The buck stops here

I would like to respond to Prof. Nick Shrauger’s letter [Computer, June 1978] critiquing my paper: “Computers on the College Rodeo Circuit” [Computer, February 1978]. Most of his points were well taken; indeed, I’m glad that he did say something about the paragraph on the Montana State University computer system. That was one of the parts of the original paper that fell under the heavy pen of an “outside” editor employed by Computer. Due to critical time deadlines, I did not catch this particular rewrite error. In my original paper submitted to Computer, the statement read simply:

“Acknowledgement is given to the pioneering work in this field by Professor Nick Shrauger of Montana State University, as well as to a similar application developed in the spring of 1977 by Computerized Farming Services of Twin Falls, Idaho.”

The rewriter chose to eliminate reference to my friends in Twin Falls. Also, I never said that the MSU system had been used for ten years. The original paper stated: “The Montana State implementation has been in existence for several years, but few schools have adopted it.”

The errors in the saddle bronc and calf roping times are my own. Nick’s criticism of my remarks on poor working conditions in the rodeo announcer’s booth are no doubt motivated by the really superb conditions in the MSU rodeo arena at Bozeman. I submit that MSU’s excellent facilities are the exception rather than the rule in college rodeo.

I am in total agreement with the statement that “the major problem opposing widespread computer usage (in college rodeo) is money.” I would have liked to have had Nick’s well-stated remarks on this subject in my own paper.

Finally, on the subject of an “on-site” real-time rodeo computer system, I am not familiar with the approach currently being taken at Montana State, but I feel that this is a very good application for a self-contained, microprocessor-based intelligent terminal with hard copy and floppy disc I/O. The difficulty lies in the commercial cost-effectiveness of such a product. While it certainly could be developed by a nonprofit organization (such as a university), the concept could achieve widespread acceptance on the rodeo circuit only if it were adopted as a promotional “loss-leader” by one of the boot, beer or tobacco companies that support college and professional rodeo.

I’ve been looking for over a year for an excuse to develop such a system, but I’m afraid that I’ll never convince my present employer (The Boeing Company) to get into rodeo.

Joel Shechter

Apologies to Computerized Farming Services of Twin Falls for our heavy editorial pen. That omission escaped us also.

Open Channel piece draws fire

I find it preposterous for Mr. [C.K.] Yuen to use general-purpose registers as an excuse for lack of dynamic relocation in IBM 360-series computers [October 1977 Computer, Open Channel, p. 85]. Dynamic relocation is achieved in Univac 1100, CDC 6000, and various other systems by means of separate relocation registers which are not accessible to the user’s program, but only to the operating system. IBM could certainly have done the same thing.

There seem to be two major flaws in Mr. Yuen’s reasoning. First of all, regardless of the number of general-purpose registers, all machines have some special-purpose registers (though perhaps not available to the programmer). Secondly, most machines which support dynamic relocation do not allow the normal user program to modify the contents of the relocation registers. In this sense there is a difference between “base” registers (user-accessible registers containing addresses) and “relocation” registers (registers which are used to relocate all addresses dynamically).

Even if the 360 had been designed with eight “base only” registers, as Mr. Yuen speculates, one could not have trusted programmers to use them correctly and thus safe, dynamic relocation in a multi-programming environment would not have been achieved.

If there is a trend in register usage, it is certainly not toward special-purpose registers in lieu of general purpose. Cache memory, for example, seems to be leading toward designs with more general-purpose registers or else toward designs which do away with registers entirely.

Dennis J. Frailey
Texas Instruments

The editor that roared

I was truly amazed when I read the introduction to your A. Nony-mouse Column of your June 1978 issue. What do you mean “As Editor Donald Christiansen and the staff of IEEE Spectrum struggle to cope with the avalanche of entries in the epochal Micro-Mouse Maze Contest?” I protest most loudly. I, and only I, single-handedly ran the entire Amazing Micro-Mouse Maze Contest, and as you are well aware, I still do and will do so to its completion. With all due respect to Don Christiansen who conceived the contest as an idea, no other staff member of IEEE Spectrum (Christiansen included) assisted me in this endeavor. As a matter of fact, many staff members looked at this project with a little disdain. So you could imagine my outrage.

At the very least, I expect you to print this letter . . . so that credit is given to the right person. Don’t disappoint me again.

Roger Allan
Associate Editor, Spectrum

P.S. Despite the terrible oversight I mentioned, I found the A. Nony-mouse column truly hilarious. I hadn’t laughed so hard, after reading it, in a long, long time.

Sorry, Roger, We momentarily forgot who the big cheese was.
We tried to make amends on p. 130