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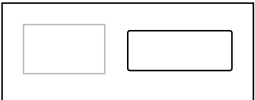## Support Indie Retro News

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DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464 BIG Review!

When Indie Retro News began its life some years ago, most of our hardware reviews have either been for the C64 or specific Everdrives for retro based consoles such as the Sega Mega Drive and NES. However we have never done a review of anything for the Amstrad CPC 464 or 6128 because at the time there were no new external SD attachments specific for that hardware, at least until now. This is the 'DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464' by a rather talented designer by the name of Zaxon also known as Piotr Bugaj, who has created some impressive pieces of kit for systems such as this Amstrad and even the ZX Spectrum!

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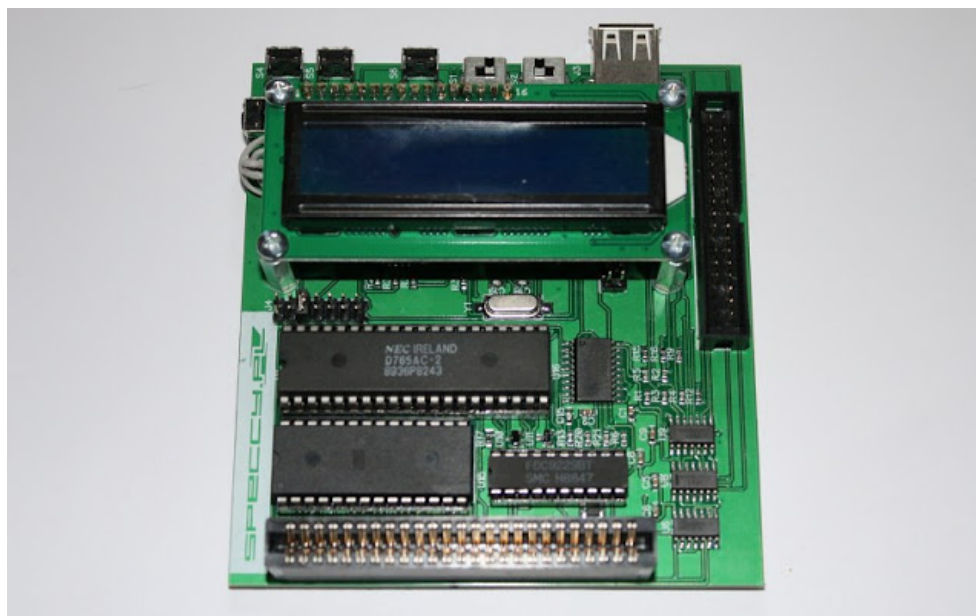FREE GAME

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Before I begin with this review here's a bit of information about the device above, now some of you may ask me this, but what is the point of the DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464 if you can buy the original HxC and use that for playing games. Well it's not that simple, the problem is the HxC isn't specific for the Amstrad CPC 464, so you will still need to find a device called the DDI-1 which plugs into the back of the 464 and controls the FD-1, or shall I say the HxC. Oh and not forgetting the floppy cable, switches and power cable requirements. (Amstrad CPC 6128 doesn't need a DDI attachment).

DarkwyndPT review

" Space: the final frontier ". I'm sure everyone knows this quote. Outer space has always been the ultimate destination of any population, t...

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And so this is where the DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464 comes into its own, as it's not just a DDI interface integrated with USB floppy emulator on one board, but there is no need for an external power supply and you can attach another external floppy if you so wish. Other such additions include, Parados and AMS Dos on board changeable by switch, a clear LCD display, USB Memory Stick slot for demos and games, slot selections and all this working under HXC firmware (Gotek anyone?).

I'm sure many of you especially Amiga owners, will remember the brilliant 1990 Adventure game ' The Secret of Monkey Island, by Luca...
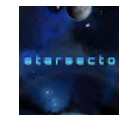
An exclusive interview with StarSector lead developer Alexander Mosolov.
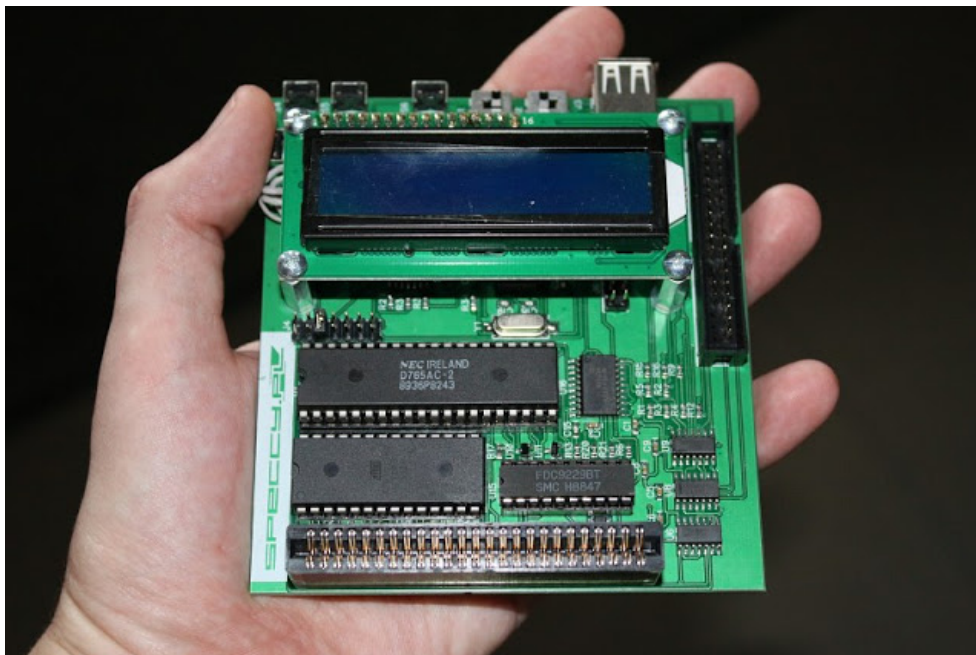StarSector is probably one of the best sci-fi open-world games ever created. Even if you don't consider it one of the best, it's still one c...
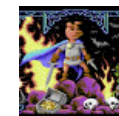
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If you're reading the website right now, you'll not want to miss out on this news announcement posted just an hour ago. As trawling ...

This device is also what I'd class as a chunky bit of kit, it certainly has some weight to it and as you can see in my hand, it's not the smallest of devices, although it does not give the impression of being cheap nor will it break in your hands, unless of course you like throwing things on the floor. Now here's where I come to my first negative, no instructions!! Even if it looks like it could be worth hundreds of pounds (It's not) it still has a lot of buttons and connections that even if it's explained online, still needs to be shown in a diagram on a piece of paper. This also comes in handy if you ever need to sell it on in the years to come.
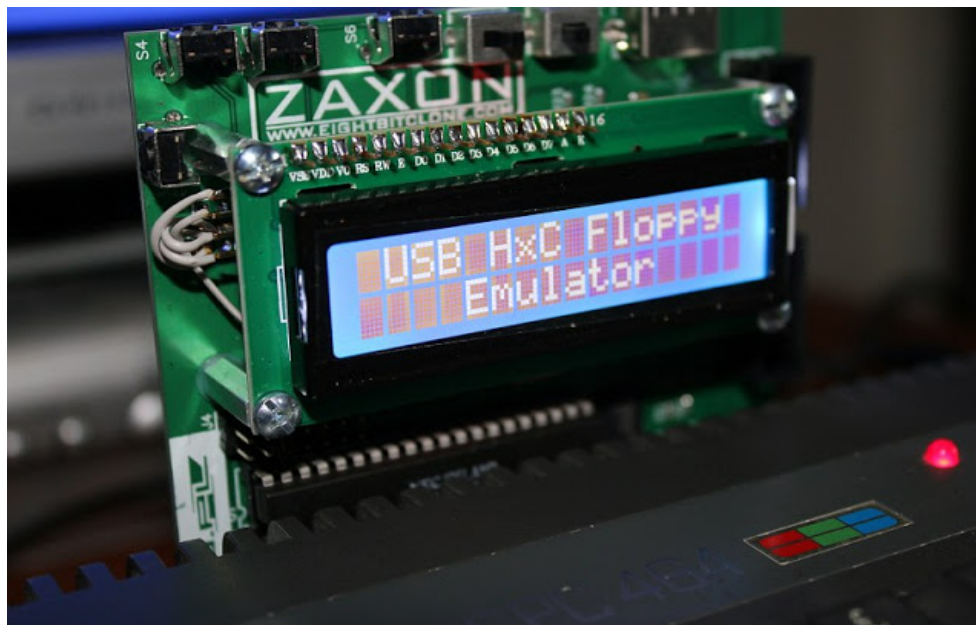
Moving on to the modern attachment, this was easy enough, just find the back of your Amstrad CPC 464, look towards the slot closest to the tape deck and push it on, it really is that simple as there's no wires, something the C64 and ZX Spectrum have had the luxury of for some time. Yes there are original extensions you can buy such as memory accessories, but we are talking about something new and special here!
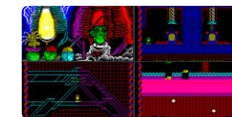
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A Pig Quest - Upcoming C64 game gets another

But this is where the fun begins, turning it all on. The first thing to greet you when you power the old girl up, is a clear front LCD display showing ' USB HxC Floppy Emulator ' and then ' No USB Stick Found ', which was pretty obvious to me as I hadn't plugged one in yet, I just wanted to give it a quick power up. Pretty much any USB memory stick will do, although I'd recommend small in build but large in size, 4GB would be recommended and can be purchased very cheaply.

Here's another feature showing up on the TV screen, which is built into the DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464, Parados v.1.1. A 16kB ROM that replaces the AmsDOS which allows the Amstrad to use double-sided floppy disks and some more disk formats. It also has other features too, but more information can be found on the great CPCWiki guide.

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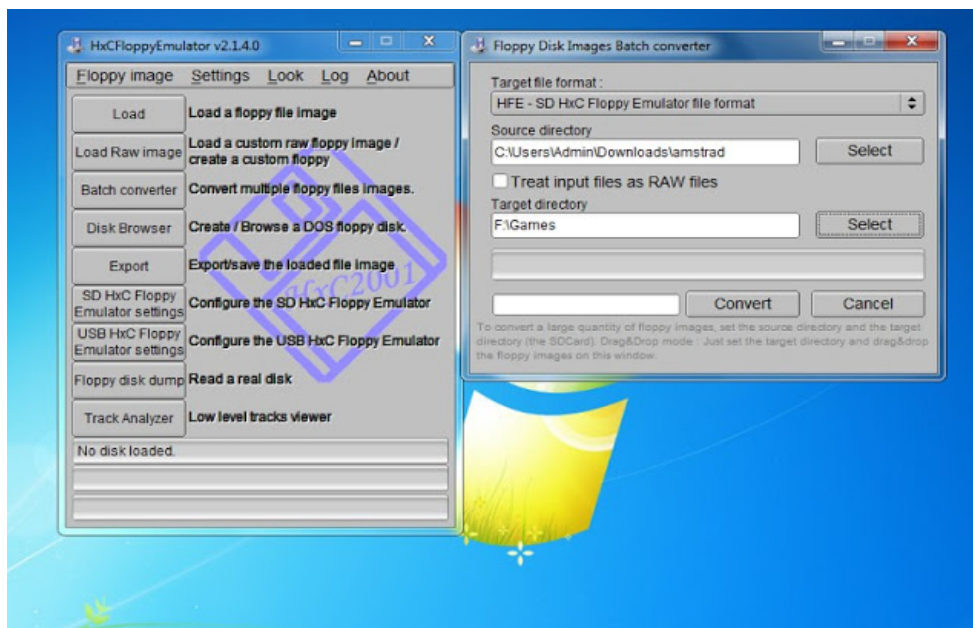
Next up I decided to load some games onto the USB Memory stick and this is when things began to get more tricky, more so if you no nothing about the HxC. Although it does say on the store page, 'Floppy emulator support HFE format for now, so DSK files need to be converted to HFE', it doesn't say how, nor does it say where to get this conversion software, which again would've been good in a guide on the store page or instruction paper. Thankfully as I knew the HxC, you needed to download the HxCFloppyEmulator V2.1.4.0 HERE and use that to batch convert your source directory of *.DSK images over to a target directory Memory Stick. Amstrad disk files/roms games can easily be found on the internet, or ask the members of the CPCWiki forums.
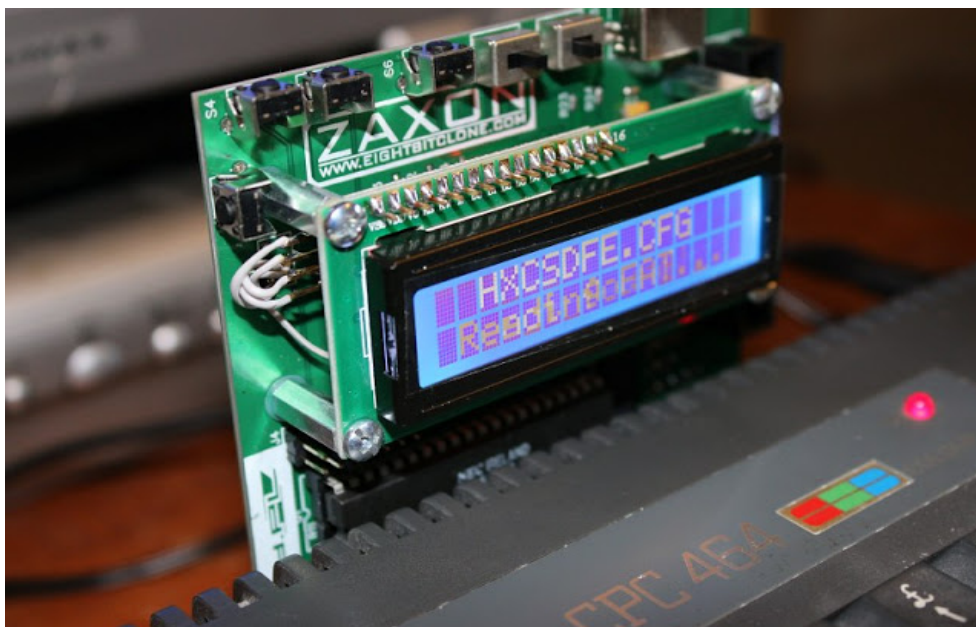
Placing the USB Memory Stick back into the slot and turning the Amstrad back on, we ran into our first problem. It kept on complaining about a missing HXCSDFE.CFG file. See the thing is, we as reviewers have to look at it from a perspective of someone who knows nothing about the HxC and also what we come across trying to be a simplistic as possible, plug in and play. Now if you've ever purchased an SD2IEC for the C64 or even the C64 Monosoft Princess, it has a guide and also tells you to just unpack a provided zip with a teaser of games to the C64 device, run a specific command and away you go.

But with the DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464 it was a little more involved with no guides available when purchasing. But again I knew from experience what the HXCSDFE.CFG file was, it is basically a configuration file to be able to show and play the games using the HxC (The short description). One way to get this file was using the HxCFloppyEmulator V2.1.4.0, selecting the HxC Floppy Emulator settings, selecting the Amstrad as an option in the top right and making sure it saves the config file to the memory stick. Aren't you glad I'm here to tell you that ;)

See how beautiful it looks now! This time it loaded up perfectly with the LCD showing the current game in selection, however as there was no diagram instructions pointing to what each button did, even though I kinda guessed, I headed over to the store page and watched the provided video, which showed that the button on the left is the reset switch, the top left buttons are slot selections, the next button is the selection option and finally the other two switches are DOS switchers.

By using the slot selections I scrolled through my directories A - C, used the selector button to pick B, then the selector button to pick Bruce Lee and the game was ready to be loaded up via the device and the Amstrad. All I needed to do now was the usual commands on the keyboard of CAT then Run"Bruce, and away it went. In just a few moments I was straight into Bruce Lee, with all it's glorious sound. As for other disk games, by unselecting the disk, moving onto the next and selecting that, you can play a game with more disks. It really is that simple and damn does it look good!

But wait I wanted more, as this is HXC firmware after all! Can you use the HxC Floppy Emulator Manager downloadable from HERE, which gives the user a beautiful on screen UI with selectable directories, with each game saved to it's own slot just like on the HxC via the Amstrad CPC 6128?

YES YOU CAN! This is in fact a better way to do it, although you can still use the old method of game scrolling via the LCD if you want, using the HxC Floppy Emulator Manager makes all of this a breeze. Not only does unpacking the files from inside the Amstrad directory of the manager to the USB Memory Stick avoid all that faffing about above, copying over config files. But by simply typing Run"HxC on your Amstrad CPC 464 when the Autoboot LCD is showing, you'll be greeted to this amazing UI. A UI that shows all of your directories, that you can scroll through, with each disk contained within ready to be saved to a slot all viewable full screen on your TV.

But as a BIG +1 to the LCD screen, without it, you'll have to change over to each slot in ParaDOS, then press CAT to remember which game is in which slot, the LCD helps with all of this, just beautiful!

So finally after probably one of my biggest reviews and my most eagerly awaited devices, not since the 1541 Ultimate on the C64. Is this worth the £52.99 that it is being sold for? In a word YES! Not only does it take out the need for a DDI-1, it removes the need for a floppy cable, you can use a USB Memory Stick to play thousands of Amstrad games, you can view all of these games through the LCD and run them with a simple press of a button and a command type, and apart from it having ParaDOS on board, it looks sleek and it's built like a brick at the fraction of the cost of a full HxC kit and extras.
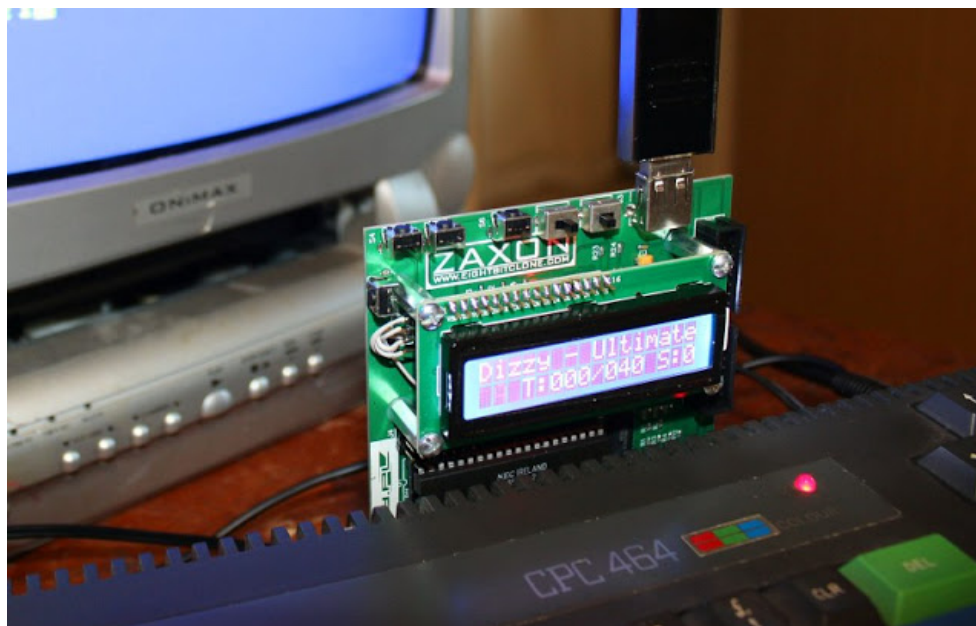
But there is a negative though and it's not the device itself. That is the need for a picture diagram with instructions with the item showing you what button does what, how you actually convert the games and the need for the HxC files such as the HXCSDFE.CFG mentioned above. Perhaps this comes with the retail product and not my one, however for people less savvy on the HxC I think this would be a great addition.

For what you are getting though, you really can't ask for anything more for the Amstrad CPC 464 for playing games through a memory stick. I'd highly recommend heading on over to the store page and picking one up, and also to talk to Piotr on Facebook if you have any concerns or want to know about other incredible hardware he has for sale.

- A huge thanks to Zaxon/Piotr Bugaj for providing the DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464 for this review and we also hope to review the Amstrad CPC 6128 USB floppy emulator as well in the future.

UPDATE 21/02/16 : I have been contacted by Zaxon earlier today, and he has now provided a link to his 8GB USB Memory stick that is preloaded with the HXC config and few demos. That can be found HERE with a huge games list ready for unpacking HERE

Links : 1) Store Page 2) Facebook

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at <u>Friday, February 12, 2016</u>   17 Comments

Labels: AMSTRAD, AMSTRAD CPC 464, DDI3 USB Floppy Emulator for the Amstrad CPC 464, HARDWARE, Piotr Bugaj, Retro Gaming, REVIEW, Zaxon

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Name

SEAN • 5 years ago
More great kit from Zaxon :) I like. I'm glad a couple more emulators appeared for sale.
1 ⌃ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

alex76gr • 5 years ago • edited
Thank you for this great review.
Every new hardware for the CPC is good news!
I still can't see why someone should buy the DDI3 instead of the HxC.
1 ⌃ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

> **INDIERETRONEWS** Mod ↗ alex76gr • 5 years ago
> Thanks man :) To be honest if you have just purchased an Amstrad CPC 464, the DDI3 is the better hardware. Not because we reviewed it :p but because it has far more features specific to the Amstrad CPC, far easier to use for the consumer, and you don't need to buy all the extra's such as the DDI-1. Here for example I have a HxC plugged into the 6128 but it was a pain in the arse and that's putting it lightly. Not only did I have to go and buy an extra floppy cable making sure it had the drive switches on it, but I had to make sure the cable was the right way and connected the right side to the HxC, I had the right power cable adapter, AND I had to make sure the jumpers were switched correctly which involved many support questions on the forum. This was the earlier days though, not sure how different it is now.
> 1 ⌃ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

> **Zaxon** ↗ alex76gr • 5 years ago
> Hmm, i see.... you don't have idea what you talking about. Amstrad 464 don't have floppy disk controller so... how you connect HXC? To joystick port?
> 1 ⌃ | ⌄ • Reply • Share ›

> > **alex76gr** ↗ Zaxon • 5 years ago
> > My mistake. Sorry.
> > The new DDI3 is an interface of high quality level, but equally high to your irony level.

The new DDI3 is an interface of high quality level, but equally high to your irony level.

2 ∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

INDIERETRONEWS Mod ↗ alex76gr • 5 years ago

Now now guys, peace and Amstrad love n all that ;)

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Sykobee • 5 years ago

All we need now is a nice 3D printed case for it :-)

I might get one of these to replace my DDI-1 interface to be honest, this is a lot nicer, and I can connect the actual physical drive still, if I understand correctly.

1 ∧ | ∨ 1 • Reply • Share ›

INDIERETRONEWS Mod ↗ Sykobee • 5 years ago

Yep :), you could always sell the DDI-1 for extra profit, after testing the external drive first

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Hasan Coskun • 3 months ago

Great review! I purchased a DDI3 from Zaxon early this year and only now just managed to get my Amstrad up and running. The information in your review is very helpful as I would be stuck for help otherwise.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Andreas Zahrl • 2 years ago • edited

Hey, the Link for the Games List is not working. Can you renew it?
I get my DDI3 a few days ago and it is now configured with FlashFloppy. All is working great.

A nice 3D Case would be nice.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

jf dn • 3 years ago • edited

Hi all ! A new Firmware update is available for Gotek HxC (and this device) supporting directly the CPC & ZX Spectrum DSK files ! :

http://hxc2001.com/download...

Jeff / HxC2001

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Xesrjb • 3 years ago

I have problems with the internal gotek CPC 6128 drive. After installing a external b drive I only get error messages after switching to |b.

Anyone with the same problem?

xesrjb

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Sebastien Broudin • 4 years ago

Hey, I just orderder a DD3 'CPC 6128) but I need a manual please, do you have it ? How to configure the jumpers ???? Drive A or Drive B ????

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

SEAN • 5 years ago

Yes thanks for the info. Mine turned up and I used your instructions to set it up. One thing was I could not follow your instructions to get the HxC config file:

ne

way to get this file was using the HxCFloppyEmulator V2.1.4.0,

selecting the HxC Floppy Emulator settings, selecting the Amstrad as an

option in the top right and making sure it saves the config file to the

memory stick. - See more at:

http://www.indieretronews.c... way to get this file was using the HxCFloppyEmulator V2.1.4.0, selecting the HxC Floppy Emulator settings, selecting the Amstrad as an option in the top right and making sure it saves the config file to the memory stick.

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option in the top right and making sure it saves the config file to the

memory stick. - See more at:

http://www.indieretronews.c...

I could not find this part of the menu in the software. In the end I used the config file that was within the Floppy Emulator Manager archive (great bit of software).

One of the games I tried was Chase Hq. I got to the title screen then I heard a click inside my 464 and the screen went blank? Maybe I should try another version of that game or even try that file on an emulator.

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

INDIERETRONEWS **Mod** → SEAN • 5 years ago

Hi Sean, yes it can be a little confusing with the configuration software, so for you it's probably best just to use the downloadable software from no recess, which was also linked. Glad it turned up and you got it all working though :) As for Chase Hq, that sounds like a file issue. If it happens to other files, might be worth reporting it to Zaxon

˄ | ˅ • Reply • Share ›

Darren Catterall • 5 years ago

Great piece of kit. Thanks to the great review above that helped setting up very easy.

˄ | ˅ • Reply • Share ›

INDIERETRONEWS Mod → Darren Catterall • 5 years ago

You are most welcome!

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