

Sinclair presented its colour successor to the ZX 81: Stripped down to the minimum – neither sound nor graphics chip, no joystick port and no proper keyboard – the Spectrum became England's most successful home computer.

Sinclair Spectrum

GB, 1982



Simultaneously to its rival C64, the Spectrum bestirred the second wave of home computers. Unlike the Commodore, Clive Sinclair's invention was a local phenomenon though. British gamers and developers loved the cheap and transparent hardware but on the continent, the Spectrum played a secondary role. Stateside, only a half-hearted attempt at marketing the Z80 based micro was started, while in Japan no one bothered.

After the first version was shipped with 16 K RAM, 1983 saw 48 K become the standard. CPU, memory and one expansion port on the back – no components to write home

about. Instead of a professional keyboard the Spectrum only had tiny keys. Indeed, many users covered those rubbers with a new case containing a mechanical keyboard, and as the Spectrum lacked a joystick port, adapters became the most popular add-on.

To beef up the low-budget computer, little black boxes for various needs, including memory, sound and speech modules, popped up all over the place. Sinclair itself released two expansions: The Interface 1 was an adapter for the 'Microdrive' storage device, magnetic tapes with a capacity of 80 K. The Interface 2 provided the Spectrum

Units sold:	5 Million
Number of games:	2,000
Game storage:	Tape, Cartridge
Games developed until:	1992

★★★★★



Even in its most advanced set up, Sinclair's 8-Bit vision was smaller and lighter than other micros. Unlike the actual computer, the Interface 1 and mass storage device (left) were ignored. Only ten games appeared for the Interface 2 (cartridge and joystick ports), among them the tiny 16 K ROM versions of Jet Pac and PSSST – Rare's debut titles.

Named Plus, the Spectrum earned an improved keyboard and a sound chip. Two years later the +2 even featured RGB video output.



with two joystick ports and a slot for ROM cartridges. As neither met with significant success, conventional audiotape remained the main medium.

While Sinclair's storage decisions were ill-fated, its selection of software partners was excellent. Without dictating a strict third-party policy (like later console manufacturers did), Sinclair cleverly took the best developers under its wings and began selling games by Melbourne House (today the Australian part of Infogrames/Atari), ROM conversions of Chris and Tim Stamper's debut titles, and even imported Japanese software to Europe – tiny 10 K programs by a new company named Hudson.

Its closest partner (a 'second-party' according to today's standards), was Psion, founded by physicians David Potter and Charles Davis. David wrote Britain's premier **Flight Simulator** and, as development manager, produced the F1 simulation **Chequered Flag**, and a year later, **Match Point** tennis and **Psion Chess**. Davis took part in restructuring Psion when it became an early PDA developer; he is now a board member at Symbian.

In the USA and Germany, the Spectrum was bashed for missing graphics and sound chips but for the creative English coders, the minimalist components provided an advantage. Sprites and scrolling were hardware supported on other micros. Whereas C64 programmers followed their fixed routines, Spectrum game design had to be conceptualized and done from the scratch. The result was a tremendous gameplay and graphical variety:

The wireframe 3D of **Stargate** and **Dark Star** was followed in 1985 by the shaded polygons of Realtime's **Starstrike 2**. Isometric graphics were popular on the Spectrum too, and adventures with icon control as well as unusual strategy RPGs like Mike Singleton's epic **Lords of Midnight**. Experimental 'interactive movies' such as Automata's **Deus Ex Machina** or **Mugsy** by Melbourne House (1984) anticipated Cinemaware's subsequent Amiga games.



Across the Misty Mountains: The drawings in *The Hobbit* adventure (shown above) looked charming and naive, much like J.R.R. Tolkien's own water paintings; its parser spoke English. Not Tolkien-based, but influenced by his ring trilogy was Mike Singleton's masterpiece *Lords of Midnight*, shown left.

