

ICL 2900 Series, Models 2903-2905

New Product Announcement

On March 20, 1980, ICL announced a new family of medium-scale systems, the ME29 series, to replace the 2903, 2904, and 2905 models. Competitive with the IBM System/38 and IBM 4300 series and upward compatible with the ICL 290X models, the ME29/35 and ME29/45 offer a number of new features, including support for electronic mail and for private viewdata systems.

Running under a new operating system, TME (Transaction Machine Environment), the ME29's support the IDMS data base management system and a variety of distributed processing applications. User-friendly features include menus, a user guide, system message translation, and an optional Personal Data System designed for non-technical people.

An ME29/35 equals the performance of a 2904/50, and an ME29/45 offers 1.8 times the performance of the 2904/50. ME29 memory capacity ranges from 256K to one million characters, disc storage capacity from 35 million to 16,000 million characters.

The microcoded ME29's have 64K or 128K bytes of control storage with a cycle time of 155 nanoseconds. Prefetch effectively reduces cycle time to 93 nanoseconds and increases processing speed to 3 million microinstructions per second.

Although the ME29 has a three-bus architecture, a control link effectively allows system components to communicate as though they were all attached to the same bus.

TME, the new operating system, provides compatibility with Exec 3S and offers new capabilities. Programs written to run under Exec 3S can be run under TME using the same job control instructions even though TME has a new job control language. TME provides a new transaction processing system but supports programs written for 290X Direct Data Entry and Multiple Transaction System applications.

In addition to batch, multi-access computing (time-sharing), and transaction processing, TME supports Wordskil Manager, an electronic mail system. Promised for the future are support for X.25 packet-switched networks and for private viewdata systems which will use modified black-and-white or color TV sets as terminals.

Only a small part of TME is resident. The rest of the control software is divided into 1K leaves (pages) that are fetched when needed. Compilers, utilities, and user programs are not paged.

User-friendly features simplify system operation. Menus allow a user to select a job from a displayed list, to enter parameters, and to run the job. Users needing more help can call up the User Guide. System messages are translated into plain English (or French, or German, etc.) before they are displayed. The Personal Data System, which runs under the transaction processing monitor, allows a user to build a personal data base and to retrieve data from it in tabular form.

In line with today's data processing trends, the ME29 series provides extensive communications network facilities. Distributed processing capabilities include: remote job entry, remote session access, message distribution, application distribution, and file transfers. Any ME29 function can be accessed from any local terminal provided the user has proper authorization.

Remote Session Access (RSA) allows a user to use a local ME29 terminal to log onto a remote system. The local ME29 system becomes transparent during the session.

Message distribution is handled by the Distributed Message Router (DMR). When the DMR detects that a user request cannot be processed locally, it automatically sends the message to the correct remote system and then relays the response back to the user.

The Distributed Application Facility (DAF) allows an application program running in the local system to get data or processing help from a remote system. The File Transfer Facility (FTF), in conjunction with the DAF, can transfer entire files from one system to another.

ICL introduced a variety of new peripherals for the ME29 series, including an integrated floppy disc drive that stores up to one million characters on two-sided diskettes. The drives can read both single and double density discs in either ICL or IBM format. One drive is standard on the ME28/35, a second is optional; two drives are standard on the ME29/45.

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The standard ME29 workstation includes a 2000-character display that can be adjusted for the operator's comfort and a typewriter keyboard with separate numeric pad and control keys. Character sets are available for various national languages.

Five new disc drives are available: Module 10, a 35-megabyte fixed disc unit; Module 20, a 60-megabyte disc pack unit; Module 40, a 120-megabyte fixed disc unit; Module 20/40, a 180-megabyte system combining an M20 disc pack drive and an M40 fixed disc drive; and Module 120, a 500-megabyte fixed disc unit.

Three line printers are available: PBS 360, PBS 720, and PBS 1130. Their printing speeds are 360, 720, and 1120 lines per minute respectively when equipped with 48-character sets. All use interchangeable bands with sets of 48, 64, or 96 characters. The standard font is ECMA 11 OCR-B Size 1.

In addition, users upgrading from 2903 and 2904 systems will be able to keep many of their peripherals and attach them to the ME29 system.

An entry level ME29/35 with 256K, one workstation, a matrix printer, and 35 million characters of disc storage, would cost about £35,000 or rent for £800 per month. Software would add about £130 per month to these amounts.

A large ME29/45 with one million characters of memory, 24 workstations, three 360-lpm printers, 2000 million characters of disc storage, and communications couplers, would cost about £250,000.

First customer deliveries are scheduled for August 1980. □