A big show issue, Spock materialises, we're handed a Psion MC400 and a case of cool *déjà-vu*.

20 YEARS AGO November 1979

We previewed the second *Personal Computer World* show, held in a small hotel in West London this month, and among its exhibitors were such towering names from the early days of micro development as Rair, Personal Computers Limited, Research Machines, Tandy and Vero. The show promised the first European chess challenge, with a £1,500 first prize, and a conference that mixed business issues with advice for hobbyists. There were Commodore PETs and Apple user groups preparing to go, but neither of the big names themselves took stand space.

We benchtested the Challenger C3-S1 from Ohio Scientific, which came in two big cases – one housing the computer and the other to enclose the gigantic 32K dual floppy drives. There were three chips on the motherboard – the 6502A, 6800 and Z80 – and a software control program to switch between them, so that all available programs (written in machine code) could be run. We felt the £2,998 machine was fair-to-middling. (By the way, an ad in the same issue for the Research Machines 380Z offered a 56K machine with dual floppy disks at a mere £3,266!)

A feature entitled 'Shakespeare, BASIC and the CIA' investigated the CIA's research into analysing sentence structure in great literary works by Jane Austen and Shakespeare to discover if literary 'fingerprints' could be isolated. The micro was on the track of nailing the global spying fraternity. ■

15 YEARS AGO November 1984

Yes, it had to happen. Spock on the cover, and not a sign of emotion. Our excuse being a new high-end home machine called the Enterprise. It came with a built-in word processor, 64K of RAM, high-resolution graphics, 256 colours, stereo sound and an 80-column display. The keyboard, we observed, looked like 'a cross between a Tonka toy, a panel of the USS Enterprise and a rubber typing mat'. The compact motherboard boasted a Zilog Z80 running at 4 MHz, and two custom chips – 'Nick' and 'Dave' – which handled video and audio respectively.

You could program your own applications by inserting a BASIC cassette that came with the £249 package. At that price, we concluded, the Enterprise had a fighting chance against the MSX range (starting at £275), the Amstrad (£329, but with a colour monitor), and the BBC B and Sinclair QL (both around £400). We were wrong, however: Enterprise sales never hit Warp speed, mainly through lack of support by software houses.

In an article headed 'Lateral thinking', we tentatively explored the brave new world of natural language processing. First we identified key concepts on which programming logic could be built – in particular, word classifications and grammatical rules. The aim was to teach a computer to recognise the rule that people can own objects, but not vice versa, and given that certain words belong to the two categories 'objects' and 'people', then a computer could theoretically answer both these questions: 'Can John own a Ford Capri?' and 'Can a Ford Capri own John?' Then we got on to the basic principles of programming, including algorithms for storing a word in a computer's vocabulary, searches and tree layouts for visualising word relationships. ■

10 YEARS AGO November 1989

It was quite a mobile month for us, although not all good things come in small packages. A mysterious leather-clad motorbiker delivered the spanking new laptop-sized Psion MC400 for us to play with. Former editor, Derek Cohen, predicted that the MC200 and 400, with their proprietary WIMP interface designed by Psion, would still 'grab many people's hearts instantly'. He added: 'As a hardened user of PC-compatibles, I'd still go for the MC400 above the PC-compatible [MC600] model'. Thus, Psion's first attempt to market an alternative mobile operating system standard, in those pre-EPOC days, was given the official *PCW* seal of approval.

Meanwhile, that legend of the industry, Guy Kewney, was speaking his mind in the Newsprint section. He'd fallen out with Poqet: a company that had just produced pre-production models of a tiny Psion Series 3 style pocket PC. Kewney went for the jugular, attacking everything from the UK management to the machine itself: 'The keyboard was, frankly, a mess. On a £50 calculator it would have been a drawback. On a £1,300 computer, it was a joke.' ■

5 YEARS AGO November 1994

Our Labs were the first to get their hands on a prototype Gateway P5-100P – the first 100MHz Pentium machine we'd ever got our testing gloves on! Our performance index (then based on an Apricot 486SX 25MHz) showed the Gateway to be a blistering 5.47 times faster than the reference machine. The new machine, we noted, 'looks something like a fridge... with room to keep a few bottles of milk'. This is where we hit *déjà vu* territory with this current issue – our cover star, the supercooled 800MHz Athlon with its LCD temperature display, is much closer to the big white pleasure machine in the kitchen. Although we didn't have a price, we expected it to be around £3,500 when it eventually shipped. For now it was 'the fastest PC money CAN'T buy'!

If you wanted to spend some money, however, we had a mind-bending Group Test of 28 machines based around 66MHz 486 DX2s. Dell, Dan and Panrix were among the winners, but the list of also-rans makes more interesting reading. Do you remember names like Adams, American Pacific, CIC Sigma, ICS, IPC, Mint and Osborne?

In the first of a series of tutorials on ray-tracing graphics, we promised to 'briefly gambol through the subject, using a widely available shareware program'. The program, called PolyRay, allowed us to explore ray-tracing. We showed standard images of 'rendered' objects, such as a teapot floating above a chessboard, before rendering our own. ■