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System Notes

Faster BASIC for the Ohio Scientific

John A Sauter, Department of Biochemistry 5426 Med Sci I, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI 48109

"I don't believe it! The guy who wrote this program didn't know what he was doing." How many times have you seen a program and said that? Well, I never thought I would say it while looking at the Microsoft multiplication routines written for Ohio Scientific's BASIC.

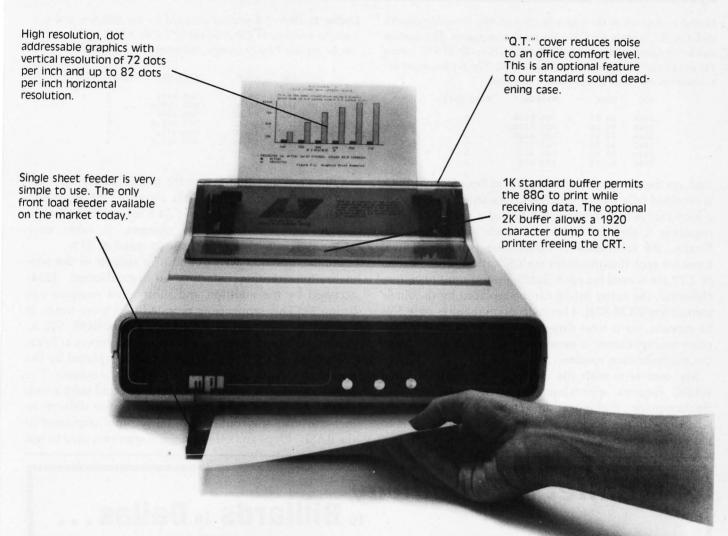
Multiplication routines written in software are *slow*, especially when accurate to 9 digits. Programmers are always trying to optimize mathematical routines for speed. That's why I was surprised that the main loop for the multiplication routine contained line after line of inefficient instructions.

To comprehend the problem, you need to understand how a software multiplication routine works. For multiplication of large numbers, the process is similar to the longhand method taught in school. The two numbers to be multiplied, the multiplier and the multiplicand, are stored in the floating-point accumulator and the alternate floating-point accumulator, respectively. These accumulators are usually 4 to 5 bytes in length and preferably located in page 0 memory. The low bit of the multiplier is checked to see if it is set: if it is, the multiplicand is added to the product (initially 0); if it is not, no addition occurs.

Next, both the multiplier and the product are shifted 1 bit right (or, alternately, the multiplier is shifted right and the multiplicand is shifted left) and the low bit on the multiplier is checked again. This process is repeated for each bit in the multiplier. Four bytes are required for 9 digits of precision: a great deal of bit shifting must go on. In fact, the bit shifting uses most of the time required for a multiplication routine.

Fortunately, there is a convenient instruction in the 6502 microprocessor for shifting several contiguous bytes 1 bit to the right. The ROR instruction shifts a byte 1 bit to the right, with the carry shifted into the high-order bit, and the low-order bit of the byte shifted into the carry. Successive executions of the ROR instruction on contiguous bytes will shift all of the bytes 1 bit to the right, with the low bit of 1 byte shifting into the high bit of the next.

Listing 1 contains a portion of the Microsoft multiplication routine for the 6502. It is part of the routine that shifts the product 1 bit right. This sequence is repeated four more times in the subroutine, and requires a total time of 85 μ s (with a 1 MHz clock rate while assuming



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Listing 1: Section of the multiplication routine from Microsoft's disk BASIC, written for Ohio Scientific computers. This section can be replaced with a single ROR instruction (ROR \$73, where the dollar sign denotes a hexadecimal 73). The replacement accomplishes the same task in much less time.

LOC	CODE	MNEMONIC	TIME (us
1946	A9 80	LDA #\$00	2
1948	90 02	BCC \$194C	3
194A	A9 80	LDA #\$80	2
194C	46 73	LSR \$73	5
194E	05 73	ORA \$73	3
1950	85 73	STA \$73	3

that, on the average, the instruction at hexadecimal 194A is executed only half of the time). This sequence is also in a loop that is repeated for all 8 bits of a multiplier byte, requiring a time of 680 μ s for each subroutine call. Finally, the subroutine is called four (sometimes five) times for each floating-point multiplication. Thus, a total of 2.72 ms is used for each floating-point multiplication. However, the entire listing can be replaced by the single instruction (ROR \$73). This instruction requires only 5 μ s to execute, for a total time of 800 μ s for each floating-point multiplication: a saving of 1.92 ms for each call to the multiplication routine.

My own tests with the changes have indicated that BASIC requires approximately 4.9 ms to complete a floating-point multiplication on a 9-digit number, whereas with the changes, it takes only 3.1 ms. This is an increase in speed of 37%!

Listing 2: Part of a routine accessed by the addition and subtraction routines in Ohio Scientific's disk BASIC. This section can be replaced by the single instruction ROR \$02, X.

LOC	CODE	MNEMONIC	TIME (us)	
1854	A9 00	LDA #\$00	2	
1856	90 02	BCC \$185A	3	
1858	A9 80	LDA #\$80	2	
185A	56 02	LSR \$02,X	6	
185C	15 02	ORA \$02,X	4	
185E	95 02	STA \$02,X	4	

Other routines that access the multiplication routines also execute more rapidly. For instance, the logarithm routine takes approximately 34.8 ms to complete a 9-digit logarithm; with the changes, it takes only 21.9 ms. This is also an increase in speed of 37%.

Similar mistakes were found in a section of the normalization routine (starting at hexadecimal 1854) accessed by the addition and subtraction routines (see listing 2). This sequence is repeated two more times. It can all be replaced by the instruction ROR \$02,X. Another interesting section of the routine occurs at hexadecimal 1879 (see listing 3). This can be replaced by the instruction ROR A, which takes only 2 μ s to execute. The actual increase in speed for the addition and subtraction routines with the changes installed was too difficult to measure since the routines are fairly rapid compared to the BASIC loops and other program segments used to test

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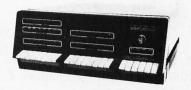


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Listing 3: Section from the normalization routine used by the addition and subtraction routines in Ohio Scientific's disk BASIC. This section can be replaced by the instruction ROR A.

LOC	CODE	MNEMONIC	TIME (uS)
1879	08	PHP	3
187A	4A	LSR A	2
187B	28	PLP	4
187C	90 02	BCC \$1880	3
187E	09 80	ORA #\$80	2
1880	C8	INY	

them. I did notice that BASIC testing loops often executed approximately 10% faster with the changes. I attribute this to the faster addition routine.

I suspected that the division routines would also contain errors, but discovered that the ROL instruction was used wherever it was needed. (The ROR instruction isn't necessary in division.)

I immediately contacted Ohio Scientific and Microsoft to inform them of the problem. Both replied with an explanation that restored my faith in big-name software companies. Apparently, earlier versions of the 6502 microprocessor did not include an ROR instruction, but as customer demand grew, MOS Technology incorporated an ROR instruction in later versions of the 6502. Unfortunately, some of the earlier Ohio Scientific computers had already been sold with the old microprocessor. Therefore, Microsoft wrote its BASIC without any ROR

instructions to make the software compatible with the earlier versions of the computer. Listings 1, 2, and 3 are actually macro expansions of the ROR instruction. [Macros are one-line pseudoinstructions placed in an assembly-language source listing. When processed, they are replaced by a (predefined) set of assembly-language instructions and assembled into machine language....GW] Microsoft assured me that this was done only for the KIM and Ohio Scientific computers. All other versions of 6502 BASIC were written using the ROR instruction.

For those who have later versions of Ohio Scientific computers and don't have BASIC permanently stored in read-only memory, there is a way to change Ohio Scientific's disk BASIC to use the ROR instruction. If you are using the OS-65D disk operating system, the program in listing 4 will permanently change your BASIC for 8-inch disks. It simply loads a part of the BASIC interpreter into memory, POKEs in the required changes, and stores the changed code back on disk. For 5-inch disks, statement 80 should be changed to read:

80 DISK!"CA 4200=03,1"

and statement 150 should be:

150 DISK!"SA 03,1=4200/8"

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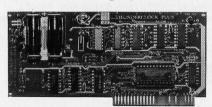
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System Notes

I have not been able to test these changes for the 5-inch systems, and I suggest that you exercise caution in using them. For systems that use the OS-65U operating system, the program in listing 5 should be used to change your BASIC.

Ohio Scientific often boasts of supporting the fastest BASIC of any of the popular personal computers, and it can give you a great sense of satisfaction to make it run even faster. I have run BASIC with these changes for four months and have noticed that all of my programs run faster than before, especially those loaded with mathematical equations. If you decide to incorporate these changes into your system, I suggest that you first try them on an old copy of your operating system to ensure that the changes work on your computer.

Listing 4: Program used with the OS-65D operating system and 8-inch disks. Beginning at hexadecimal location 4800, the program loads a portion of BASIC into memory, then POKEs the appropriate ROR instructions into the mathematical routines and stores the revised BASIC back on the disk.

```
10 REM DISK BASIC CORRECTION ROUTINE. OS-65D, 8" DISKS
20 DATA 118,2,118,3,118,4,104,106,200,208,232,24,96
30 DATA 102,115,102,116,102,117,102,118,102,189,152
40 DATA 74,208,214,96
50 REM SET UP TOP OF MEMORY TO $47FF
60 POKE 132,255 : POKE 133,71 : POKE 128,255 : POKE 129,71
70 REM CALL IN A PORTION OF BASIC TO $4800
80 DISK!"CA 4800=04,1"
90 A1=18516 : REM 18516 = $4854
100 A2=18758 : REM 18758 = $4946
110 REM POKE IN THE CORRECTED CODE
120 FOR I=0 TO 12 : READ D : POKE A1+I,D : NEXT I
130 FOR I=0 TO 14 : READ D : POKE A2+I,D : NEXT I
140 REM SAVE THE CORRECTED BASIC BACK ON DISK
150 DISK!"SA 04,1=4800/B"
160 END
```

Listing 5: Program used with the OS-65U operating system. This program does the same thing as listing 4, but begins at hexadecimal location 7800.

```
10 REM DISK BASIC CORRECTION ROUTINE. OS-65U
20 DATA 0,36,0,0,0,2,0,120
30 DATA 118,2,118,3,118,4,104,106,200,208,232,24,96
40 DATA 102,115,102,116,102,117,102,118,102,189,152
50 DATA 74,208,214,96
60 REM SET UP USR FUNCTION AND PUT AND GET ROUTINES
70 POKE 8778,192 : POKE 8779,36
80 POKE 9432,243 : POKE 9433,40
90 POKE 9435,232 : POKE 9436,40
100 REM DISK ADDRESS = $1800 + $0C00, NUMBER OF BYTES = $0200
110 REM RAM ADDRESS = $7800
120 CB=9889 : FOR I=1 TO 8 : READ D : POKE CB+I,D : NEXT I
130 REM CALL IN A PORTION OF BASIC TO $7800
140 ER=USR(0)
160 Al=30804 : REM 30804 = $7854
170 A2=31046 : REM 31046 = $7946
180 REM POKE IN THE CORRECTED CODE
190 FOR I=0 TO 12 : READ D : POKE A1+I,D : NEXT I
200 FOR I=0 TO 14 : READ D : POKE A1+I,D : NEXT I
210 REM SAVE THE CORRECTED BASIC BACK ON DISK
220 ER=USR(1):CLOSE
230 END
```