

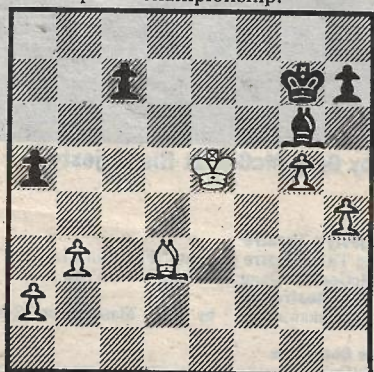
CHESS

It computes

by Murray Chandler

HAVING your own chess computer has many attractions, and the worldwide market in these electronic monsters is still booming. Considerable technological advances over the past few years have resulted in faster and stronger models, more than capable of giving the average player a good game. Yet choosing the most suitable model can be confusing — which is hardly surprising when one reads the manufacturers' advertising literature. Every different make, it seems, is the current world champion in some category!

The first thing to do it to treat the manufacturers' hyperbole with a healthy scepticism. Many claims are based on tournaments where computers play each other, but a model which does well against a metallic competitor may not necessarily perform best against live humans. Also, results are not always what they seem, as the *British Chess Magazine* reported about a game from a recent computer championship:



Here it is White's 37th move. What happened? Answer, its human operator resigned on its behalf. Both computers were owned by the same firm, which for marketing reasons wanted the machine playing Black to win the tournament. It did.

The next thing is to ask yourself what standard of opponent you require. On most models you can vary the playing strength by altering the length of time the computer has to think. But of course it is no use having a version that can only give you a good game taking an hour a move.

Up to about \$1000 you normally get what you pay for; over that you are paying for luxury extras (such as a deluxe wooden board), and you are probably getting exactly the same strength program used in a manufacturer's cheaper models.

Unless you are looking for a cheap, basic model to learn on, make sure your model has a modern sensory board of the type that will detect your moves as you make them. I would avoid the LCD (liquid crystal displays) as well — it is so much nicer to play with real pieces than on a screen. Be wary, also, of the "upgradable modules" whose manufacturers promise to produce new programs that can be clipped in later. There is no guarantee these updates will keep appearing, and the present high standard of normal models means you are unlikely to require a new computer for a long time anyway — and who knows what advances will have been made by then?

The major brands in New Zealand are Novag (makers of the Super-Constellation), Sci Sys (makers of the Turbo Star) and newcomers Mephisto, a West German firm whose models are widely bought in Europe. The Super-Constellation in particular impressed many of our top national players when two of these computers were entered in the Waitakere Trust Open last year.

Showing how fickle these creatures can be, one of them came second equal (in the process beating Ewen Green and drawing with Peter Stuart — both New Zealand internationals) while the other Constellation came second to last equal. But even that one gave current joint National Champion Ortvin Sarapu a very worrying time.

Auckland 1985

RUY LOPEZ

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|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| O SARAPU | NOVAG
SUPER CONSTELLATION |
| 1. e4 | e5 |
| 2. Nf3 | Nc6 |
| 3. Bb5 | a6 |
| 4. Ba4 | Nf6 |
| 5. d4 | e×d4 |
| 6. O-O | Be7 |
| 7. e5 | Ne4 |
| 8. N×d4 | Nc5 |
| 9. Nf5 | N×a4? |

True to form, the materialistic computer grabs a hot piece — and almost gets away with it.

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|-------------|-----|
| 10. N×g7 ch | Kf8 |
| 11. Bh6 | Kg8 |
| 12. Ne6? | |

Tempting but wrong. With 12.Qg4 N×e5 13.Q×a4 White regains his piece with advantage.

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|-----------|------|
| 12. ... | d×e6 |
| 13. Qg4ch | Bg5 |
| 14. B×g5 | Qd4! |

A knight down after 14 moves, Sarapu must have realised he had to take this game seriously. White's control of the dark squares around Black's kingside is only nominal compensation.

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| 15. Bf4 dis ch | Kf8 |
| 16. c3 | h5! |
| 17. Qh4 | Qd3 |
| 18. Nd2 | N×b2 |
| 19. Ne4 | Ne7 |
| 20. Qf6 | Ng6 |
| 21. Rfe1 | Bd7 |
| 22. Rab1 | Bc6 |
| 23. R×b2 | B×e4 |
| 24. Rd2 | Qb5 |

Computers are good on tactical points (25. R×e4 Qb1 ch forces mate). Their No 1 weakness is greed.

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|-------------|------|
| 25. Rd4 | Bd5 |
| 26. Bg5 | Rh7 |
| 27. c4 | B×c4 |
| 28. Rd8 ch | R×d8 |
| 29. Q×d8 ch | Qe8 |
| 30. Q×c7 | B×a2 |

See what I mean?

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|---------|-------|
| 31. Bf6 | Bd5 |
| 32. Rc1 | Kg8 |
| 33. Qd6 | Nf4 |
| 34. Rc7 | N×g2? |

With 34... Rg7! 35. B×g7 K×g7 Black could have eliminated the White attack, and left itself still with a decisive material plus. The Constellation's stubborn refusal to give back anything costs it the game.

35. Rd7!

Suddenly there is no defence to 36. Rd8.

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|-------------|---------|
| 35. ... | Ne1 |
| 36. Rd8 | Nf3 ch |
| 37. Kf1 | Bc4 ch |
| 38. Kg2 | Ne1 ch |
| 39. Kh3 | Bf1 ch |
| 40. Kh4 | Ng2 ch |
| 41. Kg3 | h4 ch |
| 42. Kf3 | Ne1 ch |
| 43. Ke3 | Bb5 |
| 44. R×e8 ch | B×e8 |
| 45. Qe7 | Resigns |