



On the Horizon

By William F. Zachmann

Upcoming Announcement of IBM's Model 35 Is a Step in the Wrong Direction

The numerous reports of an upcoming announcement of a new Intel 286-based PS/2 Model 35 from IBM with ISA (industry-standard architecture) AT-style expansion slots have at least provided a break in the summer doldrums. So has IBM's extraordinary campaign to persuade members of the press that such a machine would not constitute any retreat from IBM's proprietary Micro Channel Architecture (MCA).

It has always been IBM's firm policy not to comment on unannounced products. Nevertheless, IBM's James Monahan quite obviously spent a lot of time talking to the press on the topic of the new system. *InfoWorld*, *Computerworld*, and *PC Week* all carried front-page stories in their August 22 issues quoting him.

Mr. Monahan, identified in all three stories as an "IBM spokesman" rather than by job title, certainly was doing his darndest to convince the major trade weeklies that a 286-based PS/2 with ISA slots was really one small step ahead for the PS/2 rather than a return to the AT. That means, plain and simple, that somebody at IBM was getting real worried the Model 35 would be interpreted as a retreat from the Micro Channel Architecture.

Mr. Monahan didn't just happen to be chatting with reporters from all three major weeklies around the same time. Somebody at IBM obviously decided

and is hedging its bets by introducing an AT-bus system. IBM would not introduce a 286 with AT slots at this point if it wasn't worried about lukewarm acceptance for the MCA!

The problem for Big Blue, of course, is that by demonstrating its own lack of confidence in the MCA, IBM will only encourage the growing majority of users who already realize that the MCA brings them little but higher prices and fewer choices.

The motivation for such a product is

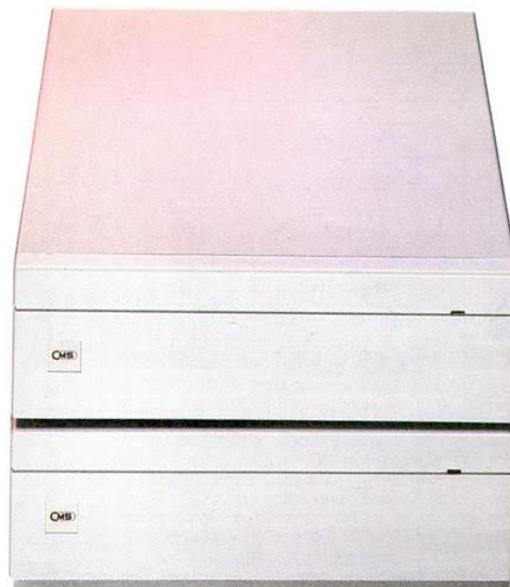
obviously to try to regain some of the sales that were lost to compatible vendors as a result of IBM's strategic error in killing off the AT after the PS/2 was introduced, despite continued user demand. IBM obviously wasn't interested in providing what its customers wanted and lost sales as a result.

Backpedaling by IBM at this point, however, will only make matters worse. The Byzantine complexity introduced into the PS/2 line by the Model 50 Z and Model 70, with their bizarre overlaps

with the older models, will get even worse. The Micro Channel Architecture strategy, already in trouble, will be in even bigger trouble.

Given all that, don't be too surprised if the recently much discussed Model 35 is given a quiet, private burial without ever seeing the light of day. The world needs another 10-MHz 286 from IBM like a fish needs a bicycle. And IBM certainly does not need to make a public retreat from the Micro Channel Architecture — unless IBM plans to run back all the way..

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IBM worried it
would be per-
ceived as retreat-
ing from the MCA.

that it was extremely important to get IBM's version of things across fast in an effort to convince users that, contrary to what nearly everyone else was saying, an AT bus in a 286 was consistent with IBM's PS/2 plans and strategy.

Poor Mr. Monahan! About all he could come up with was simply to tell everyone that a PS/2 with an AT bus wasn't really a reintroduction of the AT because it has 3½-inch disks and better graphics built in. Oh, and he reminded everyone that IBM said at consultants' and press briefings last February that a low-end 286 system was in the works.

Having been at one of the briefings where IBM Entry Systems Division president Bill Lowe dropped those hints, I am sure that there was no suggestion that this would be an AT-bus machine. On the contrary, the big emphasis was on the Micro Channel Architecture, its supposed virtues, and its eventual expansion across the entire PS/2 line.

IBM has good reason to fear that users will take the introduction of a 286-based PS/2 as an indication that IBM is worried about lukewarm acceptance for the MCA

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