

American vs. Korean CoCo 3

It is well known that over the course of the Color Computer's production, Tandy manufactured CoCos both overseas and in the United States. One of the more interesting comparisons can be made between the American and Korean models of the Tandy Color Computer 3.

The Korean model of the Color Computer 3 was manufactured in Korea between 1986 and 1988. Sometime in 1988, the switch was made to a factory in the United States. Although both models are virtually the same and functionally identical, there are some interesting differences, minor as they are, which may yield clues as to Tandy's decision to move production from overseas to home.

Exterior Differences

If you are looking at a Korean and American CoCo 3 side by side, at first glance, it's not immediately noticeable that they are different. In fact, without the original packaging and box, they look identical. However, the packaging will give away a CoCo 3's country of origin.

Packaging

Korean CoCo 3's were shipped to Radio Shack stores in a predominately white box with red lettering and graphics. The picture on the front cover of the box shows the outline of a CoCo 3, and the sides of the box give a summary of features.

The later American CoCo 3 was packaged in a more attractive, sturdier white box with blue and red lettering and graphics. Featured on the front top of the box are two children sitting in front of a CoCo 3, while the sides depict graphics and lettering oriented towards younger computer users.

This more "kid friendly" packaging fit well with Tandy's promotion of the CoCo 3 as a game machine towards the end of its production run in 1988-1989.

Outside Case

As mentioned earlier, the Korean and American CoCo 3 look virtually identical from the outside. However, there are a few minor clues which can tell the two apart without even opening them up.

1. **The Nameplate** - The word "TANDY" on the American CoCo 3's nameplate is slightly larger than it is on the Korean CoCo 3.
2. **The Power Button** - On a Korean CoCo 3, the power button on the back protrudes out further in the "OFF" position. On an American CoCo 3, the power button is shorter.
3. **The Bottom** - The bottom of the CoCo 3 case reveals different warranty and identification stickers. Also, the grey rubber feet on the American CoCo 3 are glued onto the bottom of the case, whereas the Korean CoCo 3 uses interlocking, black rubber feet that are larger in size.

Interior Differences

Upon opening up both CoCo 3's, the differences are more striking internally.

The Motherboard

On both models of the CoCo 3, the actual motherboards have identical identification numbers,

and appear to be exactly the same. The components, however, are slightly variant.

1. **Capacitors and other Components** - While the values of electrical components such as resistors and capacitors on both CoCo 3s appear to be the same, there are some noticeable visual differences. The American CoCo 3 has smaller "blob" capacitors which are yellow in color, while the Korean CoCo 3 has slightly larger blue capacitors in the same locations. Likewise, certain ceramic disc capacitors on the American CoCo 3 are orange in color, and on the Korean CoCo 3 are green.
2. **RAM** - The American CoCo 3 has 120ns Micron RAM chips, while the Korean CoCo 3 has slightly slower 150ns memory.
3. **IC Markings** - Most integrated circuit chips, particularly the GIME, have different markings and logos, probably due to newer runs of those chips.

Other Internal Differences

One glaring difference internally has to do with the area where the keyboard rests on case. The Korean CoCo 3 has two small round black pads on either side of the pegs where the keyboard rests, in addition to a rectangular black rubber "boot" at the bottom of the keyboard for support. The American CoCo 3 has none of these.

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