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Atari - Special Controllers and Hardware Add-ons

by Alan Hewston

Besides the standard Atari 2600 Joysticks, Trackballs and Paddles, a few special controllers and hardware add-ons were commonly made. Sure, there are a lot of third party joysticks, but let's focus on the controllers with unique functions. The most common of these were the three Atari keypad-type controllers which added more flexibility to game play. Star Raiders used a Keypad (the Touch Pad) and Joystick simultaneously. The "Omega Race" Booster Grip Controller was quite unique in that it added a second fire button capability, to the same joystick port. Future video game systems optimized their controllers to share all of these features, a joystick, keypad and two fire buttons all in one controller (port). The Atari 5200, Colecovision, and Intellivision benefited from these combined designs. Intellivision never needed any other controllers. The Colecovision went one step beyond and added a few controllers - this will be covered in another article.

Atari Special Controllers and Hardware Add-ons
All games with (O) are Optional, meaning that the special controller will work, but was not required.

Special Controllers	Came Packed-in with:	Controller Required for:	Also works for:	Alternative Controllers
Booster Grip Controller	Omega Race	Omega Race	Nothing else (on 2600)	Controllers with 2 fire buttons like Sega, Atari 7800, Colecovision, Inty 2
Cosmic Command Controller	Survival Run	Survival Run (O)	All joystick games	Any joystick
Driving Controller	Indy 500 & Race	Indy 500 & Race	Stell-a-Sketch	None
Flight Commander Controller	Spitfire Attack	Spitfire Attack (O)	All joysick games	Any joystick
Joyboard Controller (Amiga)	Mogul Maniac	Mogul Manic (O)	All joystick games	Any joystick
Joystick Coupler (Atari 2600)	Spy Hunter	Spy Hunter (O)	Nothing else	None
Joystick Coupler (Atari 5200)	Space Dungeon & Robotron 2084	Space Dungeon (O) & Robotron 2084 (O)	Nothing else	None
Keyboard Controller	None	See list B below	See Note 1	Kid's Controller & Touch Pad
Kid's Controller	None	See list A below	See Note 1	Touch Pad & Keyboard Controller
Light Gun	Atari XE Game System	Crossbow (O), Meltdown, Scapyard Dog, Sentinel	Nothing else	A hardware converion is required for Sega or NES Guns to work
Starpath Supercharger	Phaser Patrol	See list C below	Nothing else	None
Track & Field Controller	Track & Field	Track & Field (O) Decathalon (O)	All joystick games	Any joystick
Touch Pad	Star Raiders	Star Raiders	See Note 1	Kid's and Keyboard Controllers

So as to keep this article brief - items rarer than these are not discussed.

List A: Carts for Kid's Controller: Alpha Beam with Ernie, Big Bird's Egg Catch, Cookie Monster Munch, Oscar's Trash Race.

List B: Carts for Keypad Controller: A Game of Concentration (Hunt & Score, Memory Match), Basic Programming, Brain Games, Codebreaker.
List C: Cassettes for the Starpath Supercharger: Communist Mutants from Outer Space, Dragonstomper, Escape from the Mindmaster, Fireball, Frogger, Killer Satellites, Party Mix, Phaser Patrol, Rabbit Transit, Suicide Mission, and some 3rd party.
Note 1: Keypad Controller, Kid's Controller, and the Touch pad are all equivalent - just different looking.

Alan Hewston is a "Controls" engineer at the newly re-named NASA John H. Glenn Research Center in Cleveland OH. He loves to take apart all his videogame H/W and controllers and see what makes them tick (or not tick). Drop me a line if you live in NE Ohio and want to trade classic carts: hewston95@stratos.net

Colecovision - Special Controllers

The Colecovision standard controller was fairly sophisticated and reliable, packing nearly all of the functions one could want in videogame play. Was there room for more variety? Sure. The Roller Controller, a trackball, came with the arcade conversion of "Slither" and could be used for a handful of other trackball type games. The Colecovision Driving Controller was the first of its kind, with a steering wheel and a gas pedal. Today, steering wheel controllers exist for all of the videogame systems and the PC. Then came along the Super Action Controller. This was made primarily for the two-player sports games but will work for evey Colecovision Game with the excepetion of those that require the driving or roller controller. Why was this needed? It definately adds to the game play and allows many controls at the tips of your fingers. It is particularly effective for sports games where your opponent cannot see what button you pushed, or where a hare trigger move is the difference between a stolen base and a caught stealing. If you want to play head to head, you gotta have two of these.

Colecovision Special Controllers
All games with (O) are Optional, meaning that the special controller will work, but was not required.

Special Controllers	Came Packed-in with:	Controller Required for:	Also works for:	Alternative Controllers
Driving Controller: aka Expansion Module #2	Turbo	Bump and Jump(O), Destructor, Dukes of Hazard, Pitstop(O), Turbo	Nothing else	None
Roller Controller	Slither	Centipede (O), Omega Race (O), Slither, Victory, War Games, War Room(O)	Nothing else	None
Super Action Controller	None	Front Line, Rocky A Boxing, Spy Hunter (O), Star Trek (O), Super Action Baseball, Super Action Football, Super Action Soccer	All standard controller games	None

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