

7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge: Creation Turned Collectible

The earliest homebrew cartridge arrived in 1993. Harry Dodgson, a hobbyist with a degree in computer systems engineering, wanted to program code for the Atari 7800. Because he didn't have a 7800 development system to test his code, he decided to write one himself. The result was the 7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge. Although he designed the 7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge for himself, Dodgson correctly guessed that other people might want to have one so they could program their own 7800 games.

Dodgson offered the program to Atari Corp, which at the time still marketed the 2600 and 7800 systems. Atari rejected the program on the grounds that it hadn't manufactured too many of the required keypad controllers, and it didn't anticipate making any more.

Dodgson had a product that he was certain other people would want, and he didn't know what to do with it. In true pioneering fashion, he decided to manufacture the program himself.

At the time, Big Lots, a national closeout store, put its stock of Atari 7800 games on clearance for \$.50 to \$1.00 each. Dodgson bought a number of Hat Trick cartridges from which he removed the labels and the ROM chip. He then added new parts, mounted a switch on the sides of the cartridge, and finally placed the new label on it. The 7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge had been completed.



Video 61's "new"
7800/2600 Monitor
Cartridge

But once it was done he still didn't know how to get it to the masses. Dodgson initially began advertising his creation on Usenet. In addition, a video-game store called Video 61 carried it in its catalog while Tim Duarte's 2600 Connection fanzine ran a review of it. Although most of the orders were placed through Video 61, Dodgson still had to build the cartridges himself, a process that took several hours.

All in all, Dodgson produced approximately 25 copies of the 7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge in a two-year period. The first six were for the 7800 only, but the remaining cartridges contained 2600 software (Combat, Space War, and Slot Racers) and the ability to create 2600 games. Dodgson stopped producing them when the orders stopped coming in. Today the cartridge is considered one of the few homebrew rarities, and there is such a great demand for it that Video 61 purchased the rights and is producing and selling a limited number of them.