

TWO MORE ELECTRONIC SPELLERS

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It was with a great deal of interest that I read the article in the May 1988 issue of *Word Ways* entitled "The Electronic Speller" by Faith Eckler. Soon after that I noticed the appearance of a device known as the Spelling Ace on top of a showcase in the Sight and Sound (Electronics) department at the store at which I am employed. After toying with it a number of times, my first notion was that "The Electronic Speller" described this gadget. Alas, it didn't, but I enjoyed her article anyway.

The Spelling Ace is about the size and weight of a hand-held calculator. It has a 16-character LCD display and an 80,000 word lexicon. Its primary function is to check the spelling of words entered on its typewriter keyboard. It will recognize certain words even if they are grossly misspelled. For instance, if the letter series P-R-E-K-O-S-H-U-S is entered, it will give you back PRECO-CIOUS.

Another feature it contains is the ability to give you all the words of a given length when a certain pattern of letters is entered. For instance, if you want a list of all the three-letter words beginning with the letter A, you enter A??, and it gives you such a list, one word at a time. If you want a list of all the four-letter words ending in A, you enter ???A. Some of its "words" are actually abbreviations. The device will also let you know if a word should be hyphenated. For instance, if you enter TOPNOTCH, it will give you back TOP-NOTCH.

The Spelling Ace will also check for words that sound the same as a given word but are spelled differently. Say you want to check the spelling of PRINCIPAL but instead you enter PRINCIPLE. The computer will let you know that the entered word is spelled correctly, but if you depress ? it will give you a list of similar words including PRINCIPAL.

The Spelling Ace also features an LCD clock showing how fast the unit is working. Its microprocessor contains 128K bytes of ROM (read only memory) and is powered by four AAA batteries. It is available at Bradlees Department Stores and sells for \$59.99. The Spelling Ace is manufactured by Franklin Computer, Route 73 and Haddonfield Road, Pennsauken NJ 08110 (telephone 609-488-0600).

I was very close to purchasing the unit just described when I received a catalog through the mail which showed me a similar product with greater capabilities. This product is the Wordfinder, manufactured by Selectronics. Its capacity is 100,000 words, plus an additional 220,000 synonyms. It is the size of a wallet and

can fit in a shirt pocket. It even folds like a wallet. One half is the display and the other half is the keyboard. Letters are arranged alphabetically, as opposed to the typewriter layout of the Spelling Ace.

Its lexicon contains all letters of the alphabet except J and X as entries, and all Greek letters except nu, tau, and chi. It allows only solid (unhyphenated) words or words containing apostrophes as entries. It does not allow for the entry of words containing hyphens or imbedded blanks, although the unit has hyphenated words and multi-word terms and phrases stored in its memory for use with its synonym function. It stores a large number of proper names, including names of well-known people like REAGAN and GORBACHEV, products like VASELINE, TYLENOL, KLEENEX, MARLBORO, and TROPICANA, corporations like IBM, BOEING, XEROX, EXXON, and CITIBANK, news networks like NBC, CBS, and PBS (but not ABC or BBC), the Soviet news agency TASS and newspaper PRAVDA, and a large array of geographical names including states, major cities, and major countries. Other "words" it tells you should be capitalized include DNA, PHD, COBOL, TUPPERWARE, and WATERGATE.

Faith Eckler's article mentioned words not in her electronic speller. The words FORMICA, NEWCOMER, ACETONE, NEGRO, PERMUTE, ACTUARY, and MINUET are all included in Wordfinder.

Except for PHD, I was not able to find any vowelless words; CWM, NTH, SHH, TCH, and TVS are not included. (Entering TEEVEE yields TEEPEE.) Six of the first seven words from the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary are not included; only AARDVARK is in. Many words from the Random House American Vest Pocket Dictionary (1967 edition) are not included: ABAFT, ABATTOIR, ABBESS, ACACIA, ADLIB. Three-letter words in the Vest Pocket Dictionary that are not in the Wordfinder include ADZ, AUK, BOO, BUR, CAW, COO, EMU, ERE, and GAR. Conversely, the following three-letter words in the Wordfinder are not in the Vest Pocket Dictionary: ALA, AMP, BAA, CAY, DUO, ETA, FAX, FEY, GAL, and GYM.

As the Wordfinder has a 20-letter display, I started looking for long words that are included. Finding them is time-consuming, but I managed to locate AMBIKDEXTROUSNESS, CIRCUMNAVIGATING, INTERCONTINENTAL (all length 16), INTERDEPARTMENTAL, PSEUDOPREGNANCIES, DISINTERESTEDNESS (all length 17), ANTIVIVISECTIONIST (18), and two words of maximum length, ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAM and INSTITUTIONALIZATION.

If you wish to know all the ten-letter words beginning SUPER- the Spelling Ace will display them. However, such a listing is not possible with the Wordfinder because the maximum number of unknown letters it can handle is three. The owner's manual refers to this as the wildcard function. As an example, keying in T***T yields the seventeen words TACIT, TAINT, TAROT, TAUNT, TEMPT, TENET, THEFT, TIGHT, TOAST, TRACT, TRAIT, TREAT, TROUT, TRUST, TRYST, TWEET, and TWIST.

The greatest ability of the Wordfinder is its capacity to provide

an abundance of synonyms for a single word. Its thesaurus is constructed in such a way that it supplies one or more main concept words followed by a sequence of words of similar meaning. I personally find it amazing. Entering the word AMAZING and pressing the synonym key results in FABULOUS, EXAGGERATED, and QUESTIONABLE. In turn, FABULOUS yields REMARKABLE, ASTOUNDING, BIZARRE, and STRANGE; EXAGGERATED yields INCREDIBLE, EXTRAORDINARY, FANTASTIC, INCONCEIVABLE and UNBELIEVABLE; QUESTIONABLE yields EXTRAORDINARY, EXCEPTIONAL, BRILLIANT, NOTEWORTHY, PHENOMENAL, RARE, REMARKABLE, SIGNIFICANT, SINGULAR, STUNNING, SUPER, UNCOMMON, UNCUSTOMARY, UNIQUE, and UNUSUAL. If an entered word has no synonyms, the unit will display NONE FOUND.

One of the most fascinating features of Wordfinder is its Jumble key. It is so named because of the popularity of the syndicated word game with the same name. It will rearrange any group of two to six letters and display whatever words it finds. For instance, if you give it the word REACT and press Jumble, it will give you RECTA, CRATE, TRACE, CARET, and CATER. Keying in BREAD produces BARED, BEARD, DEBRA, and DEBAR. From PARSE it arrives at PARES, PEARS, REAPS, RAPES, SPARE, and SPEAR. Among six-letter words, DRAPES generated PARSED, SPADER, SPARED, SPREAD, PADRES, and RASPED. PASTEL produces PETALS, PLATES, PLEATS, STAPLE, and PALEST.

One other thing in common with both of these electronic spellers is that there is a built-in shutoff feature. The Wordfinder shuts itself off in two minutes if nothing is keyed in.

Wordfinder is produced by SelecTronics Inc., 701 Decatur Avenue North, Building 204, Minneapolis MN 55427 (telephone 612-545-6823). Like the Spelling Ace, it is powered by 4 AAA batteries, which are included. Its spelling dictionary/thesaurus is by Xerox Corporation and Microlytics, Inc. I mail-ordered mine from a catalog from DAK Industries Incorporated, 8200 Remmet Avenue, Canoga Park CA 91304 (telephone 1-800-423-2866). The cost is \$99.90 plus \$4 for postage and handling.

The Wordfinder contains 4.5 megabytes of information, which is more than 35 times the 128,000 bytes contained in the Spelling Ace. The DAK catalog touts that 4.5 megabytes is equivalent to about 12½ 5-inch floppy disks on an IBM PC. The back of the box containing the Wordfinder has a statement volunteered by William F. Buckley, Jr. for which he was not compensated: "It's a bloody miracle. Wordfinder has changed my life! I never used to use a thesaurus."