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Video

The #1 Magazine Of Home Video

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John Wayne's Cowboy Tapes: The Legend Lives

The Human Side of Home Computers

BERGER-BRAITHWAITE VIDEOTESTS

JVC Portable VCR · Gold Star Color TV · RCA Color Camera

VIDEO THERAPY
The Psychiatrist's New Tool

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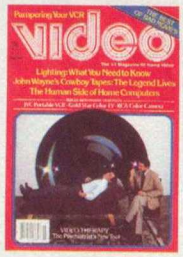
ABOUT THE COVER
For a growing number of therapists, the classic look of the psychiatrist's office is being notably updated by the presence of video cameras and monitors. On our cover, Dr. Milton M. Berger, author of "Videotape Techniques in Psychiatric Training & Treatment," assumes a familiar position as a camera lens overlooks the recreated session.



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Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Cartridge Games & Programs

by Bill Kunkel & Frank Laney, Jr.

Most Complex is Not Always Best

Simple Games for the Atari System

No doubt about it, electronic games have certainly come a long way since Atari introduced its first edition of "Pong" to the nation's bars, restaurants, and coin-operated fun palaces back in 1972.

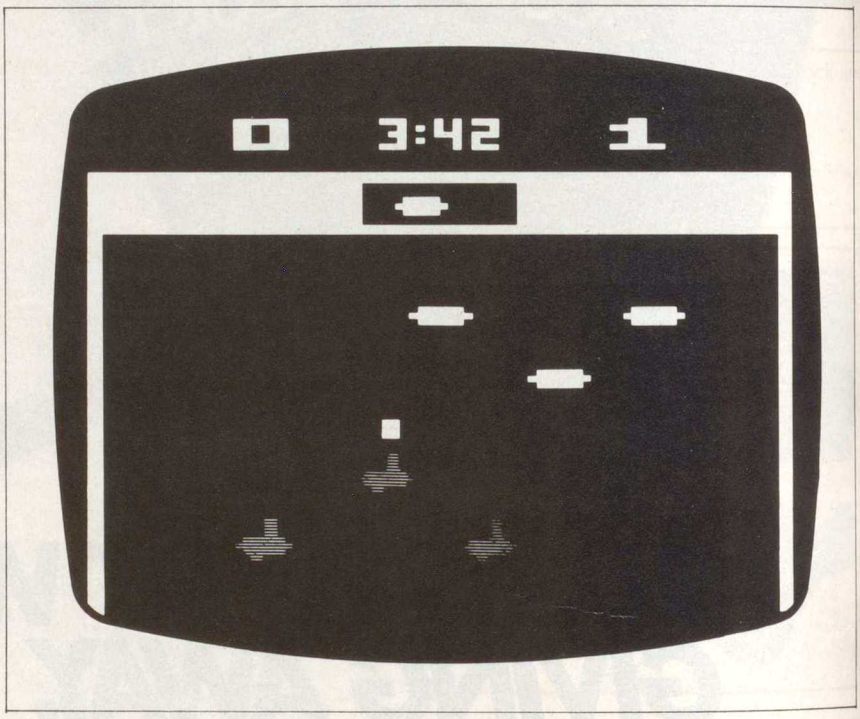
"Pong" was a complete revelation to folks weaned on old-fashioned pinball, but these days that pioneering video game seems like a relic of the distant past. Current commercial arcade marvels are as far advanced over that first ball-and-paddle machine as the space shuttle is over the Wright Brothers' rickety flyer. The newest arcade games feature a variety of visual and audio effects that would have astounded those of us who once considered "Pong" the ultimate in excitement.

The same is true perhaps to an even greater degree in the home-arcade field. More powerful systems and improved program design techniques are daily raising cartridges for programmable video games to new heights of sophistication. And then there's the torrent of pre-programmed game software for popular mass-market computers like the TRS-80, the Atari 400/800, and Apple II. Sometimes it seems as though each new game that arrives here at "Arcade Alley" is even more magnificently complex than the last. But in the rush to push back the boundaries and transcend the limitations of home-arcading, it is easy to lose sight of the overall picture. Quality and complicated rules don't necessarily go hand-in-hand. To put it another way, the best games are not necessarily the most complex ones.

This month we're going to look at the three new cartridges for the Atari Video Computer System (VCS) that emphasize clean design and solid play value without trying to jump on the complexity bandwagon.

Sports games have never been Atari's forte, but **Championship Soccer** more than makes amends for any previous weakness. It's hardly the ultimate soccer simulation, but this one's relentless action, its spare-yet-effective graphics, and the usual myriad of variations make it an outstanding team-sport cartridge.

Arcaders select from among 56 different play modes, evenly divided between solitaire and two-player versions. The variables are goal size, team speed, and penalties. (The latter option also adds goal and corner kicks and throw-ins.) Played without the use of the penalty feature, the game somewhat resembles indoor soccer. Playfield boundaries become solid, and the ability to kick-pass off the boards adds an additional strategic element.



In 'Championship Soccer,' the machine gloats with a burst of skyrockets when it scores.

After the referee whistles to start play, gamers use the joystick to maneuver three men—a forward and two fullbacks—arranged in triangular formation. On-screen players can pass in any direction or shoot straight ahead or at an angle. You'll have a lot more success against the computer-controlled goalie if you stick to angled shots. The machine is especially vulnerable to a slantwise attack, since it always attempts to position the robot net-minder directly in front of the ball to block shots.

Maintaining possession of the ball is no cinch. Because the defenders move faster without the ball than the other team does with it, it is necessary to dodge, weave, and make frequent passes to maintain an offensive drive. The old adage, "He who hesitates is lost" was never more true than in "Championship Soccer"; constant movement is essential. There are two vital components of good defense: get the team back quickly and clear the ball away from the goal mouth as rapidly as possible. Once the attackers have a chance to set up deep in enemy territory, clearing can become a tricky operation. If all else fails, back-heel the ball to your own goalie, secure in the knowledge that the game automatically prevents the embarrassment of scoring against yourself.

The VCS itself is a world-class foe. At the top of its form, the computer-controlled team is almost certain to score any time it catches the human-directed defense up-field. Scoring against the machine when it is set to the highest of its three skill levels is a real feat. Speaking of

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tape-makers are already spooling T160 variations of it: 3M is making a compromise T150 tape for the duplicators; and a T160 tape is selling in Europe under the brand-names of Panasonic and JVC.

A VHS Machine Built by Sony—Whoops, I just got carried away. But VHS tape made by Sony is a reasonable possibility.

Arcade Alley

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scoring, each time the ball eludes a keeper for a goal, the game actually celebrates the event by replacing the playfield with an electronic scoreboard for a brief but spectacular burst of skyrockets.

Tennis, by Activision, will startle those who equate tennis with two paddles and a little square ball. But though Activision has pared "Tennis" down to its essentials—no line judges, spectators, or flag-draped grandstands—this may be one of the most realistic video games ever created.

Designer Alan Miller had drawn the court as a trapezoid, giving it a true three-dimensional feel. The two racket-wielding players move freely, placing perfect drop-shots near the net or setting up at the baseline for a long volley. Racket position, relative to the ball when the two make contact, dictates the shot. Hitting from the right sends the ball in that direction, and so forth. The closer the ball comes to the edge of the racket, the sharper the angle of flight. The incredible thing is that the computer automatically takes each shot once it is lined up, placing the emphasis squarely on positioning. This produces a game so faithful to the real-life original that you'll find yourself breathing hard after each tough set.

The cartridge's only fault is its use of a solid white net that sometimes obscures the ball. A marvelous touch more than compensates for this: as the ball travels through the air, its shadow moves along the surface of the court! This is one game that even non-athletes are sure to love.

Laser Blast (also Activision) turns the tables on the usual space-invasion game. Instead of being the dauntless defender against legions of attacking aliens, this charming design by Arcade Award winner David Crane puts the arcader in command of the flying saucers. The idea is to use the ships to disintegrate planet-bound laser cannon.

The enemy guns appear on screen in groups of three, each succeeding trio a little quicker on the trigger and more accurate than the last. The guns are protected by an invisible shield wall that prevents saucers from sweeping too close to the planet's surface and generally keeps them within range of the cannon's tracking radar. The shield grows in strength as the game proceeds, forcing the saucers to blast away from increasingly higher altitudes.

Players begin with five saucers but use only one at a time. A new ship automatically activates itself whenever the previous one takes a lethal hit from the ground. In what is believed to be a home arcade first, "Laser Blast" provides reinforcements: players get an extra saucer for every 1000 points they score.

As in the more traditional invasion games, dodging fire is at least as important as zapping the enemy. It is advisable to keep the saucer above the minimum altitude permitted by the shield because the cannon appear to have a tougher time homing in on ships backed off in this fashion. A higher altitude also makes it easier to hit two, or even all three, of the guns merely by redirectly the saucer's laser instead of scooting the ship across the whole playfield. It's an admittedly chancy strategy, but one worth investigating if you've got quick reflexes.

Next month, we'll slide clear to the opposite end of the home arcade spectrum—computer games. The subject of the column will be the system that's shaking up the hobby, the Atari 400 home computer. See you all then.

TV Den

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and the picture bends to the right.

Whether you see this effect or not depends in large measure on your TV set and its age. Before home video began four years ago, TV sets in North American homes were only used to receive broadcast-quality TV, which, as explained above, follows stringent standards set by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers and enforced by the FCC. TV manufacturers didn't need to install elaborate circuitry in the horizontal-scanning circuits of the receivers they sold. The horizontal-scan circuits of these TVs have what are called "long time constants"—the time it takes for the little electronic dot to travel from the end of one field to the beginning of the next one. Japanese sets, on the other hand, have always come equipped with short time constants. So older (and usually domestic-built) TVs don't have the improved circuitry, although they can be modified for it where economically feasible.

Plagued by picture-bending? Check the age and brand of your TV, then call a serviceman to see what he can do about it. An even cheaper solution is to adjust the vertical-height control on the back of the TV. This may also require a serviceman's help. But increasing the height of the image doesn't solve the problem; it just hides it at the top part of the picture tube