

PERSONAL COMPUTERS

Honoring Technical Merit

By PETER H. LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

LAS VEGAS, Nev., Nov. 14 — Nearly a million square feet of computers, peripherals and software are on display here this week at the Comdex Fall trade show. About 1,700 companies have come to this neon-lit Baghdad to display their wares to a crowd of more than 100,000 customers.

This year's exhibition, which marks the end of the first decade of the personal computer business, is overwhelming in its size and scope. The sheer number of sore-footed, bleary-eyed, blue-suited invaders who prize memory chips more than poker chips is stunning.

While everyone else scrambles around the convention center, showrooms and hotel suites looking for the next great thing in computing, let's pause to pay tribute to the people who were responsible for the last great things in computing.

On its most fundamental level, this is a show about technology, and if it weren't for the technical geniuses in blue jeans, sneakers and T-shirt, there wouldn't be any marketing geniuses in their blue suits, white shirts and red ties.

PC Magazine, known for its testing laboratory and exhaustive reviews of products for the business market, each year honors technical excellence in several categories. Although the products may not be the best for your specific needs, PC Magazine, which is published by Ziff-Davis, has concluded that they are the best among their peers.

This year's winners, announced tonight, include the following:

Portable computers: In a year that saw a barrage of new portable computers, the big news was the small news. The NEC Ultralite, a 4.5-pound laptop that is about the size of a folded newspaper, is a breakthrough in miniaturization. Thomas B. Martin, Patrick Navin and Keith Schaefer of NEC Home Electronics USA Inc. are the heavyweights behind it. The machine costs \$3,000 to \$4,000, depending on configuration.

Graphics software: Throw out your

PC Magazine picks the year's best in several categories.

drafting pens and T-squares; Micrografx Designer (\$695) is a Windows-based graphics arts and technical illustration program that tops all the others. J. Paul Grayson, George D. Grayson, Lyle Griffin and Steve Emmons of Micrografx Inc., at (214) 234-1769, draw the applause for this one.

Application software: This category covers so much ground that you need a data base to keep track of all the programs. According to the magazine's editors, Q&A 3.0 (\$349) from Symantec Inc., at (800) 441-7234, in California (800) 626-8847, is tops in its field. Paul Lancaster, Barry Greenstein, Mike Milsner, Tim Benson and Brett Walter designed this one for the business environment.

Development tools: Turbo Debug-

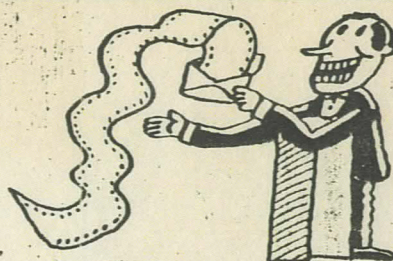


Illustration by Stuart Goldenberg

ger and Assembler from Borland International Inc., at (800) 255-8008, "is a spectacular product," PC Magazine gushed. Programmers who want a simple, elegant debugger for Pascal and C should thank Brad Silverberg and Borland's team. The set costs \$149 if purchased separately, but is included free with Borland's Turbo C Professional and Turbo Pascal Professional, at \$250 each.

Person of the year: This one is hard to figure, but PC Magazine named the 80386 chip and six of its designers at the Intel Corporation as the Person of the Year for 1988. "The 80386 makes our computing lives better every day," the citation read.

Desktop computers: "In the field of powerhouse machines there can be only one winner, and Advanced Logic Research's Flexcache 25386 is it,"

PC's editors concluded. The ALR machine consistently ranks number one in speed and performance among 80386-based machines, even though at \$6,490 for a basic machine it is one of the least expensive in its class. ALR is based in Irvine, Calif.; phone (714) 581-6770.

Design: This is a category for esthetics, and the Microsoft Mouse is about as sleek and pretty as a mouse can be. "It's a pleasure to use something so functional, yet so pleasing to the eye and hand," the judges said. It has been described as looking like a bar of Dove soap. The mouse is sold bundled with software applications such as Windows. Microsoft's number is (800) 426-9400.

Lifetime achievement: Dennis M. Ritchie of A.T. & T. Bell Laboratories "has been the most important influence on the decade's most important language, C." C is the language of Unix, and Unix may very well emerge as the standard operating system of the 1990's. Mr. Ritchie in effect wrote the C language.

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