ZX Microdrive and Interface 1: Useful Hints and Tips

ZX MICRODRIVE AND INTERFACE 1: USEFUL HINTS AND TIPS

If you have difficulty using your Spectrum with Interface 1 and Microdrives please check this list before you assume any of the products are faulty:-

A. Disconnect Interface 1 from the Spectrum. Thoroughly clean the top and bottom of the Spectrum edge connector with cotton buds dipped in Iso Propyl Alcohol (obtainable from most chemists and hi-fi shops). Stubborn stains can be removed by using a matchstick, (sharpened to a point with a knife)instead of a cotton bud. Reconnect Interface1, switch on and try again.

B. Make sure the ribbon connector (linking the Spectrum to the first Microdrive) is firmly connected. Leave this connector in place at all times. If you need to move your Spectrum, the Microdrives can be placed on top of the Spectrum without disconnecting them. If the connector is damaged, please write to Sinclair Research Ltd, Stanhope Road, Camberley, Surrey and ask for a replacement.

C. If you are loading a machine code program from a cassette recorder whilst Interface 1 is connected, please ensure that you enter NEW before loading your program.

D. If you are saving a program of your own onto Microdrive, you must make sure before doing so that you have left enough space for Microdrive, RS232 and network routines if your program uses them. Your ZX Microdrive and ZX Interface 1 manual indicates how much store each of these facilities needs. The easy way to do this is to save your program repeatedly as you develop it, and to test it each time you save it.

The following are messages which may appear on your screen:-

A.   "FILE NOT FOUND"

i)   A file not being found is often caused by user error. Check the file name (use CAT to list the name the file has been stored with). Try and find the file again by re-typing the name exactly as listed. It is important that letters are typed in upper/lower case if they are listed like this.

It is possible in some circumstances for the name of the program to contain characters which do not show up on the CAT listing (e. g. ink black, paper white anywhere in the file name would not show in the listing, but would be necessary if you wanted to access the file). You can check for these by changing the paper and ink colours on the screen. Beware of control characters coming after the last visible character of the name.

Suggestion - always save programs from a program line:

e. g.   9997 erase "m";1;"TEST"
           9998 save *"m";1;"TEST"
           9999 verify *"m";1;"TEST"

If verify fails, you can at least list the program to see whether you made any typing mistakes in the SAVE command. And always verify after saving.

ii)   File not being found is sometimes caused by a damaged cartridge tape or dirt getting into your cartridge. Try and find the file again. Dirt will sometimes clear itself, and creases in the tape, finger marks etc. sometimes make reading difficult but not impossible. Keep trying to read the data, and copy it onto cassette or a second Microdrive cartridges. There is no guarantee that this will work if the tape has been damaged, but it is worth trying.

If you do have this problem, copy all the remaining files from the damaged cartridges onto a cassette or another cartridge and reformat the cartridge before using it again. The formatting process should ensure that a damaged part of the cartridge is not used again. You will probably get a lower capacity than you had before.

Warning Always keep backup copies on a second Microdrive cartridge or a cassette.

B.   "MICRODRIVE NOT PRESENT"

Your microdrive is connected to your Spectrum but when the Spectrum tries to read the Microdrive it doesn't get data and instead the error message "Microdrive not present" appears on the screen.

i)   This would happen if you have not actually inserted a cartridge into the Microdrive in which case you need to do so.

ii) This may also happen if the small section of the tape which is immediately over the head has been completely erased in which case you will need to re-format the tape. This can happen if you switch your Spectrum off and on with a cartridge in the Microdrive.

iii) This could occur if the cartridge has not been formatted.

iv) The tape in the cartridge could be jammed – in which case you need to replace it with another one.

v)   The cartridge may not be making good contact with the head. This is often accompanied by an irritating rattle from the Microdrive. Please check that the cartridge is properly inserted.

C.   "WRITING TO READ FILE"

This message is generated when the file name you want to use for a new file is already in use on a file which you may have forgotten about. Your Spectrum presumes that the file you want is the old one, and it will not allow you to write to it.

i)   Either choose a different name for your new file, or erase the file already existing which has the name you want to use.

ii) This error can be caused if you do not allow the Microdrive test program on the demo cartridge to run to completion. This program creates a file on Microdrive, checks it, and then erases it. If you stop the process before the file is erased, you will get this error message next time you try to run the test. The remedy in this case is to erase the file called "drive test" left behind when the test was run last time.