



MCCC News



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Life Left in Classic Amigas

With things like the Vampire and other affordable accelerator cards for low-end systems being more readily available, interest appears to be rising in the low-to-middle end of Amiga retro usage lately. Nowadays there are a handful of issues when it comes to using older hardware, generally related to trying to use it in concert with newer hardware and standards. A common issue is that of video, as Amigas, especially older ones, use NTSC and PAL (15 kHz) video scan rates, which has been more and more of a problem as 31 kHz VGA became dominant for computer monitors, then LCD and HD wide screens, along with digital signal cabling like the DVI and HDMI interfaces.

The Vampire card has an HDMI interface, and an “SAGA video card” built in to allow you to output to HD screens much like an Amiga with a dedicated video card. Future core updates of the Vampire intend to implement the Amiga AGA chip hardware, thus making it possible to output common Amiga resolutions and (hopefully) “metal-banging” games and software via HDMI.

Unfortunately, for the moment, Amiga chipset video still goes out through the standard ports, requiring anything from a switch to a separate monitor if you want to work both sides, and you’re still stuck finding a method for viewing 15 kHz video. Many in the “retro” com-

puting and gaming world keep around at least one dedicated CRT 15 kHz monitor, such as the venerable Commodore 1084. If you do some research, you can find a few recent LCD monitors that will accept 15 kHz video signals, as long as you have a good VGA cable adapter for the Amiga’s 23 pin video port. Another option is a scan-doubler or HD up-converter (internal or external) to modify the native signal into one for a modern TV or monitor. (again, you may require an Amiga to VGA cable, or SCART, or component) These up-converters range from inexpensive with quality that depends heavily on what you are willing to accept (like unimpressive picture quality or significant video lag), to high quality and fast response with a price tag to match.

Sometimes waiting around for the Vampire cores to catch up on Amiga chip implementation looks like the best option, but that doesn’t help those using something else, or no enhanced hardware at all.

The other main issue is that of getting files in and out the system from your other computers or outside sources. Back in the day, floppy discs were the only universal standard for moving files in and out of the Amiga, which didn’t seem too bad then since most of the files were under a megabyte. Now with giga/terabytes of storage in the palm of your hand, networks, wireless, and Internet on everything, the old Amigas look like xenophobic isolationists by comparison. Thankfully, there are multiple new-

er methods for getting things in and out of your Amiga systems, again depending on how much work and money you want to put into it.

A common option for the retro gaming crowd is the Gotek drive, replacing or supplanting an unreliable floppy drive with one which accepts SD cards or flash thumb-drives loaded with ADF disk image files. This is a limited option designed mostly for replacing floppy discs, and thus has a fairly specific use geared toward classic gaming. One of the most versatile options is adding a USB adapter, as not only does this give access to flash drives and other storage, you can also add PC mice, keyboards, and a wide range of other USB hardware. For small-box Amigas like the A500, A600, and A1200, this is usually accomplished by boards like the Subway or RapidRoad, which use the clock port interface on the A1200 motherboard, or on third-party memory/clock cards for the 600 and 500. This is one of the pricier solutions, no to mention a challenge trying to fit the card and cabling inside a cramped all-in-one Amiga case.

Another option is a network card, either wired or wireless. This has obvious benefits, but if your only goal was to get files in and out, it’s a bit indirect, requiring you to access files on another computer or device, or even doing thing like emailing attachments to yourself. Amiga network hardware can be pricey, with some of the cheaper

options being re-purposed PCMCIA network cards for the interface on the A600 or A1200. One of the less pricey options for large file transfer, at least for 600s and 1200s, is a PCMCIA adapter for memory cards such as Compact Flash. Like any PCMCIA card to be used on an Amiga, you need a 16 bit card to match the stock Amiga interface. Amiga Kit sells one for roughly \$13. If you find it difficult or pricey to get CF memory cards, further adapters are available to use common and inexpensive SD cards in their place. These adapters cost about \$12 each. Mine is a brand called Digigear, and was bought through Amazon.com. (You want the slim version for one that works with Amiga PCMCIA or IDE drive adapters.) They seem to work quite well, though it is recommended to avoid card sizes above 32 gigabytes.

For a while it seemed like classic Amiga was stagnating somewhat, with more attention going to the "high end" systems that ran OS4 or MorphOS. The door seems to have swung the other way in the last couple of years, thanks to more available and affordable hardware options to make the classic systems "just modern enough" to work within the framework of modern monitors or storage technologies. It's plenty enjoyable to play around with classic Amiga hardware, not unlike fixing up and tooling around in a classic car.

...by Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Newsletter,
February 2018

Drones Deliver Blood in Africa

Last month in Rwanda, a young woman started bleeding after giving birth by C-section. Try as they might, her doctors couldn't stop it. They'd already transfused the two units of matching blood that they had on-hand. They could have called the national blood bank in the capital of Kigali to request more, but ordering it, and sending it the 25 miles over mountainous roads to the hospital would take up to four hours. The woman didn't have that kind of time.

Desperate, the doctors called a distribution center near Kigali, where clinic workers and a flight crew loaded a series of small, unmanned aircraft with the needed supplies and launched them into the sky. Within 45 minutes, they dispatched seven units of red blood cells, four units of plasma, and two units of platelets, more than circulates through the entire human body.

Each drone needed just 15 minutes to reach the hospital, where it dropped its payload on a pre-determined landing zone. Doctors grabbed the supplies and used them to stabilize the 24-year-old patient.

Delivering medical deliveries by drone has become almost routine in Rwanda since the California startup Zipline arrived in October. "We do this every day," says company founder and CEO Keller Rinaudo. Although his company's hardware helped save that woman's life, he gives all the credit to the team, recruited from the surrounding community, at the distribution center. "That's not just her life," he says, "that's a kid who has a mom."

Now, Zipline is expanding into neighboring Tanzania, establishing

the world's largest national drone delivery service. The Tanzanian government wants to make as many as 2,000 daily deliveries from four distribution centers serving an area roughly the size of Texas and Louisiana.

Zipline has performed about 1,400 deliveries in Rwanda, about a quarter of them in emergencies. Its drones have clocked 60,000, delivering blood to areas ground vehicles can't reach quickly, or at all during the rainy season that turns roads to mud.

For the new service, Zipline plans to fly upgraded versions of its fixed-wing drones, which have a 6-foot wingspan and can cruise at 70 mph. Each can carry 3 pounds of cargo (one unit of blood weighs roughly 1.2 pounds), and the batteries can make a round trip of 100 miles. Folded wax paper parachutes and cardboard cargo bays make the drones both durable and cheap to operate and repair. "The new vehicle is highly modular," says Rinaudo. "If a sensor is giving weird readings, it's super fast to replace that."

Tanzania's first distribution center is slated for Dodoma, the capital, and will be up and running early in 2018. Three more will follow initially, with an eventual plan to create a network to serve the nation's 55 million citizens. That's a huge expansion over the operation in Rwanda, a much smaller country, where the drones currently reach around half of the population of 12 million. Each center will run a fleet of 30 drones, enough for 500 deliveries daily. In addition to blood, they'll carry emergency vaccines, HIV medications, and supplies like IV tubes, to 5,640 public health facilities.

Zipline makes a habit of recruiting and training local engineers, health

workers, and flight operators. As was the case in Rwanda, Rinaudo knows his team will have to work with local communities to emphasize the aircraft perform humanitarian, not military or surveillance, work.

The drones will supplement the government's sporadic overland deliveries. "That mission can be a challenge during emergencies, times of unexpected demand, bad weather, or for small but critical orders," Laurean Bwanakunu, director general of the country's medical stores department, said in a statement. "Using drones for just-in-time deliveries will allow us to provide health facilities with complete access to vital medical products no matter the circumstance."

While Zipline might expand further in Africa, Rinaudo believes its services could be useful globally. "Rural healthcare is a huge problem in the US too," he says.

But launching in America requires wrangling with restrictive regulations that have limited drone deliveries to the occasional test, like 7-Eleven's Slurpee shipment in Reno, Nevada, or Flirtey's drug dropoff in Virginia. Widespread operation requires approval from the FAA, which worries about keeping drones away from conventional aircraft.

But remote areas of the country—rural Native American reservations, for example—far from hospitals, could certainly benefit from a Zipline-like service. And from there, it's not such a big leap to launching a service to get you that Amazon package you so desperately need.

...from Wired.com
<https://www.wired.com/story/zipline-drone-delivery-tanzania/>

It's Not You, It's Your Android

Dating can be stressful. Going out with someone whom you barely know has the potential to be a supremely awkward event, whether because of their awkwardness or your own. Not to mention, putting yourself out there to be scrutinized by others can feel unpleasant, because who knows what they are thinking to themselves as you progress through the date.

Well, the information in this article won't make you feel any better about all that!

Dating site Match.com performs an annual Singles in America Study, and it just published the results from its eighth incarnation, which took input from over 5,000 single people. This year's study focused a lot on technology, and how tech plays a role in the dating world.

One of the more interesting results from the study is that iPhone users are 21 times more likely to negatively judge Android users they end up with on a date. Comparatively, Android users are 15 times more likely to do the same to iPhone users, so that settles the debate on which subculture is more judgmental towards the other.

To be fair, even having your phone out on a date is cause for judgment, as 58% of respondents claimed they don't want their date to have their phone face up on the table as they chat. 75% responded they wouldn't want their date to answer the phone without any explanation, and 66% said "No" to their date texting.

Remarkably, a whopping 92% of women were more likely to judge their date for having an older model of phone. So, to you single guys out there, might we recommend an upgrade?

Oh, and one more thing: the survey says that 25% of people would have sex with a robot, but almost half of the respondents said they would consider it cheating. So if you plan on having some hot robot sex, let your date know beforehand. Let us know how that goes for you.

...by C. Scott Brown,
Android Authority
<https://elbo.in/iH5>

March Calendar

March 11 — MCCC Meeting
2:30 PM — Grand Prairie Airport
3116 S. Great Southwest Parkway, Grand Prairie

March 11 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 4:30 PM — Location TBD

April 2 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

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