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STRAIGHTTALK

At the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January, several companies introduced new computers—and they were all old computers. Coleco's Adam, Commodore's 264, even the portable goodies from Casio are merely new names and clothing on old architecture.

It's not a new trick. IBM used it to no one's surprise with the PC Jr just as it did two years ago with the PC itself.

Only Apple dares to look ahead and act on what it sees. Only Apple dares to stake its future on our future—toward the best possible future the most creative thinkers at Apple can envision.

While IBM purchases great fanfare to introduce a computer whose microprocessor is obsolete before it's manufactured, while Commodore and Col-eco and Tandy make big to-do over rehased graybeards, Apple blazes the trail to a better world, tentatively with Lisa and now boldly, confidently, with Macintosh.

There are plenty of us, Apple II and III owners and loving it, who resent the new baby. How come Apple's bringing out these new machines that don't pretend to be compatible with our Apples? Is Apple pulling a Commodore and indulging in planned obsolescence with no thought for us, our feelings, our pocketbooks?

No. Apple's changes embody progress, not cosmetics; that such changes can leave its older machines eating dust is a major concern for Apple.

Trains are lovely and romantic and their distant whistles in the night conjure all sorts of wonderful fantasies. But what a disservice to the world it would be if the development of air travel had been curtailed for fear of making trains obsolete. How dreadful really the notion of Peter Pan to deny the adult because the child's so cute.

The microcomputer industry is an infant. Apple IIs and TRS-80s and Pets and Ataris and IBM PCs are the fruits of its first crop, and of them Apple II is the blue ribbon winner. But the child is bursting its seams; it's ready to produce faster, more facile machines that grasp more and remember more and do a whole lot that couldn't be done before. While others play with the toddler and change its clothes, Apple encourages the adolescent to bloom. Memories of childhood may be wistful, but growing up is exciting, mind-stretching, life-giving.

To wish that Apple would stick to compatible computers, that it would not be the kind of company who dares to put out the 68000 machines that fly in the face of much more powerful competitors, is to wish that Woz weren't the kind of person who would have invented the Apple in the first place.

Apple hasn't and won't forget us. No computer yet approaches the Apple II in breadth and depth of software; new capabilities of the II are being discovered constantly; its limits still haven't been sighted. Nor will Apple stop updating its old machines. After all, it must continue to compete with Big Blue and its ilk. So Apple is expected also to be bringing out a new-old machine—though it won't be touted as “new”—come May: a compatible, compact, lightweight, high-powered, lower-priced version of the IIe that will, by rights, blow the PC Jr. away.

But the Macs are the future, and we Apple II and III people, imbued with the pioneer spirit as most of us are to have bought our Apples when we did, mustn't about-face and deny the frontier.

Besides, Mac is cute and cuddly and just itching to be taken home, if we can only find a way to justify a second computer.

Mac is a great computer and a great tool. It's terrific for the hordes of people who want a computer to do tasks for them. But, without a lot of effort, Mac won't let us do anything on our own. It boots up with a message welcoming us to its world—not with a cursor opening up a whole new world to our imaginations. It lets us choose from a set of tasks it's willing to do, and it does them beautifully; but it won't easily do just whatever we want it to do. We can't add to it and customize it and expand its capabilities.

Someday millions of people will have Macs or similar computers in their homes and offices. We'll be lucky enough to have our old, versatile, commandable, and commendable Apple IIs as well. In our homes, “Welcome to Macintosh” will rise frequently and proudly on-screen. But the computer welcome we choose to hear most often is still likely to be “Beep.”

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