
Subject: Re: The Intellectual People Podcast: Pi Speakers
Posted by [repeatafterme](#) on Tue, 20 May 2025 16:21:44 GMT
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Here is the sales pitch for FORTH, pulling it out of my memory from 40+ years ago:

You could bring it up on a new piece of hardware by hand-coding about 100 bytes of code. After that you were in FORTH interpreter if you had RS232 terminal

It was an interpreter and compiler. You could compile machine code right into a line of interpreted code. So the non-iterative stuff could be coded quickly in high-level FORTH and then whenever you needed something to run repetitively, quickly, you could just drop into assembler with a single character.

Coding was completely hierarchical, an extension of the language itself. FORTH was written in FORTH, and structurally identical to code written on top of it.

It was a meta-compiler and capable of recursion, all within an interpreter as small as 5K, I think.

Problem was, it was write-only, according to the critics. Almost no mandatory coding conventions - Wild West. People tried hard to encourage voluntary readability conventions, naming conventions, etc, but I guess nobody followed them.

When embedded systems had to fit within 30k, FORTH was practical, fast, fun. But when they got to the point that they were using 386 processors for embedded systems, it became unmanageable. I still miss it, as a concept anyway, not that I'd want to go back to green screen.
