

★ **SCIENCE** | A twist or two and a shake, and there's the answer it would have taken you hours to work out.

MR. TAX WIZARD USES A NEW MAGIC GADGET

ERIC RISSTROM, 23-year-old taxation wizard who earned the name of Mr. Slide-Rule, has become Mr. Pocket-Calculator.

Risstrom, the man who helped to devise our new taxation forms, now uses the smallest mechanical brain in the world. And it comes from the tiniest State in the world, Liechtenstein.

It's the Curta, that weighs eight ounces, is smaller than a man's fist, can be carried in the pocket, and will work out problems dead right in a few seconds.

This has freed surveyors, engineers and scientists working out of doors from having to wait until they return to their workshops and laboratories to check calculations on a heavier electronic "brain."

Now the Curta is helping to build hydro - electric schemes, railways, bridges, tunnels, and make sense out of miles of figures.

Mr. Risstrom, assistant secretary of the Taxpayers' Association of Victoria, says: "It's a little bomb! I can hold it in one hand and work and write the results down with the other. At first I didn't believe anything so small could handle such enormous problems. But here it is."

Eric is a financial wizard who is called on to straighten out people's tax worries. He knows the Taxation Act nearly to reciting point.

To arrive at his recommendations on tax (which were listened to by a Commonwealth Tax Committee) he worked 500 hours on a slide rule. He wishes he had had the fist-sized Curta then.

The small machine is silent and can be used where noise is a handicap in banks, booking offices, and test laboratories. It adds, subtracts, multiplies, divides, squares, cubes, and extracts square roots. Automatic devices prevent errors due to wrong handling. It is 2-1/16 inches in diameter and 3-1/8 inches high.

Because the very word taxation scares most people stiff Eric believes a crusade should be launched to take the terror out of the problem. Light pocket calculators could be heavy artillery in this.

He thinks there is still room for improvement in our tax system. In fact, he has schemes already on paper for when the time is again ripe.

Figures, figures, how they whirl into a statistician's nightmare!

"But they shouldn't," says Eric, "numbers are straightforward, they never try and deceive. A man could be happy with numbers. See a problem, tackle it, don't let that sinking feeling stop you."

His ambition: To know more about taxation than anyone else in Australia.

"It seeps into your blood after a while."

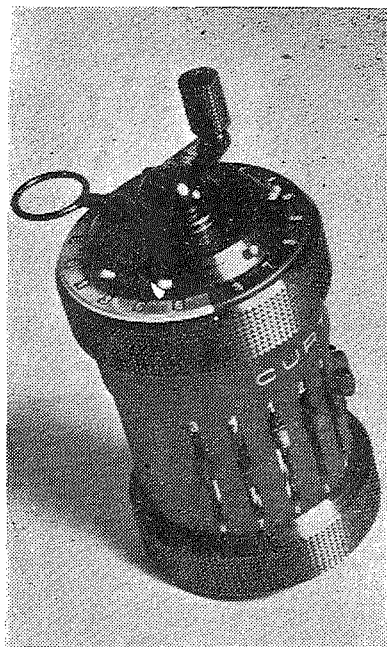
Tax can be worrying if the calculations get out of hand, he says. For some people tax is their year's biggest bill.

Now Eric is busy trying to anticipate new provisional taxes that might be introduced. His calculator is whirring, and the figures are totting up.

Once he worked out a whole new tax scheme from a couple of hints dropped by a Government official, and beat the official release of the tax increase by days. This embarrassed some people and earned Eric his name of Mr. Slide-Rule.

Youngest witness before the Fadden Federal Tax committee, he said of his scheme: "I've tried it on my seven-year-old brother and he could understand it."

The experts replied: "Don't put that over this committee, he might be as clever as you are."



THE "LITTLE BOMB" itself. It bursts out with all the correct answers about your tax troubles.



ERIC RISSTROM has an extra brain which "thinks" in figures. He's holding it in his left hand.

Later, one of the tax top officials said that he wished Eric could lend a hand in his office

Taxation is so important and involves so much money that Eric says he cannot rely on mental calculations. He must use his fistful of cogs and wheels.

For us, Eric covered a desk with sheets of figures, pulled out slide rules, and demonstrated the cut-through methods of a man who can make figures work for him. Tax we found was a big question—bigger than the citizen's brow - wrinkling a n n u a l wrestle. All sorts of things came into it.

Such as the two-way tax. Knotty this.

"A company in England may have shares in a company in Australia and dividends pass freely between them," explains Eric. "It is difficult to find the exact tax liability.

WHEN big money is involved I can't afford to do sums in my head; many people think I can. Get the machine working and make sure, that's the way. I have to be sure with thousands."

Association Secretary Mortimer James Pettigrove says of Eric and his calculator: "He arrives in the bush to explain tax worries to some angry farmers. He pulls out the machine from his pocket. They stare. Then he takes their questions and then and there works out the answers. That cools them down. He has done that

up and down the country in halls and hamlets. They know him and his machine."

"It's difficult to get legislation altered after it's drafted and gone before Parliament," says Eric. "But if we can throw our weight into a campaign before this we can often do some good.

"Taxation is still far too complicated although assessments have been simplified. But the law these assessments are based on is still knotty. The whole problem is so big that you have to know the lot before you can answer anything.

"Tax on personal exertion and property should be the same," says Mr. Risstrom, waving his calculator. "At the moment tax on property is up to £360 more than that on personal exertion."

Eric told us that not everyone was worried about taxation, however. They were using the calculator at the Eildon Reservoir for example, and not lugging log tables around with them. Railways were using them for new work calculations.

"Take 8549.2 by .03204," he said. "Whizz, whizz and you have 273.916368.

"They're real little brains. But, of course, they are barred from examination rooms."—KEITH FINLAY.