

By Gordon Davis

**W**arp Speed is the latest contender in the cartridge wars which have spawned the Expert and the Final Cartridge. It's not to be confused with the Warp 25 fast load system inside the Action Replay Mk IV cartridge from Data! which reversed the speed accolade in a recent comparative test by *Commander Disk User*. I'd like to have put Warp Speed through an identical procedure, but I didn't have the precise test programs available.

I did however run some tests on a 47Mock Basic program of my own. With no assistance from the cartridge, the program loaded on a 1241 drive in 15 seconds. The manual claims that Warp Speed can load such a file roughly 300 per cent faster. In 100 per cent faster, this was impressive as because the fast start on Warp Speed writes files to disk in 1271 format on a 1241 drive. Using the cartridge these can be reloaded, the manual says, up to 1800 per cent faster.

When tested, the fast one itself took just over seven seconds, while reloading took six seconds in this format. That's not 1800 per cent, more like 600, but to be fair, the claim is up to 1800 per cent faster. Frankly, this is rather sluggish. Warp Speed is doing the bare minimum of fast loading. Most rival cartridges use relatively sophisticated crunch/decrunch systems to reduce the number of bytes that they have to read and write. As a result, Action Replay's Warp 25 is able to do things at an incredible 35.6 bits per second. That's approximately 2000 per cent faster.

Warp Speed at its fastest is loading at about 80 bps (at against 0.8 bps for a naïve system) which makes it comparable with the *Forever Machine* in its slowest mode. Since this latter was the slowest loader during the cartridge speed trials, Warp Speed's performance is not good.

#### Chain cut

Perhaps Warp Speed has other good points? Well if you're on the lookout for a cartridge that does roughly things don't look at this one. You can't grab anything, hence it or fiddle with it in any way.

#### Teachlet:

Supplier: Financial Systems Software Ltd, 18 High Street, Peckham, Wores W8 9JF, Tel: (0181) 331133. Machine: C64/128. Price: £24.95.



Cinemascope have kept this little box specially clean, so unlike other companies they won't be getting slapped with from the software houses.

All this makes Warp Speed a little worthy-but-dull. Nonetheless it does have useful features. Disk or floppy and multi-erase commands are included, plus a very respectable sector edit and an extensive range of utility commands.

There's also a built-in machine code monitor. Cinemascope says 'one of the most advanced monitors ever produced for the Commodore 64 and 128.' Could've fooled me! I must be missing some little thing or other, because to me it looks just like a monitor, neither better nor worse than a host of other monitors. Worse,

the manual describes it as a monitor assembler. An incredible achievement because what we have here is an assembler with one command! In fact what it does is to take a user-defined and operand in immediate mode and convert them to machine code, that's all. Useless for entering more than about 8 bytes of code, and not even that if you need to branch. Hype, do they mean it?

All things considered, the most useful thing about Warp Speed is that it has a little switch which enables it to work in either C128 or C64 mode. Apart from that it's a rather dull, pedestrian product far surpassed by other cartridges on the market.