

# Programs of Choice

**C**HOICE Magazine, the journal of the Australian Consumers' Association, has carried out a survey on wordprocessors for kids. The magazine's testers — who included eight children — evaluated 11 word processing packages for the Apple, Commodore, IBM-JX and Microbee computers. The evaluations were carried out in terms of the programs' simplicity, performance and overall appeal.

The panel found nine packages to recommend, although six of these were recommended with some reservation.

The packages covered in the survey were Aussie Fred, Bank Street Writer (versions for the Apple II and for the IBM-JX), Magic Slate, Milliken, Multiscribe, Paper Clip, Pocket Writer, Superscript, Wordbee and Wordsmith.

It is worth noting that only one of these programs, Bank Street Writer, was available for the IBM-JX.

The survey targeted the needs of eight to 12 year-old students, which

according to the panel is the group containing the highest number of first-time users.

Among the features examined were those that many adult users take for granted with the more highly priced and comprehensive wordprocessors, particularly the instruction manuals. Sensible and easy-to-understand instructions are essential according to the survey, so that the kids can use the program easily. They also examined additional features offered by some programs such as different type faces, and accented letters, or the ability to allow (Aussie Fred) words which won't appear in the printed text to be inserted on screen. Others allow the insertion of graphics.

The review panel considered an ideal program for an eight to 12-year old to be one that:

- \* let the child start work after only a few keystrokes to begin the program
- \* had easy-to-use functions
- \* prompted the child with the next steps
- \* could be used to type a letter or a

short story without referring to the manual

- \* had a small range of features with further capacity apparent
- \* had on-screen help
- \* had a manual designed for children with appropriate words and terminology
- \* showed on the screen how the typing would appear on paper.
- \* made reasonable assumptions about the printer to be used and generally worked with a few simple commands.

The conclusions reached by the panel was that of the 11 packages surveyed only three could be recommended without reservations and that these perform well as word processors, are simple to use and have been written with children in mind.

It is interesting to note that the program which came second in the list of Choice's recommendations is a public domain program and can be obtained for the cost of the disk on which it is stored.