

THE VERSATILE WORKBOY

Pity the poor Gameboy. By naming the pocket-sized console the way that it did, Nintendo could have subjected the hand-held to an existence of being a game player for boys. However by packaging the ever-popular *Tetris* with the original Gameboy, boys and girls of all ages were quickly addicted to the falling block game that could be played anywhere.

Taking the 'game' out of Gameboy wouldn't be as easy. Nintendo representatives have stressed time after time that Nintendo is strictly a game company. As can be seen by Nintendo's current stance on not offering DVD-playback on its Gamecube, Nintendo has always maintained that it is primarily a game company. To offer products that would turn the Gameboy into a device that did things other than play games would have been unthinkable.

However even though Nintendo is against designing non-game applications for the Gameboy, several third party companies and gone ahead and done so; some even with Nintendo's blessings!

NEC had the right idea when it didn't limit its Turboexpress to games. To prove that the Turboexpress could do more than play games, the company released a TV tuner which in effect turned the hand-held console into a portable color TV set. The high-res, back-lit Turboexpress screen was perfectly suited to display television. Unfortunately it never caught on, mainly because the Turboexpress was simply not popular.

Because of its low-res, non-back-lit screen, we won't be seeing any television tuners for the Gameboy or any of its current descendents (Gameboy Color, Gameboy Advance). But while a TV tuner is impractical for the Gameboy, a radio tuner isn't. In 2000, Interact Accessories, the company responsible for the highly successful code-altering Gameshark, introduced the *Tini Tuner*, an FM receiver for the Gameboy. The Tini Tuner didn't plug directly into the Gameboy

through the cartridge port. Instead, it attaches to the side of the Gameboy Color and plugs directly into the link port where it draws power through from the Gameboy. And since the cartridge slot is not needed, you can play a game while listening to the radio at the same time. The radio won't disturb anyone around you either because you could quietly listen to it with the *Ear Bud Earphones* that come with the unit and plug into it.

If you want to listen to your own music, instead of what a radio station offers, the Songpro is just the thing for you. Unfortunately it still remains to be seen if this device, which had been in the works for nearly two years, will ever be released.

The Songpro, which turns the Gameboy into a Personal Music Device (PMD) that can play back MP3 files, was first shown at the 2000 E3 show in Las Vegas. At that time it was called the Songboy. When the Songboy, which was housed in a cartridge that plugged directly into the Gameboy, MP3 files could be transferred into it via a USB connection to a PC. Complete with 32Mb of memory, the \$79 Songboy could store approximately 60 minutes of music. And if that wasn't enough an additional 32Mb of memory was available optionally. But the Songboy wasn't just an MP3 player. Thanks to the Gameboy's screen, additional features like viewable song lyrics or visuals of an album cover were also possibilities. The Gameboy could even double as a recorder since the Songboy had a built-in microphone.

Songboy.com, the company behind the Songboy, applied to Nintendo to become an official licensee. Unexpectedly, Nintendo not only denied the request, it turned around and sued Songboy.com for infringement of its intellectual property rights. Ron Jones, the person who invented the Songboy and founded the company claimed that Nintendo didn't offer a license because it was bias towards Songboy.com, which was a black-owned company.

The two companies battled one another throughout the summer of 2000. After an August meeting sponsored by Reverend Jesse Jackson,

representatives from the two companies were able to reach an amicable decision. Songboy.com agreed to change its name to SongPro.com and the name of its product was changed to SongPro. Nintendo in turn agreed to officially license the product. The only calamity from the agreement was the price of the SongPro. The \$79 peripheral was re-priced at \$119 when it was finally appeared on Songpro.com's website at the end of 2000.

Product Detail & Site Comments:

Song Pro (Formally known as Song Boy) is made by SongPro Inc. We frankly think that it's a great idea to make a Mp3 player for the Game Boy. This way not only do you have games on your road trip, you also got music as well! We wish there was more memory to the thing. Plus at \$119, the price is a bit steep for this product.

News:

Funny thing. Nintendo sued Song Pro before. Why? Simply on copyright infringement. Their "Song Pro" product previously was named Song Boy, and Nintendo was not happy about that. Very interesting product made to broadcast Mp3s on your Game Boy. However, it doesn't just do Mp3s, it does the Microsoft WMA file format as well!

Here are some hype from the maker's website:

"... Pocket game users all over the world can pick up their Game Boy, remove the game cartridge, and plug-in a SongPro Personal Music Device. SongPro.Com has developed a multimedia player plug-in module that turns pocket entertainment systems into powerful multimedia and digital music players.

Listen to music, the spoken-word, comedy and audio clips. See the CD cover art, the song title,artist, album, genre and copyright information ... even lyrics for Karaoke sing-a-long! The SongPro plug-in module has a built in firmware that does all of the house-keeping necessary to present an easy to operate, "CD-like" user interface on the Game Boy and Game Boy Advance display screens.

SongPro has two sets of control buttons (hardware and software). You can monitor and adjust the digital file quality (kbps/kHz), track position, volume, stereo balance, and play modes (shuffle and repeat). The SongPro Playlist shows the user all the tracks in the SongPro memory, and provides file management (delete, play order, etc.). The SongPro Equalizer gives the user not only four presets, but also lets the user create and save new settings ..."

Song Pro Website: <http://www.songpro.com/>
Price: \$119

The SongPro- The world's first module MP3 player

Status: Unavailable, may never be released

Ever since it's announcement, this unit has been the buzz in the GB community. So here's the skinny on the product that every music-loving GB owner wants to get their hands on.

Technical details:

A portable MP3-playing module which supports 2 formats:

- .MP3 - the world's most popular streaming audio format,
- .MPE - Destiny's encrypted MP3 format which contains visual information to accompany the music, such as

album covers, lyric sheets, etc.

.WMA, .AAC, .AC3, .VRC, .WAV, and SDMI formats are all supported

The unit will come with 32 MB of space on it- enough for 30 minutes of stereo 44khz 160kbps music.

Additional 32 MB modules will be released separately, the format is confirmed to be the tiny and expensive MMC format.

link: www.songpro.com

After a hefty legal battle with Nintendo, it appears as if there has been some form of resolution ending in favor of the SongPro team.

Songpro's website has been updated to list a number of SongPro products- 2 of which are slated for release on the Gameboy/Gameboy Color/Gameboy Advance. The first of the 2 units is the "SongPro for Gameboy" which features onscreen effects or lyrics depending on the format, has a USB connection, 32 MB of built in MMC memory (with 2 MMC ports), an external mic input, and standard headphone jacks.

The Songpro Junior features no internal memory and only one MMC port, and still features the same hardware and software buttons as the above unit. Otherwise the features are pretty much the same, the Jr. features a USB connection, external headphones jack and external microphone jack.

I've spoken a couple of times to the guy who runs SongPro, and unfortunately he doesn't share the same vision as his predecessor, so I don't think that I'll be able to receive a trial unit or a review copy, so you'll just have to wait until it hits market until I can get to one to take a look at...

Nanoloop

Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

Don't laugh! Despite its name, over the years many companies have released software that let the Gameboy do things other than play games. And many of these packages have actually attempted to turn the Gameboy into a PDA.

Gametek, a company that had gained a reputation for developing NES games based on TV game shows, was the first company to lead the Gameboy out of its gaming stereotyping. With its InfoGenius Productivity Pak series, which it released in 1991, Gametek introduced Gameboy software that went beyond games.

Among the InfoGenius series was the Frommers Travel Guide. This cartridge listed travel information such as hotels, restaurants, stores, and sites, for ten US including New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. It also included several toll-free phone numbers that a traveler might need.

While the software was indeed innovative, you had to question if it was necessary. The problem with travel guides is that they get dated quickly, which is why Frommer's releases its books yearly. With

a retail price of \$40, the InfoGenuis Travel Guide would have been an expensive proposition to have to buy every year, if Gametek offered yearly editions, which it never mentioned it was going to do.

Another problem with the cartridge was that the book was easier to use. Since the original Gameboy was approximately the same size as a Frommer's guide, you didn't save anything by carrying it around. Also, while the menus on the cartridge were quite easy to use, they still took more time than if you actually looked up the information in the guide.

Gametek's InfoGenuis language translators, which were available in French and Spanish (German, Italian, and Japanese converters were also planned but never released) suffered from the same problem. The information was easier to get in a language dictionary. The cartridges gave you the choice to type in English words (using an onscreen keypad and cursor) and it would search its built-in Berlitz dictionary for the French or Spanish translation. You could also type in the foreign language word and the Gameboy would present the English translation. The cartridges also had built-in phrases that didn't need to be typed in. All the user had to do was follow an easy-to-use menu where the phrases were broken down by category such as 'transportation' and 'shopping'. Once you get to the category that you wanted, pressing down or up on the keypad would sift through several English phrases along with their French or Spanish translation.

The language translators did have some neat features that couldn't be found in a book. For instance you could enter any number via the onscreen calculator style keyboard, and the language translator displayed the name of the number in French or Spanish. The cartridge also featured a metric converter that easily allowed conversions of distance, speeds, and temperatures.

The InfoGenius Spell Checker also includes some features that cannot be found easily in a book. The Spell Checker lets you enter

a word that is spelt wrong and then it will search its built-in American Heritage dictionary for the correct spelling.

Unfortunately, the program usually won't know what word you're looking for so it will return a wide range of choices. Sometimes it won't have any idea what you're looking for and will just return what it deems closest. When 'nolege' was entered, the program only displayed 'nonage', not 'knowledge' which would have been the correct response. The cartridge also includes a cursor driven calculator. Again, in theory this was a great idea but a normal calculator that has individual buttons for numeral and operation is much easier, and quicker, to use.

Of all of the InfoGenuis cartridges, , the Personal Organizer was the most useful, and the one that came closest to turning the Gameboy into a PDA. One reason why it was more useful was because it came with a battery and allowed data to be saved. The battery also permitted the software to feature a working clock and calendar.

The Personal Organizer's interface was as easy to use as the other InfoGenuis software. A menu gave you a selection that included an appointment book, a phone directory and a note pad. Other less important features included an '800' directory similar to the one on the Travel Guide and a calculator. While the InfoGenuis Personal Organizer won't give you the storage capacity of a dedicated organizer that are available from Casio and other manufacturers for around \$15, having it available on a Gameboy cartridge is a nice feature for those who don't want to carry around too many devices.

InfoGenuis Personal Organizer

Shark MX

Mary-Kate and Ashley Pocket Planner

Innovation Personal Organizer

E.T. Organizer

Tini Tuner (TV Tuner for Gameboy Advance)

King James Bible

Singer IZEK