ITEMS DISCUSSED

F-50.....$3595
factory upgrade.....$895
Murata Business Systems, Inc.
5560 Tennyson Pkwy.
Plano, TX 75024
(214) 403-3300
Inquiry 1025.

FAX'EM
1200-bps.....$599
2400-bps.....$699
PFIDO.....$1500
Holmes Microsystems, Inc.
2620 South 900 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84119
(801) 975-9929
Inquiry 1026.

LAWN.....$495
O'Neill Communications, Inc.
100 Thanet Cir., Suite 202
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 924-1095
Inquiry 1027.

Pocket Ethernet Adapter.....$695
Xircom
22231 Mulholland Hwy.,
Suite 114
Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(818) 884-8755
Inquiry 1028.

Q-PC.....$3795
Q-MCAX.....$4495
Datapath, Ltd.
Datapath House
High St.
Melbourne, Derby
DE7 1GJ, UK
44-332-862-227
Inquiry 1029.

TrackerMouse.....$169
Penny and Giles Computer
Products, Ltd.
35 Reynolds St.
Attleboro, MA 02703
(508) 226-3008
Inquiry 1030.

Z-386/33
Model 150.....$11,499
Model 320.....$13,499
Zenith Data Systems
1000 Milwaukee Ave.
Glenview, IL 60025
(800) 553-0331
(312) 699-4800
Inquiry 1031.

part of the scenery. In fact, they're *everywhere.* Still, there is some wonder remaining in the land of the LANs.

One of the problems with the office LAN has been that you needed a computer with an expansion slot to use the LAN properly; portables need not apply. While you could always use a LAN with a modem or a serial interface, this is difficult and usually too slow to work well with most personal computer software.

Xircom has solved that problem with its Pocket Ethernet Adapter. This device, about the size of a pack of cigarettes, plugs into the parallel port on any IBM PC–compatible computer. The adapter is available to support either thick- or thin-wire Ethernet. Included with the adapter are drivers for Novell NetWare.

The Pocket Ethernet Adapter is designed for use with laptops, but it will work well with computers that otherwise have limitations in the number of slots available. This means that you can buy one of those Zenith EaZy PCs being sold on the cable TV shopping channels and use it for a Novell workstation.

At $695, the Pocket Ethernet Adapter is a bit more expensive than some other Ethernet cards, but not by much. It's certainly worth the price if it can give you access to your office LAN where you didn't have it before.

Of course, at times the problem isn't the network interface card, but rather the cables that accompany a LAN. O'Neill Communications has found a way to eliminate that part of a LAN by using radio instead of cables. O'Neill calls the result a LAWN (local-area wireless network). The system uses spread-spectrum packet switching, and it is a little slower than traditional LANs. On the other hand, it works better without cables than do traditional LANs.

LAWN has a great deal in common with the printer servers that I discussed in my December column. It attaches to the computer's serial port and is used most effectively for printer sharing, although it will support E-mail and file sharing. As I'm writing this, LAWN is undergoing FCC certification, but it should be available by late summer.

English Inroads

Comdex always brings exhibitors from all over the world, and this year was no exception. Several companies from the U.K. were part of a government-sponsored group. One company, Penny and Giles Computer Products, has produced a trackball that really will take the place of a mouse. Normally, a trackball requires two hands to operate (at least it does for me), which offsets the advantage of using little desk space.

You operate TrackerMouse with one hand. Pressable areas on the sides of the device take the place of mouse buttons. The trackball protrudes through the top and bottom of the device, so that you can operate it without having it planted on the desktop.

TrackerMouse includes a solar calculator on its top. I suppose that this is based on an assumption that anyone who has a desk sufficiently messy to preclude the use of a mouse is also likely to lose a calculator. Probably a safe assumption.

[Editor's note: *For more information on TrackerMouse, see Computing at Chaos Manor in the July BYTE.*]

Also from the U.K. is the Datapath video board, an extremely high-resolution board designed for CAD and for desktop publishing. The Datapath video board supports resolutions of up to 1600 by 1280 pixels on the IBM PC (Model Q-PC) and the PS/2 (Model Q-MCAX), and it's extremely fast. I watched one board running at 1280- by 1024-pixel resolution redraw Autodesk's sample drawing of St. Paul's Cathedral in 1½ seconds. I don't think I've ever seen it done faster.

Modern Maturity

Spring Comdex this year was quiet. This was partly because Chicago's huge McCormick Place convention center swallowed the crowds more easily than do convention centers in Atlanta or Las Vegas. I suspect that the timing also had something to do with it. Not everybody likes Comdex in the snow.

Finally, the hype level seemed to be down a little. Perhaps that means that we are more sure of ourselves—a more mature industry. ■

Wayne Rash Jr. is a contributing editor for BYTE and a member of the professional staff of American Management Systems, Inc. (Arlington, VA). He consults with the federal government on microcomputers and communications. You can contact him on BIX as "waynerash," or in the to.wayne conference.

Your questions and comments are welcome. Write to: Editor, BYTE, One Phoenix Mill Lane, Peterborough, NH 03458.