide to Manufacturers of Hardware Products 221
 - Authors' Biographies 257
 - Credits 258
 - Trademarks 259
 - Index 263

Introduction



Having picked up this book, you are probably at the stage in personal computing where you want to use your computer system to do more tasks, whether they are personal or professional, simple or complex. *The Complete IBM Personal Computer* is for individuals and professionals who want to *expand their expertise* on the IBM PC, XT, Portable, AT, and IBM compatible personal computers.

Expanding your expertise does not necessarily require learning more about the PC's hardware or about hardware you want to add to it, but learning about hardware components will unlock secrets that increase your expertise dramatically. At the very least, what you learn will give you the tools to do your personal computing more comfortably, the way you want to do it, with increased efficiency.

But, how can you plan your system to match your expanding needs? The first step is to find out what products and technology are being developed for the IBM PC. To satisfy your immediate needs, you may only need to install a new circuit board, a modem, or data storage device. This book introduces you to the range of hardware products manufacturers have developed for the PC. You will learn about the many categories of products (such as printers) that enhance the PC,

what the products do, the key distinctions between products in each category and why certain products may be best suited to your needs.

Compatibility This book concentrates on hardware developed specifically for the IBM PC, XT, Portable, and AT, and for those machines that are said to be “hardware compatible.” “Hardware compatible” means that the computer can accept expansion boards designed for the IBM PC. Three examples of compatibles that can accept PC boards are the Compaq portable computer, the ITT Xtra, and the Columbia MPC. Note that the PCjr does not fit into this category, and the PC AT is not compatible with all the boards designed for the PC.

If you own a PCjr, however, you will discover that much of the information in this book is relevant to you. For example, virtually all of the printers, external modems, and composite and RGB monitors discussed in this book are compatible with the PCjr. Other hardware components such as input devices and accessories are also compatible with the PCjr. Moreover, the hardware expansion products for the PCjr are very similar to the hardware expansion products for the PC, and the same criteria are often used to choose the best product. We do not, however, discuss products designed only for the PCjr in this book.

The IBM PC AT is different from its cousins. It has a different hardware architecture, a different central processing unit, and different expansion capabilities. In this book, we discuss some products that are designed specifically for the AT and other products specifically designed for the PC, XT, Portable, and hardware-compatible machines. Fortunately, the vast majority of the hardware described in this book is compatible with all these machines. If you are using the AT, though, you should realize that some boards mentioned here may not be compatible with your machine, in particular, boards that contain memory chips. Often equivalent boards for the AT exist with the same features.

Comprehensive Understanding This book covers all categories of products and presents example products from each category. Space does not allow a description of every product in a category, for example, every memory expansion

board available for the PC, XT, Portable, and AT. However, representative products in each category are discussed. Their selection was based on their overall quality and on their general acceptance among PC users. Many products not mentioned here are also high quality and popular.

By concentrating on selected products, we have provided a thorough understanding of the chief characteristics of a product and the key distinctions among products. Although the products selected are high quality, we occasionally make recommendations for products that consistently have proven to be reliable and represent unusually good values.

Timeliness We have made this book as timely as possible. Yet, manufacturers are changing their product lines at a surprising pace. During the short period of creating this book new and exciting products for the IBM PC line appeared. For the latest information about PC compatible products, we recommend that you consult a current issue of *PC World* magazine or other relevant magazines. Because hardware products and specifications frequently change, we have made a special point of focusing discussions on explanations and concepts that do not change.

If a new product is interesting to you, find similar products in this book and compare the new with the old. Some of the tried and true older products will continue to outdistance new products because they have proven reliability. On the other hand, new products offer cutting edge improvements over existing products. To help you get the information you need, we have provided the address of most of the major suppliers of PC compatible hardware products in the Appendix.

Organization This book is organized around categories of products such as plug-in boards, monitors, printers and storage devices. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the IBM PC, XT, Portable, and AT, and provides background concepts for the major topics. Chapter 2 focuses on expansion boards, perhaps the most common way of increasing the performance of your PC. If you are new to personal computers, we recommend reading the first two chapters before skipping to other chapters.

In Chapter 3, we examine display boards, which allow the computer to produce images on the screen. In Chapter 4,

we review monitors and other display devices. Chapter 5 discusses printers and hardware associated with them. In Chapter 6, we focus on storage devices, such as floppy disks, fixed and removable hard disks, and new technology designed to store large quantities of information.

Chapter 7 discusses computer-to-computer communications devices such as modems, special protocol converters, and local area network adapters. Chapter 8 presents various devices you can use to communicate with the computer, for example, keyboards, mice, joysticks, and bar code readers. Speech, music, and sound-related hardware are the topics of Chapter 9 in which we examine speech synthesis and recognition equipment and computer music equipment.

For hardware that is both sophisticated and designed for unique circumstances, Chapter 10 discusses special purpose hardware such as coprocessor boards, prototyping boards, remote sensing and scientific monitoring hardware, and security hardware that protects confidential information. Finally, Chapter 11 provides a quick rundown of hardware that does not fit into the above categories, such as testing and diagnostic devices, and includes some useful information about hardware troubleshooting.

The Appendix is a handy reference to all manufacturers mentioned in this book.

A Cautionary Word Before getting started, we'd like to offer advice about selecting hardware: Pay more attention to the difference between "good enough" and "not good enough" than to the difference between "good enough" and "the best."

Hundreds of hardware manufacturers and suppliers are offering thousands of products for the IBM family and compatibles. For each application, some products are not good enough, some are good enough, and some may be considered the best. The temptation is to be dazzled by the best. If the product is good enough, however, you should seriously consider it.

Products considered to be the best may be more powerful, and more expensive, than you need. Also, what others consider best is not necessarily best for your application. Consider all the needs and demands of what you expect from your computer and be careful not to buy a more costly product than you really need.