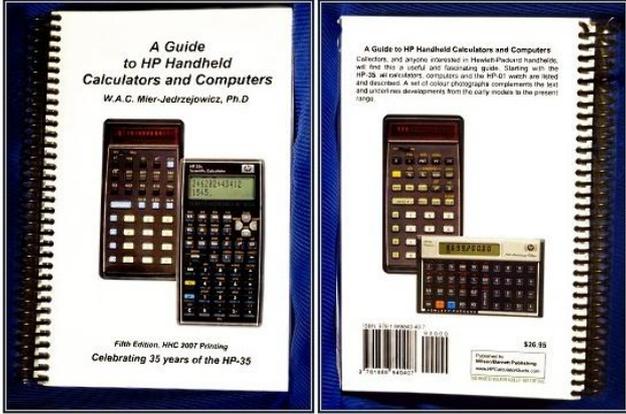


Book Review – A Guide to HP Handheld Calculators and Computers

© 2019 Valentín Albillo

1. Introduction

This is my review of the book “*A Guide to HP Handheld Calculators and Computers*”, *Fifth Edition*, by W. A. C. Mier-Jedrzejowicz (kindly dedicated to me by the author himself), a book mainly addressed to all those people interested in *Hewlett-Packard*’s vintage handheld calculators and (mainly small) computers, either for collecting purposes, to know their history and characteristics or both. First of all, the essential data for the book:

Element	Value
Title	A GUIDE TO HP HANDHELD CALCULATORS AND COMPUTERS Fifth Edition – September 2007
Author	Mier-Jedrzejowicz, Wlodzimierz Anthony Christopher
Publisher	Wilson/Barnett Publishing
Copyright	Copyright © 1995-2007 by W.A.C. Mier-Jedrzejowicz
Subjects	Hewlett-Packard – Calculators Computers
Applies to	HP vintage Calculators and Computers
Pages	224 (12 full color pages, spiral-bound)
ISBN	978-1-888840-40-7
Covers	

The book conveniently opens flat, making it very comfortable to read and use as a reference, and begins directly with a listing of its contents, which consist of three big chapters, subdivided into more than 30 sections (which have lots of subsections each) with many greyscale pictures of as many models, two sizable *Appendices*, 12 *HP Color Photo Pages* featuring color pictures of nearly 50 models and assorted accessories, plus additional individual sections such as *Introduction*, *Acknowledgements*, *Glossary*, *About the Author*, etc.

Plenty of data is given about every model (grouped by family), including (pre)announcement, release and discontinuation dates with their respective prices, distinguishing characteristics, relation to other models, a bit of history, relevant trivia, assorted comments, discussion of add-ons and peripherals where appropriate and, most important to collectors, an assessment of their rarity and fair price (*circa 2007*) as collectibles. Also, relevant events or technical subjects related to the models are featured, interspersed with the rest of the information.

2. Contents

The book features the following *Sections* and *subsections* (I've *highlighted* the models discussed in each):

Introduction

Acknowledgements

Contents

Chapter 1: About Collecting

A Guide for Collectors – and for Historians
Collectors and Historians
What We Collect – Terminology
Serial Numbers Explained
Where to Find Them – and Where to See Them
Prices (17 subsections)
Shop Prices
Model Numbers and Code Names
What to Collect
Storage and Protection

Chapter 2: Family by Family

History (2 subsections)
HP-35 Scientific Pocket Calculator (4 subsections)
The Classic Family (HP-45, HP-46, HP-55, HP-65, HP-67, HP-70, HP-80, HP-81 and others)
The Woodstock Series (HP-21, HP-22, HP-25/25C, HP-27, HP-29C)
The Top Cat Series (HP-91, HP-92, HP-97/97S)
Sting – the First Series 10 (HP-10, HP-19C)
Cricket (HP-01)
Spice/Spike (HP-31E, HP-32E, HP-33E/C, HP-34C, HP-37C, HP-38E/C)
HP-41 and HP-IL (HP-41C/CV/CX, HP-41 OPT 001, HP-IL and accessories)
Voyager (HP-10C, HP-11C, HP-12C, HP-15C, HP-16C)
Handheld Computers (HP-71B, HP-75C/D, HP-94D/E/F)
Clamshells (HP-18C, HP-19B/BII, HP-28C/S)
The Pioneers (HP-10B, HP-14B, HP-17B/BII, HP-20S, HP-21S, HP-22S, HP-27S, HP-32S/SII, HP-42S)
Charlemagne's Family – the Stretch Pioneers (HP38G, HP48S/SX/G/GX)
Palmtops (HP95LX/LX1MB, HP100LX, HP200LX, HP1000CX)
The HP OmniGo family (HP OmniGo 100/120 Organizer Plus and others)
Handheld PCs – HP's Windows CE Family (HP300LX Palmtop PC and others)
HP Jornada Hand PCs (HP Jornada 820 and others)
HP Jornada Palm PCs (HP Jornada 420 Palm Computer and others)
ACO Calculators (HP6S, HP10BII, HP12C redesign, HP30S, HP39G, HP40G, HP48G+, HP49G and others)
iPAQ handheld computers (1 subsection)
A New Calculator Team (19 subsections)

Chapter 3: Additional Information

Room for more
Related Products (HP9100, HP9835/9845 and others, HP83/F, HP-85/B/F, HP-86/B, HP-87/XM, the Integral, HP-110 and Portable Plus, HP-125, HP-150, portable Vectra, HP Omnibook Computers, HP-95C, etc.)
Accessories and Consumables (5 subsections)
Sources for further information (1 subsection)

The HP Database
Some final thoughts

HP Colour Photo Pages (5 subsections)

Appendix A

Calculator Cleaning, Repairing and Restoration

Appendix B

New Ideas, New Models (no contents in this Fifth Edition, kept just for consistency purposes)

Appendix C

HP iPAQ handheld computers (36 subsections)

Chapter 1 is all about collecting, 22 pages full of information and advice for collectors whether for fun or for profit, dealing with every aspect of it such as *what* to collect and *how* to best build your collection, prices, maintenance, storage and protection, and last but not least, trading. You get to know how to get access to individual models out there as well as full collections. Technical matters are also described such as how to decode serial numbers, information on keyboards and the various types of displays, what accessories are most desirable (including manuals) and even estimations on the number of units made, sold, and still available.

Chapter 2 begins with a brief but interesting bit of history on how HP calculators and RPN first came to be, but it mainly deals with “Families” of calculators, which are duly named and described, and lots of information on each model is given, including good-quality greyscale pictures for many of them, each model having a whole subsection dedicated to it for adequate coverage. You’ll get to know about the *Woodstock Series* (6 models), the *Spice/Spike Series* (8 models), the legendary *Voyager Series* (5 models), etc.

Interspersed within the individual model subsections there are many others of mostly technical nature that introduce and discuss interesting related subjects, such as *STO* and *RCL* arithmetic, card readers, flags, *Continuous Memory*, localization, accuracy, *Solve* and *Integrate*, catalogs, menus, *RAM/ROM* modules, *HP-IL*, *Forth*, *RPL*, etc. These side sections contribute enormously to help to know, understand and get to appreciate the various peculiarities of the diverse families and models, and constitute a very enjoyable and enlightening read for the technically-minded fan, which probably describes many members of this **Guide**’s intended audience.

For every HP calc fan this is probably the most interesting part of the book and the one which people will consult more frequently to get to know the characteristics of this or that recommended model that is under consideration for their collections, or even just to know a little more about it and perhaps expand their interests. A typical case would be for a person with an engineering background whose collection has been restricted so far to scientific models, but has just seen an HP-12C in the hands of a fellow business consultant, likes its shape, aesthetics and ergonomics, and is interested to know more about its advanced characteristics and perhaps get one.

Chapter 3 is much more specialized and as its title says, it provides additional information about mostly small and not-so-small vintage HP computing devices, which many HP calc fans have probably never used or get to know in any detail, and so interest in them will be seriously lacking as compared to calculators proper. Anyway, you’ll get here information about some relatively popular early computers such as the *HP Series 80* models (HP-85, HP-86, HP-87XM and others, I professionally used most of them), the older but groundbreaking at their time HP9835 and HP9845, the underselling (and mostly a big flop) *INTEGRAL*, and the produced but never released HP-95C, as well as lots of other somewhat interesting miscellaneous models and assorted trivia.

Finally, the *Chapter* ends with a section on accessories and consumables, other sources of information (users’ clubs, Internet sites, books, HP publications [*HP Journal*, *HP Key Notes*, etc.], various *Guides*, etc.), the *HP Database* and some final thoughts. One very useful subsection lists all *HP Journal* calculator-related articles (courtesy of Rick Furr), giving for each the *Date*, *Volume* and *Issue number*, and the calc model or accessory the article is all about, no less than 27 articles in all. Now that all of them are freely available on the Internet and can be downloaded directly from HP this list becomes a treasure map of top-quality information.

Additional sections include *Glossary*, *Handhelds in order of Release Date*, *Changes form previous Editions*, *Future Editions* and a comprehensive *Index*:

The *Glossary* might come handy as it provides a series of explanations and definitions for some 35 terms which at times are pretty obvious (“*HP – Hewlett-Packard Company*”), at times puzzling (“*Cosmic Rays*”), at times “funny” (read “*Feature*”) and at times even redundant (both “*Chip*” and “*CHIP*”) and occasionally somewhat useful (“*Hybrid*”, “*Volatile Memory*”).

The *Handhelds in order of Release Date* section is surely more useful, as it provides dates of release and discontinuation (some unknown, some still in production at the time) for every model under the sun except HP *iPAQ* models released after 2003.

The *Changes form previous Editions* section is just that, 6 pages listing about 120 changes and corrections.

The *Index* is a very comprehensive affair 11-page long, listing dozens of subjects together with every page number where they appear, from *Abacus* at page 37 to *Zenwand* at page 90. Yours truly does appear listed as *Albillo, Valentin* at page 5, which is quite appropriate !

The final short closing sections of the book include the following: *List of colour photographs*, *Want to know more ?*, *Models, page numbers and prices in this Guide*, *About the Author* and *Other books by the same Author* :

List of colour photographs lists every color picture (physically located in the middle part of the book), providing a legend for each, some of them quite extensive (*HP-41 family* and *Jornada Palm computers* for instance). It does likewise for the models shown in the front and back covers as well.

Models, page numbers and prices in this Guide list all models by name in alphabetical order and gives for each the page number where they are dealt with and, most importantly, their market price as collectibles, with the following important, fairly honest and to-the-point *caveat*:

“These prices are our best educated guesses at current [VA Note: September 2007] values of these calculators in very good physical and working condition. We make no guarantee though, and just want to give our readers something to start with.”

The information is listed in this neat tabular format:

Model	\$ Price	Page	Model	\$ Price	Page
...
HP-14B Anniv	70	(103)	HP-32S	40	102
HP-15C	200	83	HP-32S Anniv	100	(102)
HP-16C	200	83	HP32SII	150	106
...

With passing time these prices will surely become obsolete but their relative values will probably hold. Ten additional *notes* provide welcome and useful additional clarifications to the tabulated data.

About the Author and *Other books by the same Author* provide a very brief note about the author and his involvement with HP calculators and related activities, and the latter lists four additional books authored by him.

Appendix A – Calculator Cleaning, Repair and Restoration

This *Appendix* (authored by Peter O. Johnson, not Mr. Mier-Jedrzejewicz) discusses in detail the important subject of how to keep your valuable calculator collection in peak shape by removing all traces of dust, dirt, grim and corrosion both inside and outside, fixing hardware problems such as nonfunctioning keys or bad displays, repairing/replacing individual parts and restoring calculators to be as close to their original condition as possible.

To that effect it gives a healthy number of hints and tips on how to best accomplish those tasks, with lots of precisely described *recipes* including what materials to use and how to use them effectively, doing the best to avoid worsening the situation. All main parts are considered: keyboard, display, internals, with specific procedures for each. Also, a practical extreme example taken from real life is given: a classic HP-65 in some pretty bad state which the author is intent to try and restore.

All in all, 150 lines of text (3.5 pages) full of excellent advice and instructions which can help make your collection that much better or even bring to life a calculator considered long since dead.

Appendix C – HP iPAQ handheld computers

This *Appendix* is wholly dedicated to that particular class of computing devices. The author obviously didn't hold much enthusiasm for them and it shows, in spades. He begins with what is essentially a long rant, then somewhat unwillingly discusses the various models (*iPAQ Blackberry models*, *Compaq Tablet Computers* and *HP iPODs*, *iPAQ 3900 Pocket PC Series* and a myriad of other iPAQ series, more than **30** in fact!), and intersperses some subsections with additional comments in a mood midway between sarcasm and deception (“*You can not be Series*”, “*So many series!*”, “*Where is the HP calculator ?*”).

Nice as a reference, probably, but more than 8 pages of a somewhat sad read. It's clear that the author longs for the old golden times of HP calculators, both the machines proper and the teams that brought them to life.

3. Conclusion

I got my first HP calculator back in 1975 (a wonderful *HP-25*, mind you), loved it, became a devoted user and bought ever more powerful HP models after it (*HP-67*, *HP-41*, *HP-71B*, ...) to help me in college, then became a pro in the early 80's and in the 90's I started collecting them. Soon I discovered this amazing *Guide* and eventually got several editions of it. Every new edition provided many hours of most pleasurable reading and invaluable help to get my collection started and to direct me to interesting models to try and get, which I did.

This said, I honestly do consider this *Guide* to be the very best of its kind. I've read and re-read the various editions many, many times and I still keep on finding new interesting facts and tips every time. The style is clear, to the point, no words wasted, no filler sections. All the diverse families and their history are defined and discussed. Every model is dealt with in a most detailed, comprehensive way and pics are given for many of them either greyscale or in the central color plates. Side technical subjects are also discussed at adequate length.

On the collector's side, all relevant topics are discussed, including price, availability, cleaning, repair, restoration, ... in fact all you may need as an active or passive collector to increase and enhance your collection or to keep it in the best shape possible and get to know the characteristics and alleged value of your jewels.

The *Guide's* format is a generous *DIN A5* spiral-bound 224 pages (some 40 new from the previous edition) at approximately 50 lines x 78 char. (almost 4k characters per page), resulting in a true treasure trove of valuable, useful and well-organized information, clearly exposed in a friendly but accurate style, written by a committed fan for fans of all kinds, which is a pleasure to read and a godsend to HP vintage calcs lovers and collectors.

Finally, let me state just one *caveat*: the *Guide* is *laser-printed* using toner, not ink. This means that if you store it horizontally with books or weight over it, or vertically but somewhat tightly pressed between other books or objects, you risk adjacent pages to *stick together*, their toner acting as “glue”, and when you later separate them (with care not to tear them) the toner off each page will leave an “*afterimage*” mark on the other, which might compromise readability. The moral is, place the *Guide* avoiding undue *pressure* on its pages and also avoid letting it in a *hot and/or humid place* lest the toner will stick and glue adjacent pages together.

Copyrights

Copyright for this paper and its contents is retained by the author. Permission to use it for non-profit purposes is granted as long as the contents aren't modified in any way and the copyright is acknowledged.