Workstation puts power on desks

THE Cambridge Workstation is the first product from Acorn since the Olivetti rescue. The full version boasts a 32016 chip running at 8MHz with 4Mb of memory, Winchester hard disc, floppy drive and four bundled languages – Fortran 77, C, ISO Pascal and Lisp –BBC Basic and an assembler.
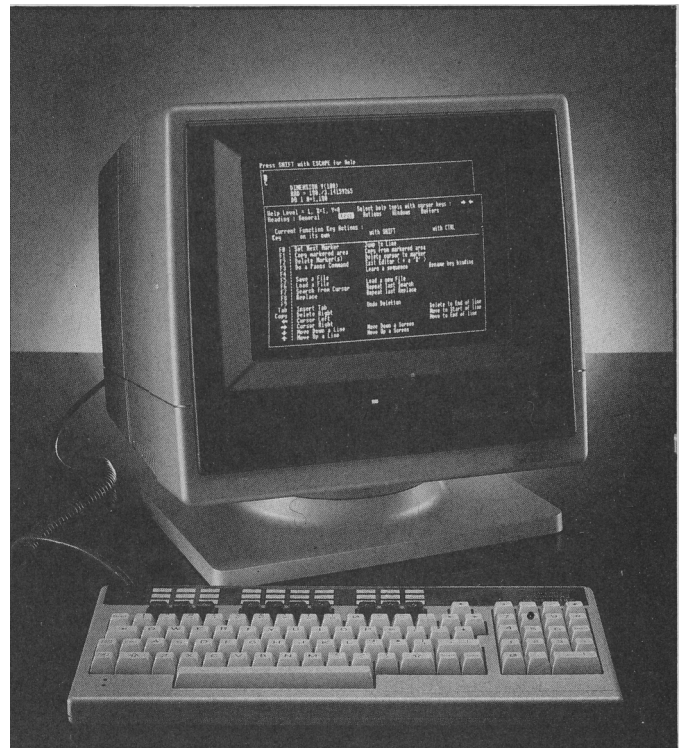
Its most astounding feature is the computing power it puts on a desk, giving the ability to run mainframe software and languages for £8000.

Acorn is negotiating with software companies and university groups to convert packages to run on the Workstation. These include the statistical package SPSS,the NAG library from Cambridge University, and Spice for circuit simulation.

The machine is being squarely targeted at the university sector and into industry. It comes in the ABC livery and is the only one of the business computer range to see daylight.

Benchmark timings confirm Acorn's claims for the product. The 32016 chip with its 32-bit architecture was designed as a mainframe on silicon. It runs software in similar times to a VAX minicomputer, and some even faster. Acorn also claims it is easy to transfer software from a mainframe, quoting just a day for one 15,000-line Fortran program.

Marketing manager Gwyn

Cambridge Workstation offers mainframe power on a desk

Matthews sees it selling purely on the ability to run software such as Spice. Acorn has been using the package and developed its own software to accompany it. Matthews hoped this would be marketed later in the year. The machine comes with built-in Econet

Acorn workstation

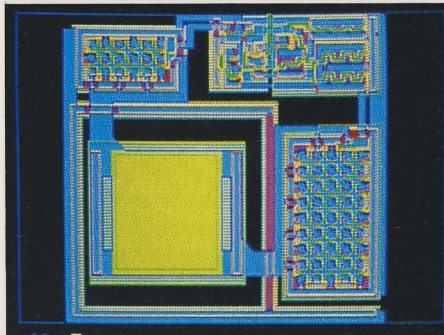interface and a gateway to British Telecom's fast X25 data network is near completion.

Although Acorn signed an agreement with software house Logica to port Xenix (Unix operating system version for micros) onto the 32016, it is not supported on the Workstation. This is believed to be because the memory management unit, a part of National Semiconductor's 32016 chip set which is vital for Xenix, is not ready. However, a socket for this is left on the processor board.

Acorn has written its own

This screen shot shows design software for silicon chips taken from a package written by Acorn for the 32016-based micros. The company has been using the programs within its VLSI tools group to develop custom chips. The software may be released for sale

operating system called Panos for the machine.

The standard Workstation comes with 1Mb of RAM for £5845. This can be upgraded to 4Mb at £1000 per Mb. A major

debate in the software industry will be pricing strategies for mainframe packages on the Workstation which traditionally cost several times as much as the micro itself.