AmigaMCCC News
Fort Worth Dallas
October 2014

"New" Amigas

The Amiga world has been a little light on hard news so far this month, so I will do a little hypothetical exploration instead. One of the recurring themes in the world of "new" Amigas is the idea of using new hardware concepts to recreate the function of the original Amiga hardware in one sense or another. This is in contrast to the "modern" Amiga and Amiga-derived systems which use mostly general-purpose PowerPC or other hardware and video cards running Amiga OS4, MorphOS, or AROS. Like Amiga emulation in one way, and very different in another, these "new-retro" developments use new and configurable hardware like FPGA chips to recreate the functions of the original Amiga chips. The purpose of these is generally to be as compatible as possible with classic Amiga software (including the ones that "bang the metal" — programming the chips directly) while implementing benefits from newer hardware, like speed and network or USB interfaces.

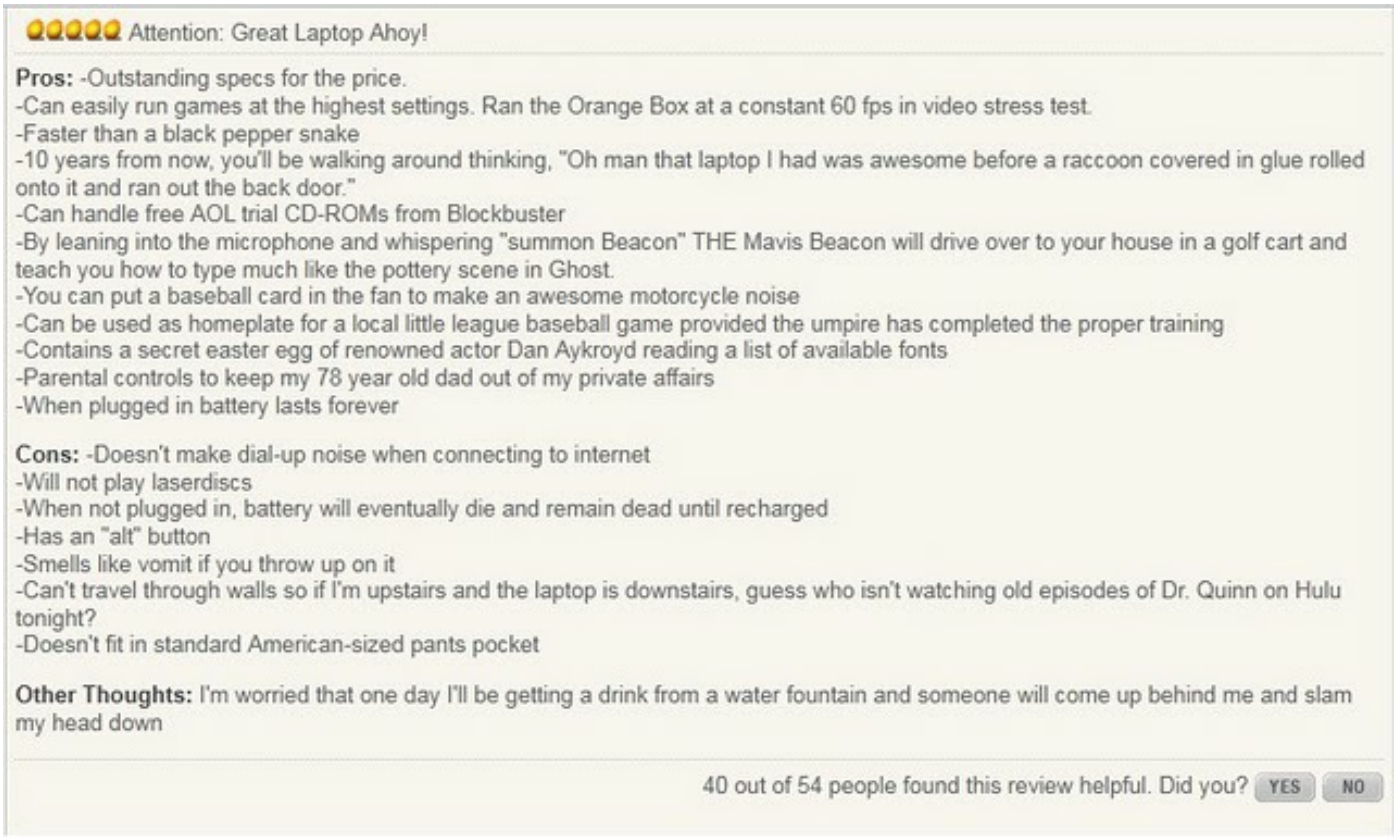
The early implementations were designs like the "Minimig," which was functionally equivalent to an Amiga 500 and worked much like a game console loading Amiga games from disk image files. More recent implementations like FPGArcade and others made possible greater speed, memory, and storage, the ability to function as more advanced Amiga models, or even switch to act as multiple computer systems or game consoles in one device. It kinda parallels Amiga emulation in a way. From there, the next step is to make the Amiga systems we didn't have back in the day, but would've wanted. One (partial) example is a recent CPU replacement / accelerator for the modest Amiga 600 system, using the Apollo CPU. Updated "cores" for the CPU enable much greater throughput than the old 7 megahertz 68000, approaching the power of the 68040 or even 68060 chips while trying to retain as much compatibility as possible with the old CPU. With tech like this it gets more and more possible to have a classic Amiga compatible machine with processing brute force competitive with your garden-variety PC.

Beyond that, the next step is to design a system which is not just an Amiga, but what the Amiga might have been if not for Commodore's 1994 bankruptcy. This was the goal of the Natami team, whose project unfortunately appears to currently be somewhere between stalled and dead. The increasingly hypothetical Natami hardware not only had a fast 680x0-compatible CPU, but also video and audio hardware that expanded on the Amiga AGA chipset (and the unproduced AAA) as well. Like most of these "nuveau retro" systems, the intent was to retain compatibility with the old Amiga hardware and software (even the "metal banging" software) while expanding capability and adding new features. The abilities might not match those of an average PC video card, but should still far outclass the old Amiga systems. While it started out with a lot of apparent enthusiasm, the Natami project has lost most of its momentum and focus, and might never be completed at this point. Some of the work done may find its way into other projects, like how the Apollo CPU core is being used to accelerate existing Amigas.

I'm of mixed feelings about the need for "updated classic" hardware systems like I have described here. My G5 former Mac running MorphOS shows me what may very well be the top end of an OS-level Amiga compatible system. Amiga emulators running on fast PC hardware can do as well or better, with reasonable compatibility running as fast as the CPU will allow. Still, there will remain the allure of "real" hardware, however illusory. There is still Amiga software I use (or would like to use) which requires Amiga hardware to work, with no equivalent for my MorphOS machine. It would be nice to have some powerful, reliable, compatible new hardware out there which meets or exceeds the specs on my Amiga 4000 tower with the 68060 processor,

essentially giving me a spare or replacement for my decade-plus-old Amiga system without missing a beat. It might be a pipe dream at this point, but achievable with time and appropriate focused effort. Without dreams, the Amiga might never have existed in the first place, so I'll keep dreaming.

…by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech Gazette, September 2014



QQQQQ Attention: Great Laptop Ahoy!

Pros: -Outstanding specs for the price.
-Can easily run games at the highest settings. Ran the Orange Box at a constant 60 fps in video stress test.
-Faster than a black pepper snake
-10 years from now, you'll be walking around thinking, "Oh man that laptop I had was awesome before a raccoon covered in glue rolled onto it and ran out the back door."
-Can handle free AOL trial CD-ROMs from Blockbuster
-By leaning into the microphone and whispering "summon Beacon" THE Mavis Beacon will drive over to your house in a golf cart and teach you how to type much like the pottery scene in Ghost.
-You can put a baseball card in the fan to make an awesome motorcycle noise
-Can be used as homeplate for a local little league baseball game provided the umpire has completed the proper training
-Contains a secret easter egg of renowned actor Dan Aykroyd reading a list of available fonts
-Parental controls to keep my 78 year old dad out of my private affairs
-When plugged in battery lasts forever

Cons: -Doesn't make dial-up noise when connecting to internet
-Will not play laserdiscs
-When not plugged in, battery will eventually die and remain dead until recharged
-Has an "alt" button
-Smells like vomit if you throw up on it
-Can't travel through walls so if I'm upstairs and the laptop is downstairs, guess who isn't watching old episodes of Dr. Quinn on Hulu tonight?
-Doesn't fit in standard American-sized pants pocket

Other Thoughts: I'm worried that one day I'll be getting a drink from a water fountain and someone will come up behind me and slam my head down

40 out of 54 people found this review helpful. Did you? YES NO

October Calendar

October 6 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 PM — Main Grand Prairie Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

October 6 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

October 27 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 4418 Sharpsburg Drive Grand Prairie, Texas 75052
http://www.amigamccc.org