

# 1541 in first gear

In search of speedier disk operation, *Jeremy Hall* tries out two **QUICK-DISK** turbo cartridge systems, one from the States and one home grown

OWNERS of the 1541 disk drive breathe a sigh of relief when devices to speed up its operation first began to appear. No longer would a large program take 2 minutes to load. The trouble was that usually needed modification to either the 1541 or 84 for Turbo, to achieve the results, invalidating any warranty.

The two new devices reviewed here are 'plug in and go' cartridges, which involve no internal modification to either the drive or computer.

## Epps Fastload

The Epps Fastload cartridge is from American software house Epps, and has only recently become available in this country. It only LOADS programs at high speed, so SAVING is still a slow chore. The speed of loading is greatly improved (up to five times). The cartridge won't load every type of protected disk but works with a lot of them. If it won't load a program there's no need to worry it, simply use the built in double facility.

A lot more than speed increases are offered by this cartridge. To load and run the first program on the disk simply hold down the CMD key and hit RUN/STOP. To load the disk directory type "D" and press RETURN. This loads the directory to the screen only, so you don't lose the program you have in memory. The "H" command can be used to send any command to the drive, or on its own tells you the drive's status. So, for instance, to format a disk you would enter "FORMAT:NAME,HD". You can use all the usual LOAD/SAVE commands, but a few short cuts are provided:

```
*NAME system LOAD*NAME*  
*NAME replaces LOAD*NAME*  
*NAME replaces SAVE*NAME*  
*
```

Also provided in the cartridge are a disk and file copy facility, accessed via a series of menus. The disk-copy is not particularly fast, and requires the destination-disk to be formatted before copying commences. The file-copy will only copy one file at a time, and you have to enter the filenames manually. A machine code monitor is included and entered by typing "M" and pressing RETURN. This is quite a useful addition, although the syntax of some of the commands is a bit odd if you're used to standard monitors. Finally there's a track offset facility which allows you to load any particular sector of a disk, edit it on screen, and then write it back.

The documentation consists of a single sheet of glossy paper folded in half with all the available commands explained briefly but comprehensively.

## Quickdisk+

Quickdisk+ is a British product at less than half the cost of the Epps product. Its LOADING speed is approximately the same, but it also offers an improvement when SAVING speed is appreciably the same, but it also offers an improvement when SAVING rate comparison table 6. First LOADING/SAVING is indicated by a striped screen of 80c similar

to some tape turbos. The cartridge can be disabled by typing "80C", and a handy help facility accessed with "MH", which prints a summary of all the commands available. Unlike the EPPX, this cartridge can be used with device number 8 or 9, so people with two drives are covered too.

Quickdisk+ has the same DRS commands as EPPX (1/2/3 and 6), with the addition of a useful error.

NAME replaces LOAD\*NAME\*  
RUNNING a new disk is normally a painfully slow process, but with QUICKDISK in place it takes just 20 seconds (not 10 seconds as claimed in the instructions!) — approximately 1 time faster than normal (see comparison table 2).



The fast file copy is extremely useful and very well implemented. Simply type "MC", insert the source disk (disk from which you wish to copy files), press RETURN and each filename on the directory is printed on the screen one at a time with a YES/NO prompt next to it. To copy the file press "Y", to ignore a press "N". When the last file on the directory is reached the selected files are read in at high speed. The user is then prompted to insert the

destination disk and to set out all the files are copied.

The disk Backup is also quite good and easy to use, taking just over 4 minutes to copy a whole disk (compressed disks only!).

The Cronetics printer software which is built in will drive most printers connected to the user port. This facility did not work on the first review cartridge I saw used, however. The Micro Centre quickly sent me a replacement which worked fine. Type "MP" and the interface will be switched on, giving a summary of all the options on the screen. OFFERING the printer to device 4 selects COM characters, device 5 selects normal characters and a secondary address of 7 gives lower case. The interface can be switched off by typing "0E".

Finally, a reset switch is built into the cartridge which will allow you to break out of any program without the need to power off and on, and does not destroy the contents of main memory.

The documentation which I received was of similar standard to the EPPX cartridge, and quite adequate.

## Conclusions

If you want to use either device with a particular program, check that the program will load with the cartridge before you buy it. If you need a machine code monitor and track editor built into your turbo cartridge then EPPX FASTLOAD is the one to go for. Otherwise QUICKDISC+ is superior in virtually every other way. Add to this the fact that it costs less than half the price of the EPPX, and it becomes a must for every 1541 owner. ■

COMPARISON TABLE 1 — SPEED

	Normal	EPPX	Quickdisk+
Load 100 000 Bg File	65 secs	10 secs	10 secs
Save 100 000 Bg File	70 secs	70 secs	38 secs
Copy 100 000 Bg File	145 secs	80 secs	50 secs
Format New Disk	80 mins	80 mins	70 mins
Copy Disk	15 mins+	8 mins+	4 mins

COMPARISON TABLE 2 — FACILITIES

	EPPX	Quickdisk+
Fast Load	YES	YES
Fast Save	NO	YES
Fast Format	NO	YES
Double Facility	YES	YES
DRS Commands	YES	YES
Fast File Copy	AVERAGE	VERY GOOD
Fast Disk Copy	AVERAGE	GOOD
Track Editor	YES	NO
Machine Code Monitor	YES	NO
Help Facility	NO	YES
Device 8 or 9	NO	YES
Combinos Software	NO	YES
Reset Switch	NO	YES

PRODUCT: Epps Fastload Cartridge.  
SUPPLIER: The 84 Software Centre, 1 Princeton St, London WC2R 4EL, Tel: 01-429 8954.

PRODUCT: Quickdisk+.  
SUPPLIER: Micro Centre, Bridge St, Buxton, Derbyshire.  
Tel: 0330 49441.