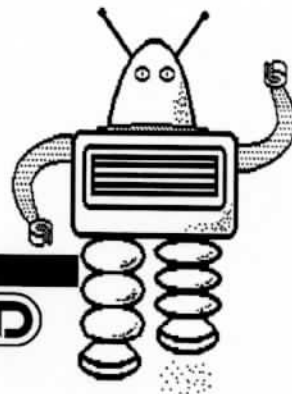# THE ROBOT COMPANION

The Newsletter of the Dallas Personal Robotics Group
September, 1989
Stan Spielbusch, Editor

CCD

PRESIDENT'S CORNER
by Ed Rivers, President

August 27th was the date of our last robot lab. The lab was held at Walter and Bev Bryant's new home in Flower Mound. We were joined by three prospective new members which I hope will be able to join us at InfoMart this month. We'll have full details of the user lab at the next meeting.

The current project craze is still maze running robots. At the last InfoMart meeting, I demoed my Big Trak. Stan also brought his, and showed the modifications he has been making to it. Afterwords, Brian made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and I sold my Big Trak to him. Good luck, Brian. I knew I wouldn't have time to modify the Big Trak myself, and it WAS collecting dust in the garage. Bart recently found one at the Dallas First Saturday Sale. It looks like things are underway.

I made my first visit to Tanner Electronics a few weeks ago. I found them to be a good source for parts, but they didn't seem to have much in the line of surplus equipment. Tanner is located in the SW corner of I35E and Beltline, north of the LBJ Freeway. Their phone number is 242-8702.

Our main meeting is late this month, September 23rd. This is also the first day of Autumn. Will be good to see the cooler weather.

For Sale: Hero 1 Robot with Arm, Voice, Remote Control, Memory Expansion, Basic, Wandering Demo, RS-232 Interface, Cross Assembler with Source for PC. $1000. Ed Rivers (214) 840-3044.

From: Stuart Yarus, CCD President, StarText Mail Code: 102338

For General Release --

Dr. Adam Osborne, Chairman and CEO of Paperback Software, will give presentations and demonstrations of his company's offerings at the September 23, 1989 Super Saturday meetings of the Computer Council of Dallas. Dr. Osborne and Mr. Terry Schussler, Director of Product Development at Paperback Software, will discuss:

Artificial Intelligence today   Expert Systems
Spreadsheets for the 90's   Three-Dimensional Connections with Databases.

In addition, there will be presentations of:
VP-Planner Plus, a 3D spreadsheet   VP-Expert, an expert system with an SQL interface.

The program will be given in the Alexandria Auditorium at INFOMART, 1950 Stemmons Freeway, from 9 AM to 11 AM. The program will be repeated at the same place from 1 PM to 3 PM. Both programs are open to the public.

-- Programs sponsored by the North Texas PC Users' Group.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

by Stan Spielbusch

The Mice Are Coming

As you can see from Ed's article, it looks like the mouse projects are starting! I'm very excited about this, even though I haven't had time to work on my own. So far we have three people (myself, Brian, and Bart) with Big Track mice-in-the-making. I hope to see the 3 blind mice in action soon! the most interesting think will be to see the 3 different methods of computerizing the Big Tracks.

Mine will probably be the most massive, since the computer I'm using is on 4 separate boards (originally meant for a much larger robot). This will make it heavy, but then the Big Track always was pretty powerful. I once tied a shopping cart to it and drug it around a warehouse.

Brian's may be the smallest. He intends to house everything inside the original case, using a single-chip processor and just a few peripherals.

I don't know much about Bart's yet. He's going to use a 6809 processor, and it will have sonar.

For anyone still looking for a mouse brain, I just got a new catalog from Micromint. They have a line of single-board computer products that could work very well. Contact Micromint, 4 Park Street, Vernon, CT 06066. Tel 1-800-635-3355.

I'm anxious to hear if anyone else is considering a mouse project. If so, let me know. I would especially like to get someone's detailed plans to print in the newsletter. Even though part of the fun is being original, it would help to have some detailed plans to start from. Once things get competitive, we'll see "turbo-charged" mice and "smart" mice, with no two mice alike. But of course, mine will always win!

New Robot

Loren Heiny recently forwarded a press kit to me about a new robot on the market. Before I go into details, the base price is $12,500. There -- that should keep you from drooling so much when you read about it.

The name of it is the Droid Genesis 1, by Droid Systems group in New York. It's about 4 feet high, and looks like a 1-armed robot weight-lifter (the arm is heavy-duty and can lift 15 pounds). the hardware features include a PC-compatible computer (so they say), a radio link keypad, the arm (mounted on its side, not in front), and standard sensors. Well, it's a typical robot, but it doesn't even have speech yet (a costly later option, no doubt). I didn't see much details about the electronics, except "IBM PC compatible". They hinted at, but didn't really say that it will accommodate PC hardware.

While the electrical design appears to be state-of-the-art, the mechanical design is a step backward. The drive system is two lawnmower wheels in front, with two very small casters in back. This might work on smooth floors, but any degree of carpeting is out. Also, the robot is very slender with a small base. With the arm on the side, it looks like it would lean severely if it lifted 15 pounds. Speaking of which, the arm being on the side like the HERO 1's makes it very hard to use (and makes the overall width pretty large).

The robot's main feature seems to be its software. It has an "Interactive Modular Control Environment", which looks remarkably like Brian's Home Navigation system, in which you define tasks and run them like mini-programs. They also have "available" a scheduler and a mapping program. In other words, it will do what we have gotten the HERO 2000 to do already. They "plan" to have speech recognition and vision some day. Who doesn't?

They call it "The First Thinking Person's Robot". For that price, I think not.

If you would like some info, contact:

Droid Systems, 412 East 88th Street, New York, NY, 10128. Tel. 212-534-5800.

CCD Access

CCD Access: Number 1 – September 1989. By: The Journal group.

WELCOME TO THE CCD!

Your user group belongs to a most unique organization. There isn't anything else quite like it anywhere.

The organization's full name is the Computer Council of Dallas, Incorporated. Most folks just call it the "CCD". It is an organization set up very much like a user group. Its membership, however, is special. The Computer Council "members" are user groups. Only groups that meet CCD standards can apply.

The Computer Council of Dallas is a coalition of many different groups. Its leaders are elected out of those groups. The main body of the Council are people that each user group has picked to represent them.

The main purpose of the Computer Council is simple: to provide a better atmosphere for the operation and growth of user groups in the North Texas area. As simple as it sounds, it keeps quite a few people busy in the process....

To "provide a better atmosphere" involves a heck of a lot. The Council wants each group to have a place to meet, accomodations that fit what the group does, support for user-related activities like disk-sales and special presentations, provision for the vendors who service those groups. In addition, the Computer Council wants to make the public aware of the groups and what they do. The CCD promotes communication and good relations between each of the user groups. The Council must be a standard-bearer for groups in general: enhancing the community's image of what user groups are, and emphasizing responsibility and service.
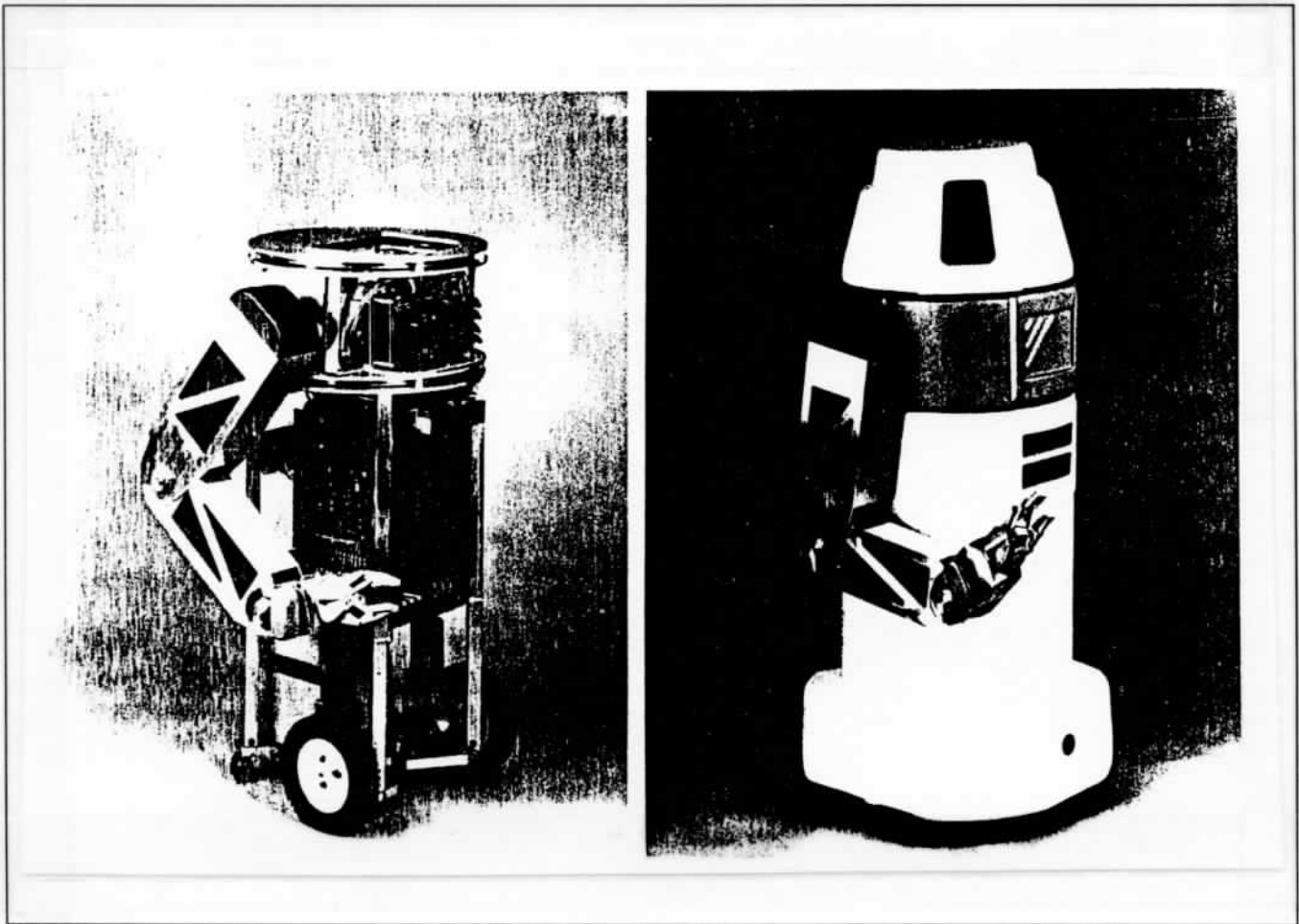
Each of these aims are important to user groups. Without suitable meeting places, groups must move around a lot. They then have a harder time attracting members. A computer group can't always meet in many places that are available, simply because groups often hold classes or have speakers who need the use of larger auditoriums, electricity, audio-visual equipment, etc. Most groups aren't in the financial position to rent halls every month. They usually prefer to spend dues income for newsletters and things which benefit even those members too far away to attend regularly. They would like to have vendors available for their members, but schools and libraries often have rules against vending activities. Each group would certainly like to be known by the rest of the community. The group leaders understand the social nature of their clubs. Keeping in touch with each other helps groups serve their own members better. No group can afford to alienate other members in the computing world. We need to bring a better image to user groups, since the only press users ever seem to get in the media comes from lone wackos who try to terrorize other users. We all need to show that the real users are good people doing good things.

So with all these things to consider, it's no wonder that the groups got together to form The Computer Council of Dallas. The CCD user groups are all working together, to do more than any could do alone.

Any feedback, comments or suggestions should be forwarded to:

CCD Publicity
1950 Stemmons Freeway
Box 277
Dallas TX 75207.

Here's the best reproduction I could manage of the Droid Genesis robot.

FROM THE LIBRARY

by Stan Spielbusch

ARMATRON PROGRAM

David Astin of Alabama sent me a disk with a program to control the Radio Shack mobile Armatron toy from a PC's printer port. Also included on the disk is a text file with very complete instructions on interfacing the armatron to the PC. It doesn't look very difficult. While the armatron is by no means a productive device, it's an excellent educational tool, and would probably be able to at least move game pieces around for a PC chess game. This disk is now available in the DPRG library. Ask for disk "Armatron"

If you have a program to submit, put it on an MS-DOS format disk (double sided, double-density standard format) and bring it to the meeting or send to Stan Speilbusch (address on membership form).

We currently have 6 disks in the library -- a HERO-1 BASIC disk, a HERO-2000 BASIC disk, a HERO-1 Assembler disk, Loren Heiny's EyeSight program, Loren's Sonar Mapper, and the Armatron control program.

If you want a copy of a disk, the best way is to bring a blank, formatted PC-DOS/MS-DOS disk to the meeting and trade with me there. If you forget to bring a disk, we will have to collect $2.00 per disk. Mail-order -- $3.00 per disk -- no need to include a disk with order. Send orders to Stan.