Using the TC232

| Author: | Gary Grandbois and Wes Freeman, Microchip Technology, Inc. |

INTRODUCTION

The TC232 RS232 dual transmitter/receiver IC is specifically designed for computer and telecommunication applications in implementing the RS232 interface protocol. It operates from a single 5V supply and requires a minimum number of external components.

This application note will show how designers using the TC232 can reduce external parts count over similar 232 ICs currently on the market, and that Microchip Technology's improved processing techniques eliminate the worry of CMOS latch-up.

Basic Operation

The heart of the TC232 is the two voltage converters that allow the device to have an output swing of $\pm10V$ while being fed from a single 5V supply. 5V is fed into pin 16, then doubled to create 10V by switched capacitor techniques (See TC962 datasheet for further information on switched capacitor charge pumps). This uses the capacitor placed between pins 1 and 3 as the switched capacitor.

The output of pin 2 is fed to a switched capacitor voltage inverter which utilizes the capacitor between pins 4 and 5 of the TC232 as its switched capacitor. The output of the inverter is filtered by a capacitor from pin 6 to ground.

Powering Other External Circuits

The convenience of having a $\pm10V$ power supply "for free" is almost too good to pass up, and designers are often tempted to use the TC232's on chip voltage converter to power more than just the 232's drivers and receivers. Succumbing to this temptation can lead to start-up problems if the additional load imposed is too great.

The structure of the TC232's DC-to-DC converter is such that with a sufficiently heavy load on the 10V output it is possible to reduce internal supply voltages to below the point where start up can begin. The graph in Figure 2 shows startup voltage vs. external load current to achieve start up for a typical TC232. For proper operation it is recommended that the combined currents taken from the outputs of the doubler (+10V) and inverter (–10V) be no greater than 6mA. If currents totalling more than 6mA are required, then ICs such as the TC962 or TC4429 should be considered for the job.

Placement of C3

A question often asked is whether C3 should be connected between pin 2 and the 5V supply or between pin 2 and ground, as depicted in Figure 1A. For the TC232 it makes no difference. However, this is not the case for all 232 ICs.

While the best connection for C3 is to ground, users of the first 232 ICs on the market discovered that start-up problems would occur under certain conditions. Investigation showed that if the 5V power supply came "on" abruptly, the voltage converter would stall or latch up. By boot strapping the 10V output to the 5V supply rail this problem could be avoided and subsequent data sheets and application notes showed C3 connected in this manner. The drawback to this configuration is the transference of system noise from the 5V supply to the 10V output through C3.

Microchip Technology has taken special care to avoid this problem, in both the circuit's design and processing used to produce the TC232. The result is a device which is very resistant to latch-up and operates quite well in either configuration.

Deleting the 10V Filtering Capacitor

A unique feature of the TC232's voltage converter is its ability to operate with only three capacitors, instead of the usual four. In those applications where the TC232 power supply outputs (10V) are not required to supply external circuits it is possible to eliminate the 10V filter capacitor, on pin 2, and still obtain satisfactory performance for most 232 interfaces.

Figures 3 through 8 show performance comparisons of the TC232 with and without the filtering capacitor for various load conditions. Notice that while removing the filtering capacitor on pin 2 increases the 10V output's ripple, it does not effect the data outputs enough to cause noise problems for most 232 applications.

In applications where the 10V is used for other external circuits the decoupling capacitor for the circuit can be combined so that it is still not necessary to have a capacitor specifically for the 10V output.

Latch-Up Proof Design

One of the advantages of the TC232 over other CMOS 232 interface ICs is its immunity to CMOS latch-up. This prevents "mysterious" failures of the interface ICs due to transient currents flowing between the two different grounds of the two systems that the ICs are interfacing.

The latch-up ability also allows "hot switching" that is, the ability to change a board in a system without having to shut down the system. Most CMOS ICs will latch-up if this is done resulting in the destruction of the devices and/or the inability of the system to operate.

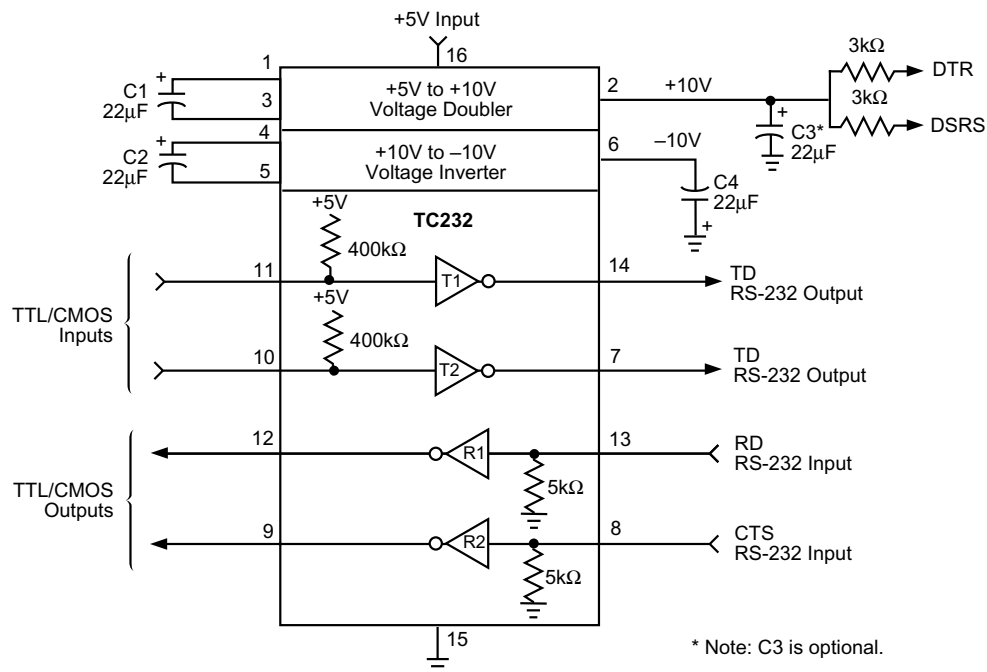For further information on latch-up see Application Note 31.

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CONCLUSION

It is possible to eliminate one additional capacitor in many designs when using the TC232. This can help save parts cost as well as board space.

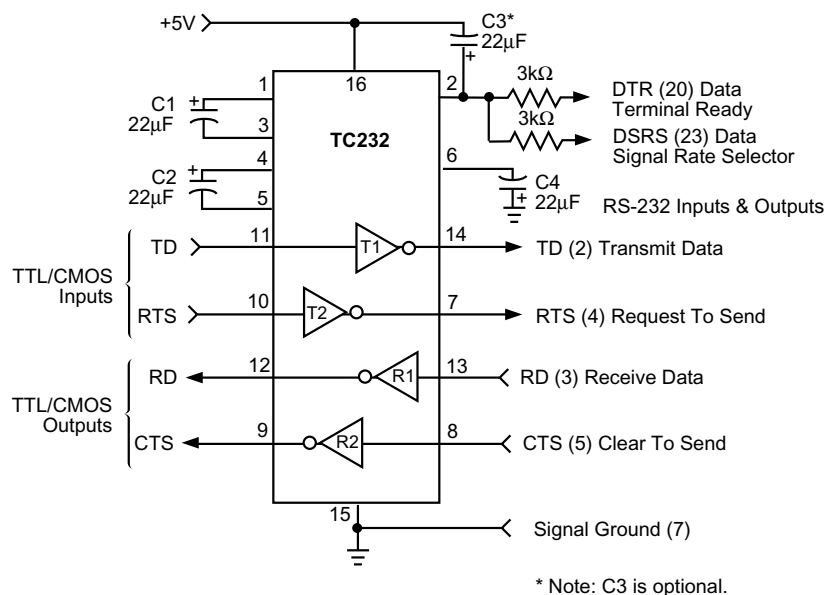Microchip Technology's processing eliminates the designer's worry about latch-up, resulting in improved system operation and reliabiltiy.

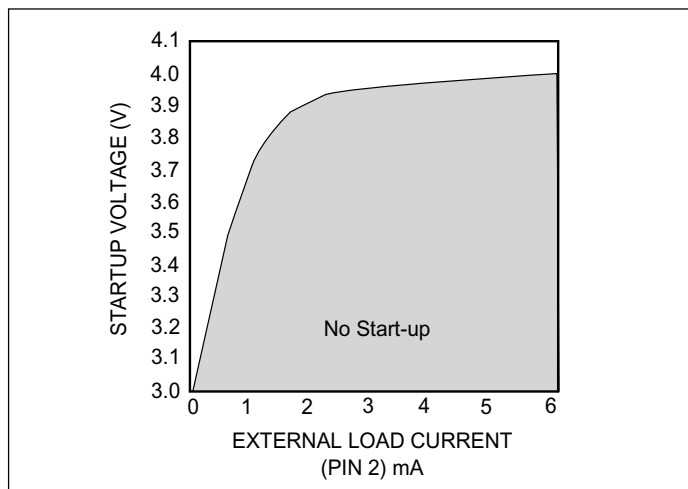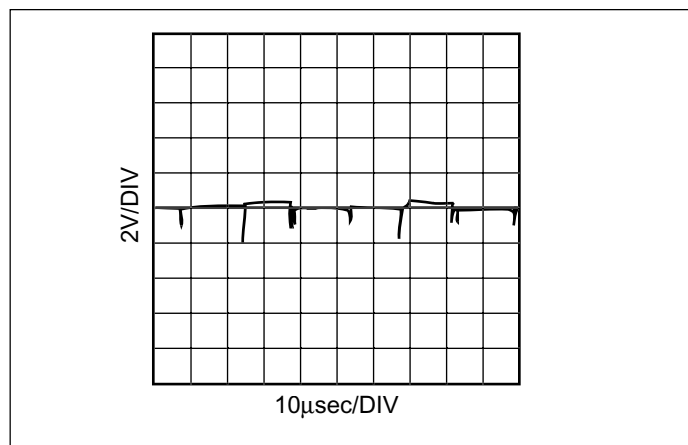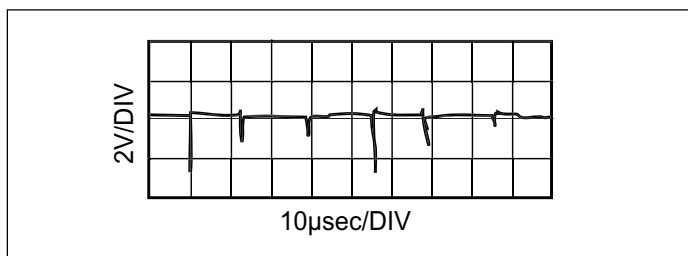FIGURE 1: Typical application.
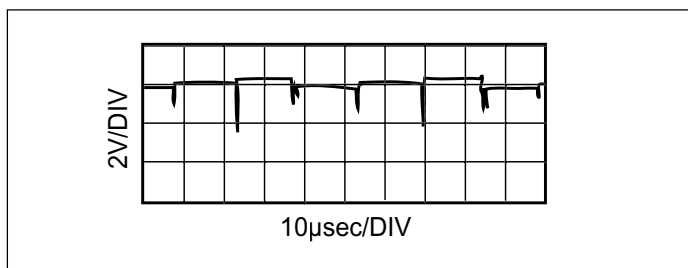
FIGURE 2: *Startup voltage vs. external (pin 2) load.*
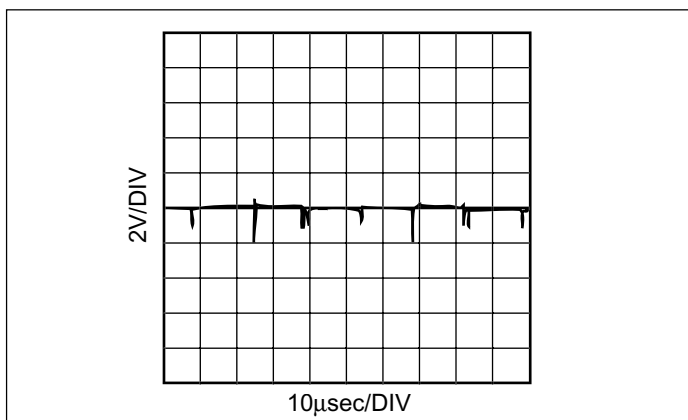

FIGURE 3: *10V output ripple, no C3, no load.*

FIGURE 4: *10V output ripple, no C3, I_{LOAD} = 6mA.*

FIGURE 5: *RS232 output high, C3 = 10μF, R_L = 3kΩ.*

FIGURE 6: *RS232 output high, no C3, R_L = 3kΩ.*
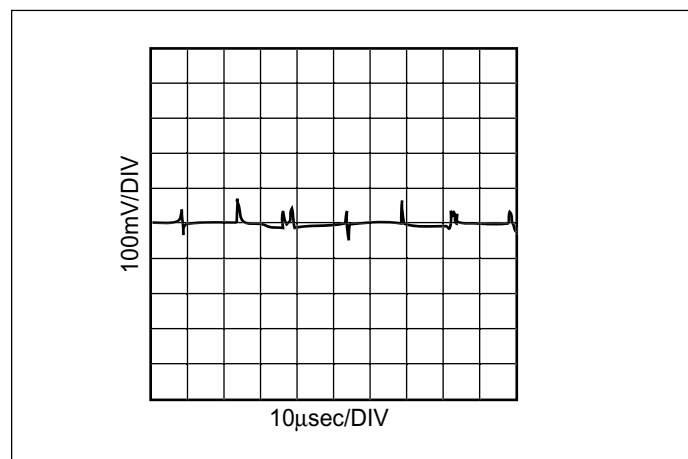
FIGURE 7: *RS232 output low, C3 = 10μF, R_L = 3kΩ.*
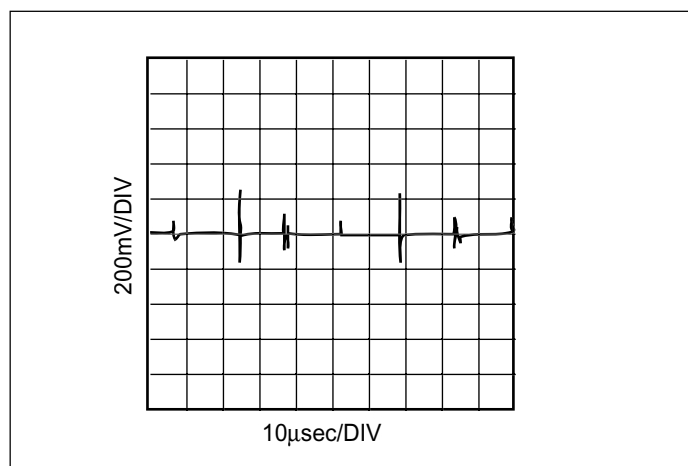
FIGURE 8: *RS232 output low, no C3, R_L = 3kΩ.*

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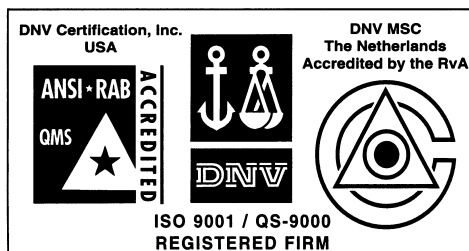
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Corporate Office
2355 West Chandler Blvd.
Chandler, AZ 85224-6199
Tel: 480-792-7200 Fax: 480-792-7277
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Web Address: http://www.microchip.com

Rocky Mountain
2355 West Chandler Blvd.
Chandler, AZ 85224-6199
Tel: 480-792-7966 Fax: 480-792-7456

Atlanta
500 Sugar Mill Road, Suite 200B
Atlanta, GA 30350
Tel: 770-640-0034 Fax: 770-640-0307

Austin - Analog
13740 North Highway 183
Building J, Suite 4
Austin, TX 78750
Tel: 512-257-3370 Fax: 512-257-8526

Boston
2 Lan Drive, Suite 120
Westford, MA 01886
Tel: 978-692-3848 Fax: 978-692-3821

Boston - Analog
Unit A-8-1 Millbrook Tarry Condominium
97 Lowell Road
Concord, MA 01742
Tel: 978-371-6400 Fax: 978-371-0050

Chicago
333 Pierce Road, Suite 180
Itasca, IL 60143
Tel: 630-285-0071 Fax: 630-285-0075

Dallas
4570 Westgrove Drive, Suite 160
Addison, TX 75001
Tel: 972-818-7423 Fax: 972-818-2924

Dayton
Two Prestige Place, Suite 130
Miamisburg, OH 45342
Tel: 937-291-1654 Fax: 937-291-9175

Detroit
Tri-Atria Office Building
32255 Northwestern Highway, Suite 190
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
Tel: 248-538-2250 Fax: 248-538-2260

Los Angeles
18201 Von Karman, Suite 1090
Irvine, CA 92612
Tel: 949-263-1888 Fax: 949-263-1338

New York
150 Motor Parkway, Suite 202
Hauppauge, NY 11788
Tel: 631-273-5305 Fax: 631-273-5335

San Jose
Microchip Technology Inc.
2107 North First Street, Suite 590
San Jose, CA 95131
Tel: 408-436-7950 Fax: 408-436-7955

Toronto
6285 Northam Drive, Suite 108
Mississauga, Ontario L4V 1X5, Canada
Tel: 905-673-0699 Fax: 905-673-6509

ASIA/PACIFIC

Australia
Microchip Technology Australia Pty Ltd
Suite 22, 41 Rawson Street
Epping 2121, NSW
Australia
Tel: 61-2-9868-6733 Fax: 61-2-9868-6755

China - Beijing
Microchip Technology Consulting (Shanghai)
Co., Ltd., Beijing Liaison Office
Unit 915
Bei Hai Wan Tai Bldg.
No. 6 Chaoyangmen Beidajie
Beijing, 100027, No. China
Tel: 86-10-85282100 Fax: 86-10-85282104

China - Chengdu
Microchip Technology Consulting (Shanghai)
Co., Ltd., Chengdu Liaison Office
Rm. 2401, 24th Floor,
Ming Xing Financial Tower
No. 88 TIDU Street
Chengdu 610016, China
Tel: 86-28-6766200 Fax: 86-28-6766599

China - Fuzhou
Microchip Technology Consulting (Shanghai)
Co., Ltd., Fuzhou Liaison Office
Rm. 531, North Building
Fujian Foreign Trade Center Hotel
73 Wusi Road
Fuzhou 350001, China
Tel: 86-591-7557563 Fax: 86-591-7557572

China - Shanghai
Microchip Technology Consulting (Shanghai)
Co., Ltd.
Room 701, Bldg. B
Far East International Plaza
No. 317 Xian Xia Road
Shanghai, 200051
Tel: 86-21-6275-5700 Fax: 86-21-6275-5060

China - Shenzhen
Microchip Technology Consulting (Shanghai)
Co., Ltd., Shenzhen Liaison Office
Rm. 1315, 13/F, Shenzhen Kerry Centre,
Renminnan Lu
Shenzhen 518001, China
Tel: 86-755-2350361 Fax: 86-755-2366086

Hong Kong
Microchip Technology Hongkong Ltd.
Unit 901-6, Tower 2, Metroplaza
223 Hing Fong Road
Kwai Fong, N.T., Hong Kong
Tel: 852-2401-1200 Fax: 852-2401-3431

India
Microchip Technology Inc.
India Liaison Office
Divyasree Chambers
1 Floor, Wing A (A3/A4)
No. 11, O'Shaugnessey Road
Bangalore, 560 025, India
Tel: 91-80-2290061 Fax: 91-80-2290062

Japan
Microchip Technology Japan K.K.
Benex S-1 6F
3-18-20, Shinyokohama
Kohoku-Ku, Yokohama-shi
Kanagawa, 222-0033, Japan
Tel: 81-45-471- 6166 Fax: 81-45-471-6122

Korea
Microchip Technology Korea
168-1, Youngbo Bldg. 3 Floor
Samsung-Dong, Kangnam-Ku
Seoul, Korea 135-882
Tel: 82-2-554-7200 Fax: 82-2-558-5934

Singapore
Microchip Technology Singapore Pte Ltd.
200 Middle Road
#07-02 Prime Centre
Singapore, 188980
Tel: 65-334-8870 Fax: 65-334-8850

Taiwan
Microchip Technology Taiwan
11F-3, No. 207
Tung Hua North Road
Taipei, 105, Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-2717-7175 Fax: 886-2-2545-0139

EUROPE

Denmark
Microchip Technology Denmark ApS
Regus Business Centre
Lautrup hoj 1-3
Ballerup DK-2750 Denmark
Tel: 45 4420 9895 Fax: 45 4420 9910

France
Arizona Microchip Technology SARL
Parc d'Activite du Moulin de Massy
43 Rue du Saule Trapu
Batiment A - ler Etage
91300 Massy, France
Tel: 33-1-69-53-63-20 Fax: 33-1-69-30-90-79

Germany
Arizona Microchip Technology GmbH
Gustav-Heinemann Ring 125
D-81739 Munich, Germany
Tel: 49-89-627-144 0 Fax: 49-89-627-144-44

Germany - Analog
Lochhamer Strasse 13
D-82152 Martinsried, Germany
Tel: 49-89-895650-0 Fax: 49-89-895650-22

Italy
Arizona Microchip Technology SRL
Centro Direzionale Colleoni
Palazzo Taurus 1 V. Le Colleoni 1
20041 Agrate Brianza
Milan, Italy
Tel: 39-039-65791-1 Fax: 39-039-6899883

United Kingdom
Arizona Microchip Technology Ltd.
505 Eskdale Road
Winnersh Triangle
Wokingham
Berkshire, England RG41 5TU
Tel: 44 118 921 5869 Fax: 44-118 921-5820

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