August 2020

Amiga in Japan

I browse around the net regularly looking for Amiga stuff, as most know by now. One thing I found sparked my interest, showing me a world I knew almost nothing about. Commodore and their systems had very little presence in Japan, at least they didn't much past the VIC-20 (VIC-1001 in Japan) and the Commodore MAX machine, sort of a cut-back predecessor to the Commodore 64. Soon after, homegrown computer systems from NEC, Sharp, and others that used the MSX standard took over the Japanese market. Commodore wasn't completely locked out however and sold Commodore and Amiga computers in Japan in small numbers.

Strangely enough, the Amiga appeared to have a bump in Japanese popularity in the early-to-mid 1990s, shortly before Commodore went under. Books were published showing off the Amiga system around this time, displaying available hardware and software, and acting as tutorials and reference works, because the Amiga was never officially adapted to the Japanese language. It seems the Japanese fans of the Amiga enjoyed the idea of exotic foreign technology much as someone here might be a fan of Japanese tech, media, or culture, and several in the graphics and video industry used Amigas there just as they did here. I admit I never really thought about the Amiga's place in Japan before now, assuming it to be somewhere be-

tween minuscule and nonexistent, so this was an eye-opener for me, and perhaps you will find it interesting as well.

Commodore and the Amiga computer in Japan:
https://www.chrismcovell.com/secret/OTH_1986Q1.html

And I shall conclude this section with a few more Amiga YouTube links:

10MARC - Flash & SSD Drive solutions for Amiga 600/1200:
https://youtu.be/mLpDG2K0NmU

10MARC - Preview/review of Un-Amiga FPGA for Amiga 500/1500 cases:
https://youtu.be/Hf9ZAoDJy8U

10MARC - 2020 Amiga Art Contest announcement:
https://youtu.be/EWm8GjDggAk

I shall conclude this month's column by recounting my recent experiences in frustration and attempted escapes from it. Previously I wrote about how two of my different Apple hardware vectors for MorphOS usage went belly-up — the Powermac G5 succumbing to some as-yet unknown malady that stopped it from booting, and my generally-quirky Powerbook laptop dropping from an apparent hard drive crash. I have since obtained a new G5 tower and a new MorphOS license key to go with it. For better or worse, I was gathering funds for a new Vampire system, which went instead to replacing the G5, leaving me to build the Vampire fund up again. I am running on the hope that I will eventually get my original G5 tower running again, giving me two high-powered sys-

tems, which is why I got a new MorphOS key instead of attempting to migrate the old key to the new hardware.

My new tower runs a little slower than the previous, clocked at 2.0 gigahertz instead of 2.3. This was partly to save a little money, as prices seem to go up faster than the clock speeds, but also because the slower CPU runs about ten centigrade degrees cooler, running around 62-64 degrees where my 2.3 gHz CPU usually ran at around 74. I like the idea that a cooler system might have something of a longer life. Strangely enough, Mike Barclay's G5 system, also 2 gHz even, runs even cooler at around 58-60 degrees most of the time. (the fans on his kick into high gear at the drop of a hat, so maybe that's why) On all these systems, I simply moved my hard drive between machines, and it would boot as if it was always my old machine, so props to MorphOS for making that easy.

The other issue I had to deal with regarded the video card. I didn't realize the 2 gigahertz and 2.3 models used different video cards, the 2 using an older card with 64 mb video ram as opposed to the 128 meg card I was used to. I probably should have let it go, as there were no real problems where it was important. Still, I noticed some slight performance differences that got on my nerves now that could see them, and set out to upgrade the card. I found and bought a nice, cheap 128 meg card from Ebay, which turned out to have problems of its own, showing intermittent visual trash on the display, especially when booting cold. After inspecting the card, it appeared some large capacitors on it might be leaking, and in fact it looks like most video cards of this vintage

may be having similar issues in varying degrees. I found another, similarly inexpensive 128 meg Radeon video card from a slightly more reputable dealer, and this one looked cleaner (yet not perfect) and worked well enough, bringing the adventure of the new old G5 MorphOS machine to a close for now, assuming it doesn't go bad quickly.

Next on the plate will be looking into getting the older G5 working again, and seeing if having these Radeon video cards re-capped would be beneficial, or help the card which already has problems. I didn't exactly intend to, but it seems I'm becoming a bit of a hardware hoarder, with more than one Apple G5 system and double as many video cards of various RAM sizes. There's the temptation to take it further, as there probably is in many "classic/retro machine" circles. If something goes bad, just grab whatever replacement parts you need from the rack and keep going. I can't say I'm there yet, but as someone who'd rather be using Amigas and their related systems for many things, It's easy to see why you'd want to prepare ahead for potential failures, akin to the classic car nut who feels compelled to drive his '66 Mustang to work each day. Wish all of us luck folks!

…Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette
Dayton, Ohio, July 2020

CrowPi2

This inexplicably-named laptop is the all-in-one electronics toolkit you're probably looking for. Powered by a Raspberry Pi, the CrowPi2 features a screen and key-

board as well as a panoply of inputs and outputs that hearkens back to the 100-in-1 electronics kits of yore.

The laptop is fully-funded on Kickstarter and will ship this month. The CrowPi2 is a successor to, naturally, the CrowPi and this model features 22 sensors and buttons as well as lessons in programming Scratch, Python, Minecraft, and even facial recognition using the built-in camera.

You can even "make a piano using different fruits." I mean...

The new model is far more laptop-like than the original CrowPi and if the Kickstarter is to be believed you'll be able to play arcade games and even interact with beginner IDEs using the entire complement of inputs, allowing you to play Flappy Bird with the touch sensor and measure sound levels using the built-in microphones and LED array. Because this doesn't look like a toy, I suspect parents will have an easier time convincing their younglings not to dump this onto the floor like they do every other STEM product.

The basic model costs about $210 for early birds. If you figure out how to make music with a kumquat, do let us know.

…https://gizmodo.com/force-your-kids-to-code-with-this-raspberry-pi-laptop-1844586608

Mickey Mouse?

Golly, I didn't know Mickey was so generous.

Well, okay, maybe he's not. As reported by CNN, 176 people in Rhode Island got a curious check in the mail recently. What was intended to be a regular old tax refund check was signed, not by state officials, but by Mickey Mouse and his very dead creator, Walt Disney. Which, for those taxpayers, was surely concerning; while whimsical, few banks are likely to accept checks from anthropomorphic cartoon mice.

Typically, per CNN, these checks are signed by Seth Magaziner, Rhode Island's state treasurer, and Peter Keenan, the state controller. The mixup, which affected mostly corporate tax refunds mailed to taxpayers last week, was a result of the checks being printed using test materials—Mickey and Walt being the signees on Rhode Island's Division of Taxation's internal test printings.

As for the checks, they were, naturally, not cash-able, and were voided by the state, with replacement checks set to be mailed out with the proper signatures.

"The division is continuing to proactively contact impacted taxpayers to remedy the error, and apologizes for any inconvenience the error may have caused," Jade Borgeson, chief of staff for Rhode Island's Department of Revenue, told CNN.

…https://io9.gizmodo.com/a-bunch-of-people-in-rhode-island-accidentally-got-chec-1844586565