

MG: Take Control: A Guide to Joysticks

by Tuncer Deniz

Although joysticks have become synonymous with computer gaming, the Macintosh by nature was the only computer in the 80's built to make computer gaming a nightmare for Macintosh game developers. The problem stems from the Macintosh's biggest drawback (in terms of computer games), its lack of a joystick port. As a result, joystick developers have had to develop software for their joysticks that emulates the mouse and keystrokes of a keyboard. Not an easy task but something joystick developers in recent years have learned to do well.

For years Advanced Gravis was the only brave soul to create joysticks for the Macintosh. Being the only joystick manufacturer for the Macintosh, Advanced Gravis enjoyed being in a niche market that the competition flat out ignored. But that slowly began to change about two years ago when other joystick manufactures began noticing the ever-growing Macintosh game market. Right around the time Inside Mac Games began publishing, we started to see interest from other joystick manufactures. First came the MacFly, then the ThrustMaster, and finally the FlightStick Pro from CH Products among others. And it doesn't stop there! More is on the way.

MouseStick II

The original MouseStick by Advanced Gravis (800-663-8558) was originally introduced in the late 80's. For a long time, the MouseStick was it. Although it worked well, the quirky software and other small problems with it turned off a lot of people. Many preferred to play with the mouse than have to deal with the troublesome and expensive MouseStick. But that all changed when the MouseStick II was introduced a few years later. Taking lessons the company had learned from the original MouseStick, Advanced Gravis improved on the original design of the joystick and dramatically re-designed the software that ran it. The end result is impressive.

he MouseStick II features a total of 5 buttons. Two of them rest atop the head of joystick, while two larger buttons are built into the base of the joystick. The fifth button is the trigger and fits comfortably under your fore finger. The software is easy to use and comes pre-loaded with standard sets for many of today's popular games. Its strongest feature is a function called "Application Aware" that automatically loads a set for a particular game.

While Advanced Gravis will admit that early production runs of the MouseStick II resulted in often broken hardware, Gravis says the MouseStick II's now shipping employ better hardware and software to sustain the rigors of computer gaming. Overall, the MouseStick II is a good joystick for the average game player. It is now relatively inexpensive (around \$50 street price) and is readily available at most computer stores and mail order houses. If you're looking for a good, somewhat inexpensive joystick, the MouseStick II is your best bet.

ThrustMasters

Unlike the MouseStick II, the ThrustMaster joysticks from ThrustMaster (503/639-3200) are exclusively geared toward flight simulators (and similar types of games). ThrustMaster makes 3 different types of control systems including the Flight Control System (joystick), Weapon Control System (throttle) and Rudder Control System (rudders).

The one required piece is the Flight Control System (FCS), which is used to control flight. Made of a lightweight but durable hard plastic, the FCS is modeled after the stick found in the F-4 Phantom. It features 3 buttons, a trigger, and an eight-way half switch (used to change view directions). The Weapons Control System (WCS) is like the one found in the F-15 and is used as the throttle and also features 6 buttons, and a 3-way rocker switch. Finally, the Rudder Control System (RCS) is used to control the yaw of the plane. Yaw is generally used to point the aircraft's nose in a different direction from that of the flight path.

ike the MouseStick II, the ThrustMaster software allows you to calibrate the joystick and has an "application aware" feature which automatically loads button and switch settings for a particular game. Another useful piece of software that also ships with the ThrustMaster software is an application called Tactical Advantage, which helps users get a visual representation of the button sequences.

Overall, the ThrustMasters are an excellent choice for any flight sim fanatic. For other gamers, however, the ThrustMaster might be overkill. Although you can play non-flying games with the ThrustMaster, you're probably better off with a joystick that suits your particular game taste.

Retail Price: FCS: \$149.95, WCS: \$99.95, RCS: \$149.95
Street Price: FCS: \$109.00, WCS: \$63.00, RCS: \$129.00

Requires: Mac with ADB port, System 7, the ThrustMaster Mac WCS and RCS require the ThrustMaster Mac FCS.

[FlightStick Pro](#)

The FlightStick Pro by CH Products (619/598-2518) looks like a cross between the ThrustMaster and MouseStick II. Although its name might suggest it is primarily designed for flight simulators, it performs extremely well with arcade games as well.

The FlightStick Pro's biggest advantage over the other joysticks is its sturdiness, heavy weight (compared to the ThrustMaster) and extremely comfortable fit. It offers a four-way "hat-switch", three thumb-buttons, a fire trigger, and a throttle flywheel. There are also two potentiometers on the base of the joystick, which can be used to calibrate the joystick.

ike other joysticks in the market, the FlightStick's software automatically loads pre-defined sets for games. It also allows you to configure new sets and modify existing ones. The software also has an option to set custom color depths and sound levels for each configured application, an extremely useful feature!

If you are looking for a joystick that performs well with flight simulators as well as arcade games, the FlightStick Pro is an outstanding choice. Although its a little pricey, its excellent ergonomics and ruggedness will provide enjoyment for years to come.

Retail Price: \$129.25

Street Price: \$79.95

Requires: System 6.0.7 or later, ADB port

QueStick I & II

The QueStick I and QueStick II by MicroQue (801-263-1883) are both similar in design but the former comes with a smaller base than its later cousin but lacks a Power-On LED. Both, however, feature two-button programmable buttons, with an Auto button that basically turns it into a four-button joystick. Like the FlightStick Pro, the QueSticks have two potentiometers on the base of the joystick used to calibrate the stick.

The QueSticks are a good choice for all-around gaming, especially if you're on a tight budget. Their fairly inexpensive price tag are definitely their biggest advantage.

Requires: System 6 or 7, ADB port

GamePads

GamePads are video game system style controllers similar to those found on Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis game systems. The Gravis GamePad (800-663-8558) was the first of these to be released on the Macintosh roughly two years ago. The venerable Gravis GamePad provides an eight direction movement control pad and four fire buttons that can be customized for both left and right handed players. The software is similar to that of the MouseStick II and comes with a horde of sets for many of today's popular arcade games. The GamePad is incredibly cheap at just \$29.95 (through MacWarehouse) and now comes bundled with FireFall, a centipede-like game from Inline Software.

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icroQue also recently released a gamepad recently called the QuePad. Although similar to the Gravis GamePad, but the QuePad offers two additional buttons in the front of the QuePad for a total of 6 buttons. Like the Gravis GamePad, the QuePad is similarly priced (\$35.00 mail order) and comes bundled with an arcade game (the QuePad comes with a game called GridLock.

Overall, both game pads offer excellent play value at an extremely low price. If you need the additional 2 buttons that the QuePad offers, the extra \$5 investment might be worth it.

More on the Way

The joystick mania doesn't stop there. In 1995 CH Products plans on introducing a variety of game hardware for the Macintosh. In February the company will release the JetStick, a low cost alternative to the FlightStick Pro. This joystick features 2 programmable buttons and

elevator and trim controls. The JetStick will retail for \$79.95.

CH Products will also be introducing the Pro Pedals (rudder pedals) along with the Virtual Pilot Pro in mid-1995. The later is the perfect companion for flight simulators and auto-racing games. It features dual four way switches and six fire buttons, as well as elevator and aileron trim controls and throttle.

Advanced Gravis in the spring will be releasing the Phoenix Flight & Weapon Control System (pictured below). This unique two-handed joystick lets you control your elevators, ailerons, throttle, rudder, flight and weapon commands all in one piece. The joystick also features 24 programmable buttons.

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acAllay (800-644-1132) will soon be introducing 2 joysticks of their own, the MacAllay JoyStick and the MacAllay GamePad. The joystick is a two button programmable stick similar in design to the QueStick. The GamePad features 7 programmable buttons and a movement control pad. Both products should be out by the time you read this.

[The Stick for You](#)

With an increasing number of joysticks appearing on the Macintosh, choosing one among them can be a tenuous task. Thankfully, all the joysticks differ in quality, price, and features making a decision based on those factors an easy one. Die-hard gamers mainly interested in flight simulators should look closely at the ThrustMasters, while casual-flight simmers and arcade players should keep an eye on the FlightStick Pro. If you're on a tight budget, the MouseStick II and QueStick offer excellent gameplay at a relatively low cost.

Game Pads are another story. All of them are similar in style, features, and price. While the QuePad offers 2 more buttons than the Gravis GamePad, the later is better suited for people with smaller hands. But in the end, either one would be an excellent choice.