



MCCC News



Fort Worth

December 2018

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Buying an Amiga 30 Years Later

When I was younger we had an Atari ST as our home computer, and while it was a great machine and I loved it dearly, I always found a lot of the games weren't quite as good as on the Amiga that a lot of my friends had.

I routinely used to go to my friend's house, and we'd play for hours on the latest Amiga games. I'm guessing this was the mid to late 80's. That's around 30 years ago. Yikes!

A few months ago I watched "From Bedroom to Billions." It triggered some serious nostalgia and a lot of memories came flooding back. So on a whim, I decided to see if I could pick-up an Amiga on eBay to replay some of those old games that I loved as a child.

It turns out it's not too hard. There's a thriving community that still uses and loves the Amiga. There's also a fair number of people on eBay who refurbish and upgrade them with a 4GB memory card containing workbench and a bunch of software and games. This is very handy because, even if you did manage to buy the original games, there's no guarantee they will work due to the magnetic platters getting mouldy or damaged over the last 30 years. Yes, that's real life bit rot in action.

Buying "Vintage" Amiga Hardware

Ah eBay, I'm not sure where else you could easily find vintage and retro tech with such ease. I picked up the following for under £650, it may sound like a fair amount of money for 30-year-old hardware and I suppose it is. However, because it's now "vintage," it'll hold it's value (or go up). I don't plan on keeping it forever, but it's good to know I'll be able to get my money back once I've enjoyed that sweet hit of nostalgia.

Amiga Problems

I picked up the 1084s monitor, and on first boot, it looked good, I was impressed it was still working after all these years. However, a few minutes later I noticed a high-pitched whine. Uh-oh, I knew this was not a good sign. A little bit of Googling and I found out that this is usually a problem with the flyback, and while I'm technical and can build PC's this is way outside my comfort zone — especially when you consider these old CRT's are known for storing up a lot of electricity inside them.

The whine goes away after it's been on for 20 minutes, but the issue does mean the monitor probably has limited life left in it unless it's fixed. I plan to sell the monitor back on eBay at some point, so hopefully, someone that can fix the issue will pick it up.

I got the machine up and running, and the first few games I tried looked glorious on the old CRT monitor. I was delighted, however,

I then tied to launch Cannon Fodder, Syndicate, Monkey Island, and a few others and each one greeted me with the following error "Can't Allocate ShadowMem." Urgh.

After some more Googling, it turns out because the games are not running from floppy disks the machine needs to load them into RAM and run them from there. Along with running Workbench, this can quickly munch through the 2MB of RAM that the A1200 has installed.

Again, I turned to eBay and found an 8MB RAM upgrade. I installed this via the trapdoor in the bottom of the Amiga. I was pleasantly surprised to find it took less than 5 minutes to install. I never thought I'd see myself buying RAM and upgrading 30-year-old hardware in 2018, but here we are.

If you really want to push the boat out, you can try and get your hands on an accelerator, something like the Blizzard or Apollo — these have up to 128Mb RAM and a 68030 or 68040 Processor and offer a blistering performance enhancement. I decided not to go this route as they can be somewhat pricey.

Once the extra RAM was installed every single game I tried worked like a charm. I had finally reached retro nirvana. I had a perfect Amiga setup, it looked and worked just like it would have all those years ago.

Personal Top 20 Amiga Games

I'd forgotten how many of the best games I'd played as a child were actually on the Amiga, as I dug deeper I kept finding classics that I'd forgotten about. The vast breadth and depth of the Amiga games library is seriously impressive.

While we've come a long way in 30 years, some of the games don't hold up as well as I remember. Thankfully, there are a bunch of games that still look good, sound great, and are fun to play. Some of them could even give modern games a run for their money.

In no particular order, here are my personal top 20 favourite Amiga games:

- Lemmings
- The NewZealand Story
- Bomb Jack
- Bubble Bobble
- Rainbow Island
- R-Type
- Worms
- The Secret of Monkey Island
- Rick Dangerous
- The Chaos Engine
- Dungeon Master
- Gods
- Arkanoid: Revenge of Doh
- Chuck Rock
- MouseTrap
- Batman The Movie
- King's Quest I
- IK+
- Goldrunner
- Dogs of War

The other game I loved from this era was "Solomon's Key." Unfortunately, it was one of the few games that was only on the Atari ST and never made its way to the Amiga. Here's a list of games that didn't make my top 20 but are still worth mentioning:

Another World, Xenon, Space Quest, Magic Pockets, Syndicate, Cannon Fodder, Adventure Island Dizzy, Supercars, Pushover, Stuntcar Racer, Populous I & II, Speedball II, Simon the Sorcerer, Fire and Ice, Kid Chaos, Ballistix, Xenon & Xenon 2, Benefactor, Oscar, PP Hammer, Ruff 'n' Tumble, Soccer Kid, Yo! Joe, Traps n Treasure, Mr. Nutz, Jim Power, Turrican 2, Lost Vikings, Superfrog, Putty, Wonder Dog, Walker, Settlers, Kult, Oids, Flood, and Super Methane Bros.

Vintage Amiga Hardware Photos

There seems to be a lack of recent Amiga photos out there (not surprising really), and because I enjoy photography (and I'm a geek), I thought I'd spend some time taking a few photos. I've tried to give the images a slight retro/vintage feel to them without going over the top.

Final Thoughts

The Amiga still has an active and faithful community, and it's thanks to them that it's possible to pick up an Amiga and get it upgraded and running all these years later. I also think it's a testament to how impor-

tant the machine was in the UK and around Europe.

If you're looking to learn more about the booming home-brew game scene during 80's Britain then I can highly recommend "From Bedroom to Billions" (<http://www.frombedroomstobillions.com/>). It's a little low budget but seems to capture the time perfectly.

The follow-up documentary, "From Bedroom to Billions: the Amiga Years" (same web address) is also a must watch if you have fond memories of the Amiga. There's also "Viva Amiga," (<http://amigafilm.com/>) but I've not watched that one, yet!

If you're looking for even more retro gaming goodness you should check out "The Best 10 Video Game Documentaries." (<https://www.vintagewave.net/blog/2018/11/30/10-of-the-best-video-game-documentaries>)

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<https://www.vintagewave.net/blog/2018/11/30/buying-a-commodore-amiga-30-years-later>

December Calendar

December 8 — MCCC Meeting
2:00 PM — Burleson Public Library
248 SW Johnson Ave., Burleson

December 8 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 4:00 PM — Location TBD

January 1 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 2507 Tamaron Cove Cedar Hill, Texas 75104
<http://www.amigamccc.org>