

CapriceESP32

(A version for the Odroid GO Hardware)

Introduction

At the time the Amstrad CPC came out in the 80th, I was fascinated what lies within the creativity of computer games. It was my first computer where me and my brothers spent days and nights playing games. What a perfect time looking back from now. It was also the time I got fascinated by how a computer works, I have started to learn digital science and computer programming, finding hacks and game cheats in first place. Well, there is always a way to start with :-)

Now, sever centuries later, I came in touch with the Odroid GO by searching for ESP32 programming and evaluation board references. I liked already the ESP8266 for doing some nice IOT projects on my own for home automation purpose. Then, after purchasing an Odroid GO, I have started to upload some nice EMUs checking some games.

Well, then I was looking for a Amstrad CPC EMU for the Odroid GO. As far as I know, there is no public version available. I was caught by the idea playing my favorite games I was addicted to in my youth 30 years later on this tiny ESP32. How could such a big machine fit to half a square inch of space?

Then I started with the end of mind. Searching for a simulator platform saving me some development time capable to develop the wrapper on a decent PC. On the Amstrad CPC, I searched for a good starting point to develop from. I decided to go for the Caprice Palm OS version. It was the most flexible and most decent version of the original Caprice32 version. Still a mystery to me how to develop an EMU. Well done Ulrich Doewich and Frederic Coste! Every thing else is history.

Here we go, a first pre-release of the ESP32, Odroid GO version of the Caprice CPC engine is made available here. What needs to be done to get going is described below.

Preparing the SD Card

```
>|whatever_sd_card_name_you_take/  
>|→ /cpc/dsk   :: Search path for DISK images  
>|→ /cpc/cps   :: Default snapshot path (not used yet)  
>|→ /cpc/scr   :: Default screenshot path (not used yet)
```

It is very important to setup the SD card accordingly. Without that it won't work. This configuration is uses to be standard compliant to Odroid GO Emulator setup. In general used to keep multiple EMUs organized on one single SD card. The **/cpc/dsk** path may contain sub-directories. Please not that sub-directories cannot be stepped into at the moment. So please put all your *.dsk disk images into the root directory of: **/cpc/dsk**.

Compile from source

Normally, there is no need to compile from source. The repository contains two executable versions. One to use with `>make flash (monitor)`, the other as a FW image which can be loaded through the Odroid GO Firmware process. As platform, the esp_idf version 3.2 is uses. It is basically the standard Odroid GO development platform. I have added also Cmake support for the actual esp_idf

version 4.x for testing purpose. It should compile, however, I have stopped development on 4.x because no performance improvements determined.

Running the Emulator

After compile and flash, or FW upload, you should see the following screen:

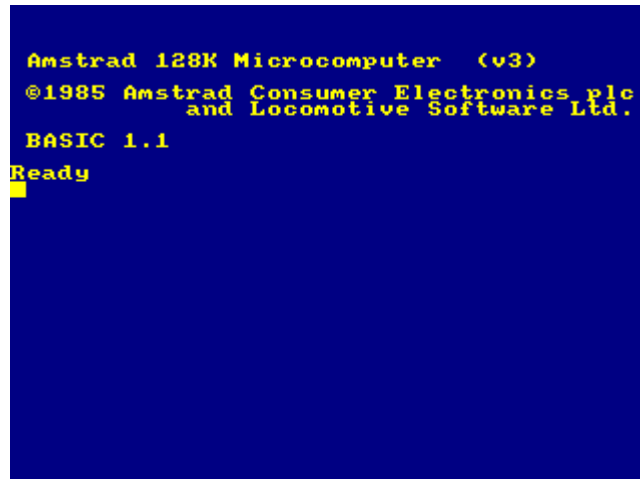


Illustration 1: Start screen of the Amstrad CPC Emulator on the Odroid Go

By connecting the serial monitor, you will get additional information about frames-per-second, audio stream, battery status, keypad status, and CPU load. You have the following two options to navigate:

The virtual keyboard:

The virtual keyboard can be launched by pressing **>M< (Menu) + >A< (Button)**. When inside the virtual keyboard, the navigation keypad is attached to it. You can move, left, right, up, down to select a character. The selected character is then highlighted red. When pressing **>A<**, the current character will be emulated. You can leave the virtual keyboard by pressing **>M< (Menu) + >A< (Button)** again. Then, the navigation attachment falls back to joystick support.



Illustration 2: Virtual Keyboard of the CapriceESP32 Emulator by pressing >M< (Menu) + >A< (Button)

The virtual keyboard size was kept as low as possible in order to overlay as minimum as possible with the emulator screen. The size and position are fixed. You can't move the virtual keyboard on the screen at the moment.

Loading and Running games.

On a standard Amstrad CPC, the Basic OS is always booted at startup prompting with **Ready**. What one normally does is to put a disc into the drive and type >CAT< (catalog). Then the system lists all available files. By typing >run" + <filename><, the system executes the file selected. This procedure is normally sufficient to load and run games.

This is a bit unhandy on a device without hardware keyboard. So the procedure was simplified on the Odroid GO. In order to load a game, you need to press >M< (**Menu**) + >B< (**Button**) to get into the context menu:

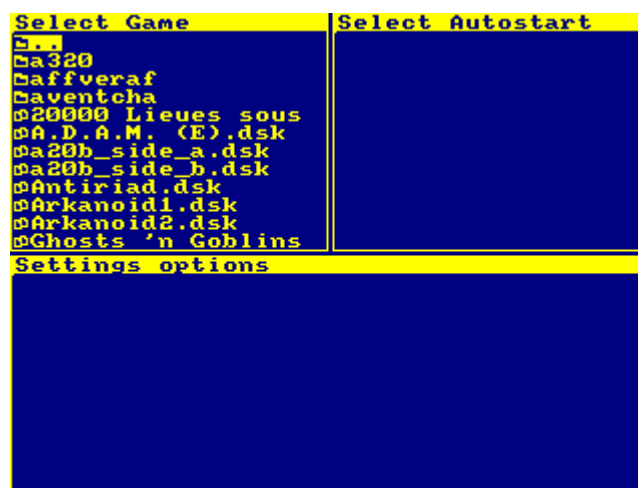
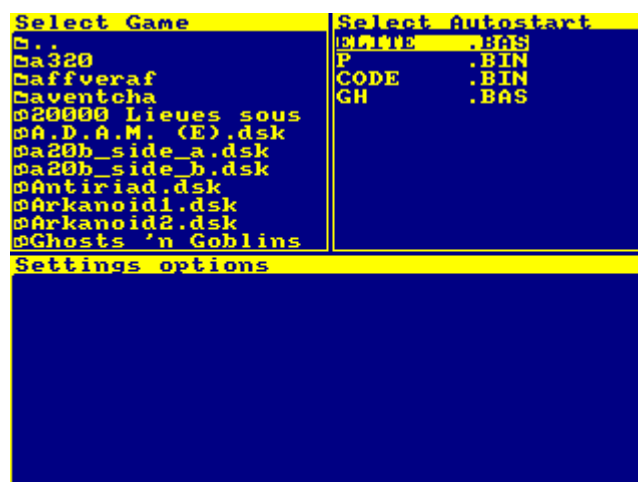


Illustration 3: Context menu by pressing >M< (Menu) + >B< (Button)

You will see three sub-panels. The active panel (highlighted yellow) is the game select panel by default. With the cursors you can move up and down inside this window. The actual one is always highlighted yellow. As a limitation so far, folders cannot be entered. I might implement this in future. Then, by pressing >A<, you will see the available files on this disk selected. In this particular case “Ghosts ‘n Goblins” has been selected. In order to get now in the Select Autostart panel, you need to press >M< + >RIGHT<.



Panel navigation is implemented when >M< + >LEFT, RIGHT, UP, or DOWN< is pressed. So you can switch between **Select Game** and **Select Autostart** by pressing >M<+>RIGHT<, or >M<+>LEFT<, respectively.

Please note: In case the catalog is already seen in the **Select Autostart** panel, the disk is loaded already into the emulator. One, can also switch back to the emulator by pressing >M<+>B< again. This is useful when another disk needs to be loaded, for instance games provided on multiple disks. Don't press >A< in such a situation. Then, the emulator will be reset by moving out of the context menu. It will enter the Autostart feature.

Please also note: To start the autostart process, one need to press >A< on the particular file selected in the catalog. In this example it is "ELITE.BAS". There is no visual feedback to the user that Autostart has been initiated. Please do not wait for an on-screen-display (OSD) window giving feedback on this. If you now go back to the emulator window by pressing >M<+>B<, the emulator will reset and start typing the file name to run.

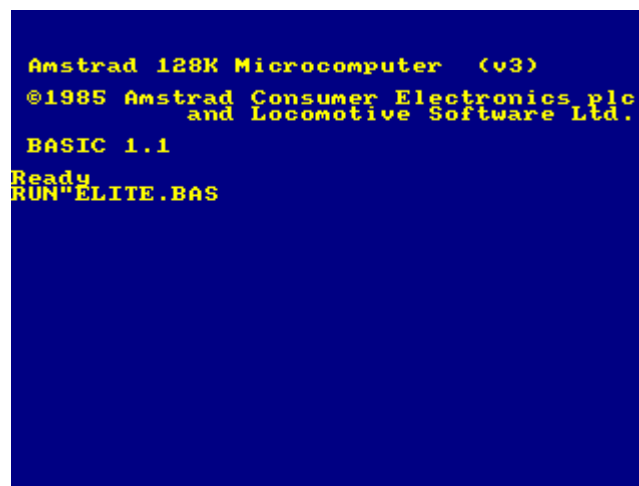


Illustration 4: Autostart execution

After that, the game should load and you are ready to play!



Illustration 5: Game screenshot

During the game you can press >M<+>A< to get to the virtual keyboard. By pressing >M<+>B< you can hold on the emulator, or you can select another game to play.

Known Limitations

Some games that use overscan are not displayed fully. Overscan means that it uses the full border area for the game. The current bit-blit algorithm implemented does not use scaling and blending. I might implement this feature in future.

Some remakes or ports like *Pinball Dreams* do not work correctly. I have checked that it is also not working correctly in Caprice32 and Caprice Palm OS version. It works on Caprice Forever. So I need to approach Frederic Coste how to solve it. It is something deeper in the emulator.

Settings are not implemented so far. Like:

- green monitor feature,
- switching from Joystick to Cursor keys, or other per-defined hardware key arrangements,
- night mode
- volume control (volume is set to 20%, should be ok)
- volume mute
- screenshot
- game snapshot (to continue playing on a later stage)
- on screen display (OSD)
 - Errors and Acknowledgment
 - Battery life
- of course there are memory leaks and other bugs need to be fixed

I might work on this in future.

One final remark

Main idea of this project was to get it working real time on an ESP32. During this project I have learned a lot about the esp_idf (I just used it with Arduino previously). I have learned how an real-time OS works in reality and how a dual core CPU can be used to increase performance. It was also a topic related to two things:

- There are always two creations, one in mind and one in reality!
- Always start with the end of mind!

Have Fun! But maybe two years to late for the Odroid GO!