

# Astrocade sues Commodore and Atari

By Barry Bayer

CHICAGO, IL—Astrocade, a Columbus, Ohio, manufacturer of video games and microcomputers, announced the filing of a patent-infringement lawsuit against Atari and Commodore at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court for the southern district of New York, claims that Atari and Commodore are using two patents licensed exclusively to Astrocade that deal with bit-mapped graphics for video display. Bit-mapping aids in producing high-resolution graphics.

The suit requests damages of an unspecified amount, plus the issuance of an injunction against the defendants prohibiting them from using patents number 4,296,930 and 4,301,503. Each patent was issued late last year to Jeffrey Frederiksen and assigned to Bally Manufacturing Company, which Astrocade claims licensed the patents exclusively to Astrocade.

Astrocade's counsel declined to

specify the Commodore or Atari machines that are claimed to infringe the patents, stating that it would be unethical to disclose this information in the complaint.

He did state that Astrocade had asked patent-holder Bally to join the suit, but Bally refused to do so, so Astrocade made Bally an "involuntary plaintiff" in the suit.

As is usual in a case involving a new

patent, preliminary injunctive relief was not requested. Astrocade did not identify the amount of damages.

Atari spokesman J. Peter Nelson responded that the suit was "without merit." Commodore spokesman David Kaminer said the company was still waiting to look at the suit before commenting, but noted the timing of the suit during CES would help Astrocade obtain publicity.

## A spreadsheet program for \$50

By Paul Freiburger, IW Staff

"We intend to crush them on all levels, price as well as features," says Richard Crandall, president and chief executive officer of Comshare.

Crandall's caustic remark reflects his belief that at \$50 a copy, his firm's new PlannerCalc software package will significantly affect his competition.

PlannerCalc is a spreadsheet program like VisiCalc, published by Visi-

Corp, and SuperCalc by Sorcim Corporation. Comshare Target Software has priced its package at \$50 on the retail market. When you compare this cost with the \$250 and \$295 suggested retail prices of VisiCalc and SuperCalc, Comshare's aggressive posture becomes evident.

Thus far, competitors have shown no sign of reducing their prices in response to PlannerCalc. "It will not af-

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### NEW SECTION

In this issue, we inaugurate a new section, Telecommunications. Senior Editor John Markoff explores inexpensive local-area networks that microcomputer users can hook into. Turn to page 31 to connect with this article.

CP/M capability for the Apple III.

"It makes a ton of software available," said Taylor Pohlman, Apple's product-marketing manager for the Apple III. "It's what people wanted."

The Apple SoftCard III System was

## NCC News

developed by Microsoft Corporation and is being distributed exclusively by Apple Computer. Microsoft also developed the SoftCard for the Apple II and II Plus computers.

According to Pohlman, the system requires no hardware or software modifications, and installation involves plugging a single board into any of the Apple III's peripheral card slots.

Microsoft executives Bill Gates and Vern Raburn were enthusiastic about the potential market for a CP/M-capable Apple III.

"It's clear that the III isn't dead yet; we expect better penetration on the III than for the Apple II," said Gates. "I wouldn't be surprised if more than half of the Apple IIIs end up with SoftCards because of CP/M's extensive use

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