



Mixed Reviews for Intellivision

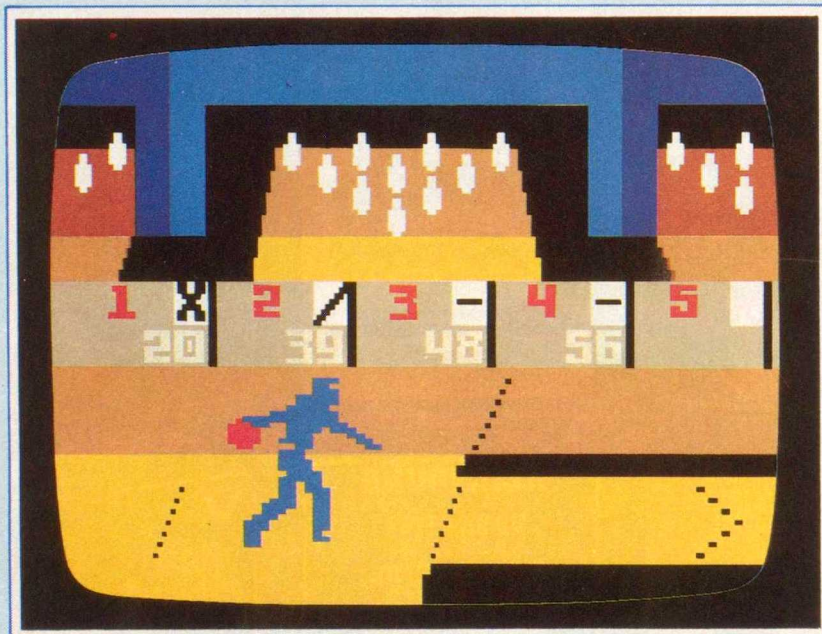
The past holiday season brought an extra helping of good cheer for the owners of Mattel's Intellivision programmable video-game machine. After a year of unfulfilled promises about new software, Mattel has evidently broken through its production logjam. Intellivision fans, who suffered through most of 1981 without new cartridges, can now select from among a trio of new titles, with another batch expected to reach retail stores shortly.

This month's three new entries—**Bowling**, **Astros mash**, and **Triple Action**

—suggest that the Intellivision system has reached its first moment of reckoning. Even without the oft-announced but never delivered keyboard component, Intellivision has clearly established itself as one of the major home-arcading devices. The question Mattel faces: where does Intellivision go from here? It is necessary to release a steady stream of new games to maintain player interest and loyalty, but the system's technology limits potential subjects.

The unit's high-resolution graphics, coupled with on-screen movement speed somewhat slower than competing video games, has moved Intellivision designers toward sports simulations. The company's game inventors have repeatedly risen to the occasion to produce the hobby's finest versions of baseball, football, soccer, basketball, auto racing, and more.

Now comes crunch time. With the introduction of "Bowling" and the **Boxing** title now waiting in the wings, the manufacturer is coming uncomfortably close to exhausting sports-game possibilities. There are still some unused sports—anyone for j'ai l'ai?—but most of the



'PBA Bowling,' Intellivision's best new offering, has play options that include ball weight, left- or right-handed roll, and alley slickness.

major and minor ones have already been translated into electronic form. Based on the latest group of new programs, it appears that Mattel will attempt to balance the Intellivision software line by adding exactly the kind of action contests it has previously shunned. How successful will this move be? Read on.

"PBA Bowling" (3333-0920) achieves greatness by boldly striking out in a new direction that departs markedly from all pin games on the market today. Like the real sport, this one cannot be mastered in a couple of frames; arcaders who expect to roll a string of 200-plus games right from the start are in for frustration. The game serenades the keglor who rolls a 200 with a fanfare—and believe us, that's a well-earned tribute. As might be expected from an Intellivision title, "PBA Bowling" sets graphic standards for games of this kind. Multiple views of the action give a feeling of realism and involvement unmatched by any other bowling cartridge.

Things commence with a side-view of the bowler standing by the return, ready to begin the approach to the line. Pushing the direction disk pops the ball into the

on-screen athlete's hands, and the action buttons on the left side of the controller can then position the bowler anywhere between the two gutters. Attention then shifts to the aiming spots located about one-third of the way down the alley. By holding down the lower-right action button the arcader starts a "phantom" ball crossing the alley over the spots. Releasing the button makes the ball cross that point on the alley on its way to the lumber at the far end.

Selecting the aiming spot automatically starts the bowler toward the foul line.

The gamer then chooses the desired amount of curve by pushing the appropriate segment of the direction disk. The screen changes to a down-the-alley shot so that the gamer can watch the progress of the ball. It rumbles down the alley until—just before the sphere makes contact—everything downshifts into slow motion. This feature has aroused a little controversy: some will enjoy the opportunity to observe the pin mixing in minute detail while others may find the wait a nail-biting agony. A full line score is printed directly above the side view of the alley that begins each frame. The "leave" after the first ball is shown directly above the scoreboard to help the approach for the second shot.

The best advice we can give prospective players is to treat this cartridge like real bowling: getting a rhythm is the key to success. Try to release the ball the same way at the same spot every time. Adjust your roll a little each time until you've got an approach that will knock down most of the pins most of the time. Making spares consistently results from lots of practice.

"PBA Bowling" offers a number of play

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options, few of which are found on any other video-game program. One to four can participate, and each pin-buster can choose the weight of his ball and whether to roll left- or right-handed. The slickness of the alley is adjustable. Two different games are included: regulation bowling and a "make the spares" contest which is ideal for refining technique.

"Astrosplash" (3605-0920) is an obvious attempt to provide Intellivision-ites with a solitaire arcade-style target game. It combines elements of "Space Invaders," "Asteroids," and even "Missile Command" to produce a contest that begins being dull and plodding and becomes much more challenging as the score mounts.

The player manipulates a horizontally movable cannon using the direction disk and attempts to shoot a variety of targets—big and small rocks and spinners, guided missiles, and UFOs—as they fall from the sky. The defender starts with five laser guns and gets an additional one in reserve for every 1000 points.

The scoring system is a little too complicated to thoroughly explain here. In general, however, each of the targets is worth a varying amount of points depending on its intrinsic nature and the difficulty level in force when it's destroyed.

Adding spice to the game, every missed target subtracts from the total score. A small rock, for instance, reduces ac-

cumulated points by 10 at the easiest level and by a hefty 60 at the hardest. Missing one of the spinners is an absolute catastrophe. If one hits the ground, the cannon in play automatically disintegrates. The guided missiles are also high priority because they sweep horizontally across the bottom of the playfield to zap the cannon if not picked off during their descent.

Color-coding the difficulty levels isn't a bad idea, but a more prudent choice of hues would have been a favor to players.


An Important Message for 'Arcade Alley' Fans

One of the names in this column's now-familiar byline has changed, though the writers remain the same. Contractual restrictions have previously kept Arnie Katz from writing under his real name, forcing the co-author of "Arcade Alley" to venture forth under the pseudonym of Frank Laney Jr. Bill Kunkel, on the other hand, remains as always. Video arcaders should also note that Katz and Kunkel are, respectively, editor/co-publisher and executive editor of *Electronic Games*, VIDEO's stablemate devoted exclusively to the world of electronic fun.

The greyish blue used for the 1000-to-4999-point range is especially odious. It's hard to look at, much less play against. Our feeling is that the steady increase in the targets' movement speed is enough to separate good gunners from bad without assaulting the optic nerves in this fashion.

"Astrosplash," were it offered for some of the other systems, might be a dubious investment. But for Intellivision, which has traditionally lacked arcade programs, it is probably worth a try.

The trilogy "Triple Action" (3760-0920) will surprise quite a few gamers, especially those fortunate enough to own Intellivision's earlier *Armor Battle*. Why, comes the inevitable question, did Mattel decide to make another tank game? "Battle Tanks," in any case, turns out to be a completely legitimate effort. Unlike the strategy-oriented "Armor Battle," this one is pure arcade action. Players steer tanks with the direction disks, dodging the blocking walls and attempting to score 15 hits on the enemy AFV. The battle can be waged with any of four kinds of ammo. Shells are short- or long-range and sometimes ricochet off barriers.

The other components of the trilogy involve road racing on a crowded highway and dogfighting with World-War-I era biplanes. The cars game is nothing major, but the air-combat program is delightful in many respects. 

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