SCREENPLAY
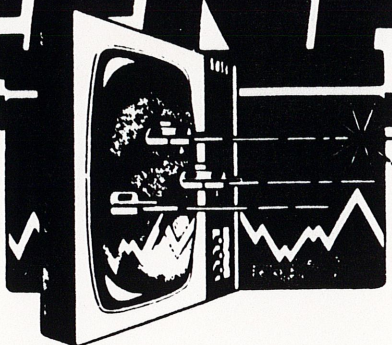
Ian Davies has a look at games for Dick Smith's VZ-200.
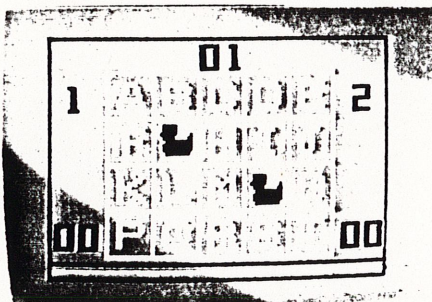
MATCH BOX

Game: Match Box
Supplier: Video Technology
Price: $12.50

Match box is a memory enhancement program designed to increase your power of recollection in a game format. It runs on a standard VZ-200 with no extra memory required.

The screen is divided into twenty-five squares, each identified by a single letter. Beneath each square is a hidden symbol. Two players are required for this game, and the computer will take it in turns asking each player to select a pair of squares. The symbols underneath these squares will be revealed briefly, and then hidden again.

The objective of the game is to match up as many identical pairs of symbols as possible, and so it is necessary to remember where various symbols have appeared. Once a pair of symbols have been involved in an identical match, they are thereafter out of play. Each match scores a player one point, and the player with the highest number of points wins the game.

Match box is a series of three basic programs, which are automatically loaded into the VZ-200 one after the other. The first program displays the name of the game, the second provides instructions and the third actually plays the game. Because of this, Match Box is painfully slow to load and cannot repeat the instructions after a game without completely re-loading all three programs.

Additionally, the game runs very slowly and seems to crash regularly – requiring a complete re-load. On the plus side, Match Box will help to increase your retention and is non-violent – two rare characteristics in video games.
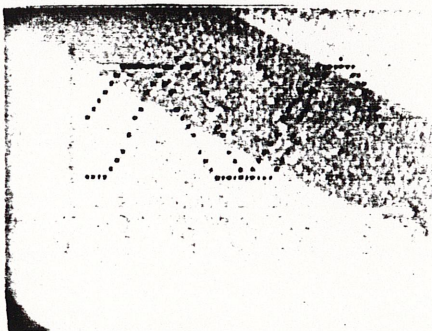
Use of graphics:	★★★
Use of sound:	★★
Addictive quality:	★★
Game speed:	★
Use of colour:	★★
Value for money:	★★

BIORYTHMS

Game: Biorythm/Pair Matching/Calendar
Supplier: Video Technology
Price: $12.50

This tape consists of three programs all related to dates. The biorythm program (pictured) predicts your emotional, physical and intellectual highs and lows over a given period. It does this in a graphical format and provides text to (incorrectly) explain the meaning of the graph.

The pair matching program accepts the birthdates of *two* people and then tells you which week day they were born on. It then goes on to produce a percentage of compatability for emotional, physical and intellectual factors. It does this by comparing the two biorythms involved – a trivial process based on the number of days between the two dates.

The calendar program accepts two dates and tells you which day of the week those two dates were, and also how many days are between the two dates.

If you are thinking that these programs apply the same simple formula in three different ways, then you are probably correct. They all perform useful functions, but do not perform anything particularly clever.

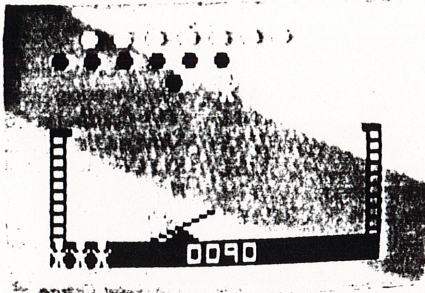|	
Use of graphics:	
Use of sound:	
Addictive quality:	★
Game speed:	★
Use of colour:	
Value for money:	★

CIRCUS

Game: Circus
Supplier: Video Technology
Price: $12.50

Under the Circus Big Top, acrobats perform death defying stunts on the catapult (see-saw). One acrobat jumps off a high platform onto the empty end of the catapult, thereby sending the other acrobat flying high into the air.

Your job is to move the catapult from left to right so that the acrobats continue to land on their respective ends and project the other into the air. A stream of balloons float high above the ring, and the acrobats must collect as many of these as possible for ten points per balloon. The game becomes progressively faster until it runs at an impressive speed, thereby sorting out the men from the boys.

Control of the catapult is really rather complex, as the game accurately models the actions of a real catapult. In other words, the second acrobat will be projected differently depending on how close to the pivot point the first one lands. This type of subtle control is very important, as the player inevitably finds himself in a position where the falling acrobat is going to land on top of the other acrobat. The only alternative is to move the catapult completely out of the way, in which case the airborne acrobat falls to his doom. With careful control, the dedicated player can learn to avoid this situation.

The game is over either when all the balloons have been collected, or when there have been five fatal falls.

Circus runs on an unexpanded VZ-200 and is played to the tune of "My Body Lies Over The Ocean". The game can make use of a joystick if one is installed. In general, Circus is a great deal of fun and rather addictive until one has master control of the catapult.
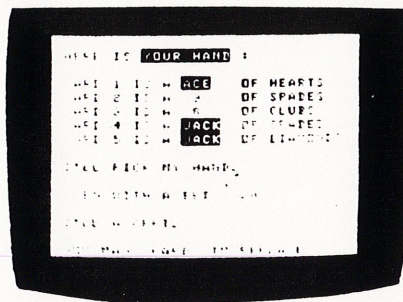
Use of graphics:	★★★★
Use of sound:	★★★
Addictive quality:	★★★★
Game speed:	★★★★★
Use of colour:	★★★
Value for money:	★★★★

POKER

Game: Poker
Supplier: Video Technology
Price: $12.50

VZ-200 Poker is a rather sad implementation of straight draw poker – you against the computer. It allows you to bet, raise, call, bluff and fold. So much for the good news.

Poker is written in Basic, and makes absolutely no use of colour, graphics or sound. These sins could easily be forgiven if it was a particularly good poker player, but alas, it is not. The program suffers badly from a fear of large bets, so a 100% reliable way to win is to place a bet of $100. It will immediately fold.

The program will happily replace – 3 of your cards, and will even replace the same one three times. Any non-numeric input will result in the familiar "?REDO" message from Basic. The player can happily continue to spend more money than he owns.

Poker is the type of game that any novice could write in a single evening after a few weeks experience with Basic. That a game of this quality is available for purchase is disappointing.

Use of graphics:	
Use of sound:	
Addictive quality:	★
Game speed:	★
Use of colour:	
Value for money:	★