MITS Computer Caravan

The Mighty MITS Mobile stopped off in Boston recently and roused the microprocessor byters from the woodwork. It was a good deal like a club meeting as the MITS Computer Caravan paused to provide a seminar for 30 plus enthusiasts.

Since it is more than likely that virtually every one who is reading this brief report was to some degree snared into the computer hobby field as a result of the Altair 8800, we won't try to explain who MITS is or what they make.

But reading about the Altair and seeing it in action are two different things, so the crowds have been catching the Caravan in large numbers. It's a good show, so don't miss it when it comes around. The registration fee is $12 and for that price you get a loose leaf binder with schematics of the Altair and notes to go with the short instruction course presented during the Caravan seminar. The book alone makes the price reasonable. You also get an opportunity to see the Altair in action and ask questions until you get tired.

The 8800 on demo had a teletype IO and a cassette memory unit, which is what most of us were anxious to see and try out. The program was a good one, starting out with a discussion of the fundamentals of computers and logic, then the Altair hardware, and finally the software with a demo of MITS BASIC.

A couple of non-beginners went out for a short snort or something while the introduction to logic circuits unfolded . . . everyone else listened with interest. The session was run by Mike Hunter, who has been driving the Caravan all around the country.

The standard modem tones of 2025 and 2225 Hz were used for the cassette storage . . . which seemed like a good feature. After a short loading program via the front panel switches BASIC was loaded from a cassette and demonstrated. This certainly appears to be a very good version of BASIC and to have a lot of advantages over other possible languages.

The soon to be released floppy disk operating system was discussed. This will make fast access bulk memory available for a very reasonable price as compared to commercial units now available for the minicomputer systems. MITS is reportedly going to have this ready for use in a few weeks. This certainly will be a major step toward providing low cost complete operating computer systems.

The MITS line printer is also about to be released, complete with its operating system, and magnetic tape memories are in the works. Considering that all this really started only about one year ago, the progress by MITS has been just about incredible.

The MITS Caravan was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone and it seems likely that as a result of the group getting together for that seminar that a club will be forming . . . another feather in the cap for MITS. This sort of thing has been happening all around the country. ■

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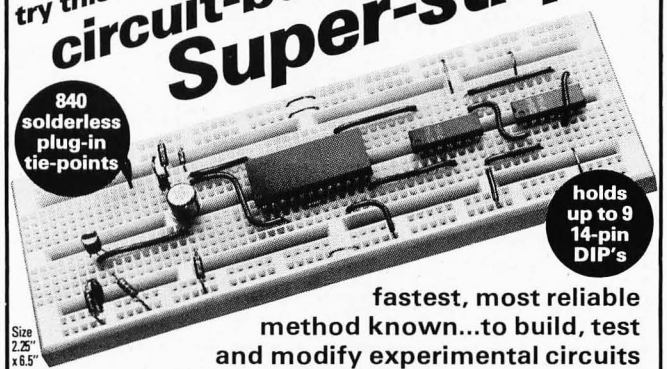

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