

# Video Review

Tape & Disc  
Reviews  
plus  
Equipment  
Test Reports

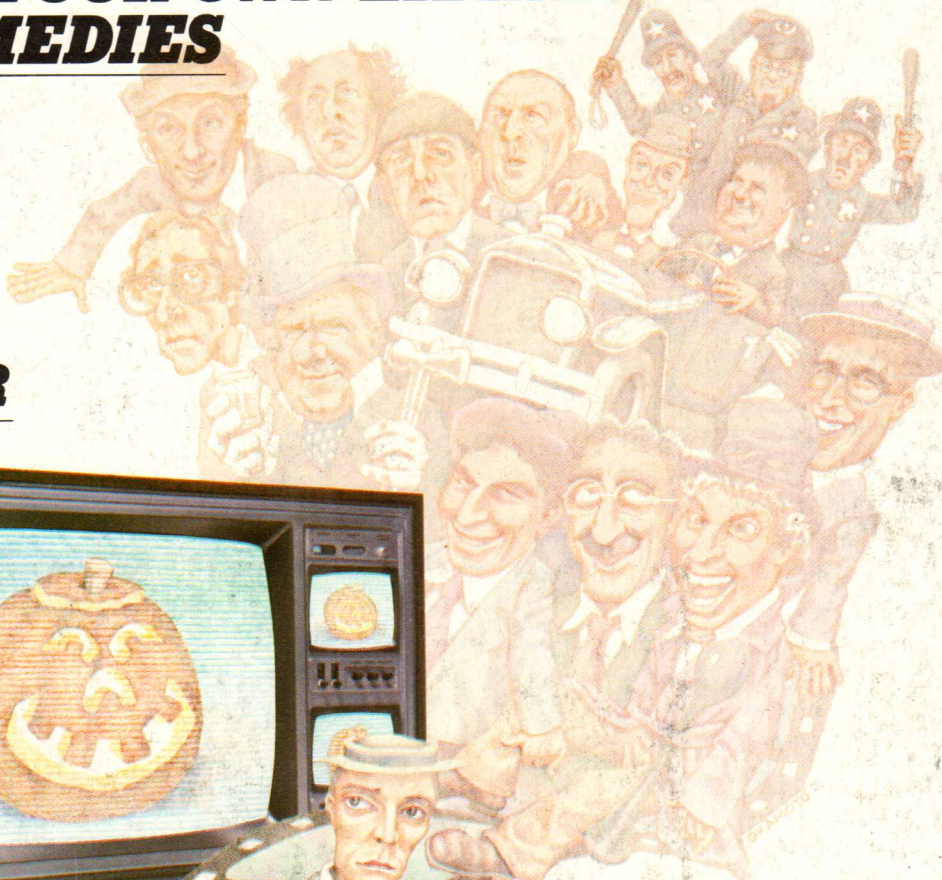
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THE WORLD AUTHORITY ON HOME VIDEO

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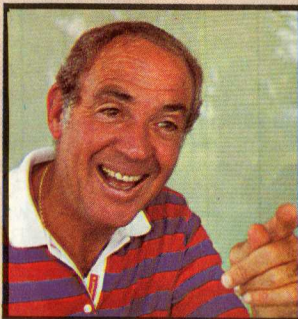
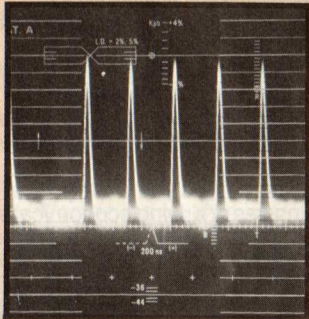
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OCTOBER 1980  
CONTENTS

# Video Review®



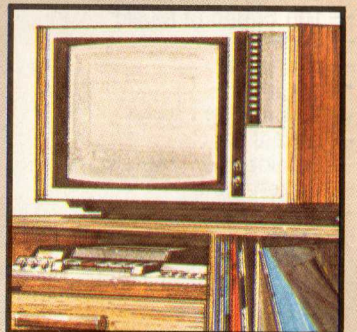
## FEATURES

- Casting Out the Goblins of Your Video Life** Even when it's not Halloween, strange things can happen to home-video equipment and tapes. Most times there are very down-to-earth ways to set things right . . . . . **48**
- Construction Project: Build a Better Video Space** Now's the time to plan where and how to add videodiscs and disc equipment to your set-up for tapes, TV, etc. . . . . **52**
- Flicks and Tricks: Why Movies Look Different on Tape** It's not always technically easy to transfer certain types of movies and TV shows to tape. An expert offers a practical guide to duplicators' crops, speedups, etc. . . . . **58**
- The War of the Words: Is the U.S. Ready for Teletext?** For years everyone's been "hyping" the idea of shopping, banking and studying by TV. So why, then, is the U.S. lagging behind other countries with it? . . . . . **62**
- Your VCR and Your Pocketbook: An Inflation-Fighter's Tip Sheet** Nobody says investing in video equipment is inexpensive. But there are ways to use your equipment to save hard dollars. . . . . **70**
- Critics' Choice: Comedy Tonight (and Tomorrow, and the Day After, and...)** Leonard Maltin picks the 10 best comedies on tape, plus 10 classic comedy scenes worth taping off the air. . . . . **78**
- Direct It: Jerry Paris Tells You How** The director of Happy Days and other hits offers tips for home-video. . . . . **110**



## REVIEWS

- Equipment** Technical Editor Len Feldman and the CBS Technology Center test: Hitachi VK-C750 videocamera . . . Sharp VC-6800 VHS videocassette recorder . . . Sears Betavision video recorder . . . Sampo 9519 19-inch tri-screen TV set . . . . . **30**
- Programs** Rex Reed on The Rose . . . Andrew Sarris on Hitchcock's Psycho and The Birds . . . Norman Spinrad on Alien . . . Roy Hemming on Brother, Can You Spare a Dime? . . . John S. Wilson on Ella Fitzgerald in Concert . . . Mark Trost on TV's Star Trek . . . Elissa Haden Guest on On Vacation with Mickey Mouse . . . Pete Coutros on Sports Champions Never Quit . . . Genevieve Kazdin on Graham Kerr's Breadmaking . . . Al Goldstein on California Gigolo . . . . . **81**
- Video Flicks** 200 new capsule reviews. . . . . **87**
- Winners** for July's "Pick the Phony Flick" contest . . . . . **104**



## DEPARTMENTS

- Viewpoints** From Publisher Richard Ekstract. . . . . **6**
- Newsbreaks** Art Levis cues you on the latest in video. . . . **13**
- Freeze Frames** David Hajdu's potpourri of video news. . . **14**
- Broadcast & Cable TV** This month's promising entries. . . **16**
- Video Views** Bob Angus on video's "hi-fi connection" . . . **18**
- Looking Ahead** Bob Gerson looks at new trends . . . . . **20**
- New Products** This month's hottest hardware . . . . . **22**
- Q&A** Experts answer your questions . . . . . **24**
- Games** Phil Wiswell reports on Odyssey<sup>2</sup> . . . . . **28**
- Letters** Readers' comments . . . . . **106**
- Humor** More of the wholly fictitious history of television . . **115**

Cover Illustration: Mike Okamoto Cover Photo: Steve Eisenberg



# Hitting a homer with Odyssey<sup>2</sup>'s extended play



Phil Wiswell

To keep you abreast of what's available in the world of video gaming, this month's column zeroes in on Magnavox's Odyssey<sup>2</sup> programmable video game system.

The Odyssey<sup>2</sup> was first introduced in 1977 and has stood the test of time as a reliable unit. Magnavox, moreover, has made sure to provide enough game cartridges to support it—currently 27 are listed in its catalog for a total of 38 different games (some come two to a cartridge).

The competitive list-price of the Odyssey<sup>2</sup> (\$180) can be equaled only by Atari's Video Computer System (\$180) and bettered by APF's MP 1000 (\$130). With the Odyssey<sup>2</sup>, you get the basic microprocessor unit, two game controllers, a television hookup and a game cartridge. There are no hidden costs for things like extra game controllers or a keyboard attachment—because you can't buy anything further except more games. Odyssey<sup>2</sup> does not convert into a programmable computer.

## Durable Design

The built-in alphanumeric keyboard is of a durable monoplane design that requires only a light touch to operate. True, you must use the hunt-and-peck method of typing and do it carefully to avoid mistakes, but then you won't ever be doing that much typing in the games anyway. For this system, the monoplane keyboard makes a lot of sense. It prevents water and dirt from getting into the microprocessor and cuts down on parts that might need replacement.

The hand controllers for the action games are very well designed, too—perhaps the best on

the market. The controls work smoothly, giving players a good deal of confidence in their hand-to-eye coordination. The eight possible positions of the joystick are marked on the controllers so you can always know exactly which direction you'll be going in when you push the stick. The only criticism I have is that perhaps the controller boxes are a bit too large for the hands of children.

## Prepackaged Bonus

Generally, I don't like the game cartridges most manufacturers pack with their video systems since they tend to be the least interesting from a game player's standpoint. Magnavox, however, is an exception. The three games on the cartridge that come with your initial purchase—Speedway, Spin-Out and Crypto Logic—are all good selections to get you started.

In Speedway, a player must maneuver his car through an obstacle course of computer-controlled cars along a straight track. It's a two-minute race to see how many miles (points) you can rack up. The faster you drive, the more miles go by—and, unfortunately, the more accidents you have. The same basic principle is true of Spin-Out, in which two players race around a square track with barriers and difficult-to-negotiate turns.

Crypto Logic is a different type of fun, and I'm glad Magnavox included this mental challenge in the introductory cartridge. One player types in a word (or two words) up to 14 letters, and the computer scrambles their order. The second player then tries to rebuild the word a letter at a time. Try unscrambling these examples:

1. LEBTPAHA \_\_\_\_\_
2. GOCLI \_\_\_\_\_
3. SHCERA \_\_\_\_\_
4. EDWEV VIRIEO \_\_\_\_\_
5. MVXOANGA \_\_\_\_\_

At the Consumer Electronics Show this summer, Magnavox

introduced six new game cartridges for the Odyssey<sup>2</sup>: Volleyball, Electronic Table Soccer, Pocket Billiards, Pachinko, Casino Slot Machine and Blockout/Breakdown. With the exception of Casino Slot Machine, all have a unique aspect to set them apart from similar games by other manufacturers.

In Volleyball, it is the finesse required to "spike" the ball onto the opponent's side of the court. Electronic Table Soccer is a video version of Foosball, in which the men are connected and move as a line. Pocket Billiards is a blend of hand-to-eye coordination and pool strategy in which players can use full 360° rotation of their cues to play a shot at any angle. Pachinko,



The Odyssey<sup>2</sup> game console.

the Oriental arcade game, is interesting purely as a new form of video ball game, somewhat akin to pinball. And last, but certainly not least, is Blockout/Breakdown. Its basic idea is to bounce a ball off a wall of blocks that disappear as you hit them. But in this version, defensive play by a second player changes the nature of the game. The defensive player has a little man on each row of blocks. As the blocks disappear, he can, if fast enough, run to that space and replace the block. So while one player is knocking them down, another player is rebuilding them!

The rest of the game cartridges are fairly standard as video games go, giving a wide range of sports, action and mental strategy games. □

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Moreover, for many moviegoers a night out also means dinner before the movies and/or drinks and a snack after the show—upping the cost anywhere from an additional \$10 to \$25.

Total cost: a minimum of \$20 for two, but probably much closer to \$40 or \$50.

Now, if the movie you saw was, for example, *Grease* or *Saturday Night Fever*, you could own a tape of it for \$59.95 from Paramount Home Video. Not only would you make up half the cost of just one night's going out to the movies, but you'd own the picture for repeated viewings anytime you wished. And you could swap it with friends for other tapes you haven't seen—for further savings against other nights out at the movies.

An even more cost-effective tactic would be renting the picture from Fotomat for \$9.95 to \$13.95 (price depends on locality) for five days. That could be less than even a penny-pinching night out.

And let's not forget that popcorn and munchies (to eat at home during video showings) probably sell at the local grocery for about a third of the movie theatre price. Not to mention the price of drinks.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** If you invite a group of friends over, that would make for one less party for you to throw—and more to attend later if your guests reciprocate. If the kids like the picture, set up a matinee for them. Kids go through more money at the movies than the ticket takers!

## 2. Collecting Classics

Before VCRs, the only way movie fans could personally collect their favorite pictures was by buying 16mm or super-8mm prints. Often, 16mm print quality was second-rate. And 8mm prints tended to be heavily edited. Movie companies are now issuing complete, decent-quality prints on super-8mm. However, increasing silver costs have sent their prices sky-high. As for 16mm, it's usually more expensive—and its quality can still be unpredictable.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** Warner's super-8mm 400-foot (about 16 min.) version of scenes from *Superman* lists for \$59.95. WCI Home Video's two-hour videocassette of the complete picture runs only \$5 more.

MCA's super-8mm 800-foot (about 40 min.) version of *The Jerk* costs \$89. The same company's complete videocassette is only \$59.95—about \$30 less!

The complete super-8 sound version of *Saturday Night Fever* is \$456 from Blackhawk Films. The Paramount cassette costs less than a seventh of that—\$59.95.

None of those pictures are legally available in 16mm. But one company, Reel Images, offers 16mm, super-8 sound and video versions of many pictures. Its price for a videocassette of Frank Capra's classic *It's A Wonderful Life* (1947) is \$72.95, super-8 sound: \$199.98; 16mm: \$429.98!

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** There's much more than old movies available on videocassettes and discs—including TV shows, sports programs, instructionals and so on—while super-8 or 16mm film catalogs offer comparatively limited selections. For most people, home video has enormous advantages over film collecting aside from cost—especially the convenience and flexibility of video equipment and tape compared to setting up and handling movie projectors and film.

**Some people have the mistaken notion that owning a video recorder takes lots of money. But once the initial investment has been made, you may be surprised at all the ways you can actually save money.**

## 3. Improving Home Skills

Learning to cook isn't as easy as apple pie—nor as cheap. For more and more families nowadays, Grandma isn't just around the corner anymore to help teach us her special secrets—or even just plain ol' basics. And for all the cookbooks that are available, nothing can still match seeing how specific recipes are done.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** Anna Muffoletto's Cordon Bleu of New York, Ltd., one of the nation's most respected cooking schools, offers 18 hours of instruction in many cooking disciplines for \$355. But not all of those hours' subject-matter may be of interest to you—so you could end up paying for things you don't need or want. With videocassettes, you can pick and choose more specifically—and save accordingly.

For example, WCI's *Flavors of China* (reviewed in our May 1980 issue) zeroes in on two hours of Chinese cooking instruction from master chef Titus Chan for \$50. (And who isn't into Chinese cooking these days?) The tape allows you to learn at your own speed—no matter how long it takes you to perfect a dish. It even illustrates shopping pointers and other tips "on location" at various markets, restaurants and kitchens around the world, something no school could possibly do in the same time at the same cost, or with the enormous flexibility of video.

Into breadmaking? There's *Graham Kerr's Bread-making* available from Karl Video Co. (reviewed in this issue), the first in a projected series of tapes featuring well-known cooking experts in different specialties.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** Played on a VCR with freeze-frame capability or slow-motion, a cooking cassette can be more valuable than in-person instruction in many ways. The ability to study—and restudy—the techniques of a great chef, at your command, can be an unequalled boost to your skills and confidence—and to the appetites of your family and friends.

## 4. Exercise and Dance

The one thing more embarrassing than not knowing how to dance is learning to dance. But with home video, you can master shuffling off to Buffalo or the latest disco beats without leaving your own locked living room. Dance, like most physical activities, requires some kind of visual demonstration. But many organized dance classes fall far short of their claims of costly "personalized" instruction.

Much the same holds true for the rash of exercise centers and fitness clubs that have been springing up in recent years.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** For \$240, the Nickolaus Exercise Center, a chain of new York fitness spas, will



**For the home-movie fan, the cost savings of video compared with film equipment is staggering. Buying and processing 4 hours of Super-8 film can run to \$1,040. A 4-hour videocassette: less than \$25.**

teach you 30 exercises. That means you get to share an unfurnished room with 8 to 12 other exercisers for 24 hours over a three-month period. The Center provides no saunas, pools or exercise hardware—just a room with other people and an instructor.

For \$49.95, Health 'N Action (2125 Madison Place, Evanston, IL, 60202) offers a series of 60- and 30-minute videocassette exercise programs. You don't have to share space with others, and you save over \$190.

As for dance, the nationwide Arthur Murray Dance Studio offers a package of supervised and unsupervised lessons for \$90.

A one-hour *Watch Your Step* tape from Magnetic Video that teaches a variety of dances in a series of short (15 minute) lessons retails for under \$45—a 50% savings.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** Arranging an exercise-tape sharing system with one or two friends can not only cut the cost per person, but may make for a more fit neighborhood—especially if you jog with the tapes from house to house.

## 5. Video Games

Anyone who's ever played Pong knows that video games can be addictive and expensive, if you're buying game time on coin-operated arcade machines. According to Atari, manufacturers of both coin-operated and home video games, one Japanese man poured \$80,000 in coins into the arcade version of Space Invaders. He could have bought a real rocket ship for that kind of money! But even for less lavish spenders, there are savings in home video games.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** While pinball machines stay "alive" as long as the player's skill permits, Space Invaders and most other arcade video games have strict time limits. Players are at the mercy of arcade owners, who can set the games' timers for as little as one minute per quarter.

With home-video games, on the other hand, the costs break down like this: The Game console ("hardware") for Atari's system, for example, has a suggested retail of \$199, but it's often discounted for as low as \$125. Game cartridges (software), including Space Invaders, cost around \$29.95. At that rate, only 120 plays make up the price of the cartridge, and 500 plays pay for the hardware. Considering that many players compete against friends, that effectively cuts the number of break-even games in half, doubling the savings.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** Atari, APF, Bally, Magnavox, Mattel and Activision offer scores of different game cartridges, many far more complex than their arcade counterparts. And you don't necessarily need to buy them all to play them. If you have friends with game consoles, you can arrange to trade cartridges with them.

## 6. Home Security

It's unfortunate but true. In most parts of the country, home security is costly but increasingly important. Crime statistics are up, and so are home and apartment dwellers' awareness of the need for some kind of protection. In more and more homes, video is becoming a key security aid.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** A Long Island, NY, security company quoted \$1,500 as the average price of a tailor-made home alarm system. GBC, a large industrial closed-circuit television company, plans to sell a black-and-white single-camera monitor security system for \$500.

However, owners of home video equipment can easily convert their VCRs, TVs and cameras into sophisticated part-time CCTV-type systems for little more than the price of a \$50 wall mount and a few feet of cable.

A black-and-white or color camera can be easily mounted in front of a door with the picture displayed on the living-room set. Technically oriented videophiles can use an AC adapter to have the camera feed directly into the set. By adding an RF switching device, you can then check what's on the door-mounted camera whenever you wish.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** Black-and-white videocameras now cost less than \$100 at many discount houses. At this price, it may pay to cover *all* your doors with cameras and use an RF filter as a central switching device.

## 7. Home Moviemaking

Of all the ways to save money with your VCR, home moviemaking is certainly the most dramatic. Raw film stock is expensive, blank videocassettes are not. Film results are often uncertain; videotape can be played back, checked and perfected on the spot. Standard film rolls provide no more than a few minutes running time, videotape allows for uninterrupted recordings for hours at a time.

**COMPARATIVE COSTS.** Initial equipment purchases will prove video more expensive (approximately \$1,500 for a portable VCR and camera vs. \$800 for a super-8 projector and camera). But you can make up the high start-up costs of video equipment on the use of just one cassette.

The equations are staggering. Kodak's suggested retail price on a 50-foot roll of super-8 sound Ektachrome film is \$10.55. Processing adds an additional \$3.70. That's \$14.25 for approximately three minutes of footage. A comparably priced T-120 cassette (\$14.95 at discount houses, slightly more elsewhere) is capable of two, four or six hours of recording.

So, in order to buy and process only four hours of *film*, one would have to spend a minimum of \$1,040! That doesn't include an expected amount of throwaway footage—such as leader film and under- and over-exposed material. On top of that, you have to change reels every three minutes.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.** Granted, few people will buy four hours of super-8 film at a time. But it illustrates resoundingly that tape pays, at any recording speed. At SP, however, you'll have to use only two tapes to match that \$1,040 worth of film. □