

An elitist game

Apart from improvements in speed at the higher playing levels, there is not much more that the average chess player could possibly want from the best of today's chess computers. And as Tony Harrington notes, when it comes to new products Fidelity and Novag are way out in front.

By the time you read this the World Micro Computer Chess Championship (WMCCC), held this year in Glasgow, will be over. A full report will appear in December's PCW.

Without denigrating other suppliers' machines, the World Championship looks at the time of writing to be a two horse race between the Novag and Fidelity programs.

Fidelity won last year's WMCCC, but the Novag Super Constellation has had some very encouraging player-tournament results and the battle looks to be unpredictable.

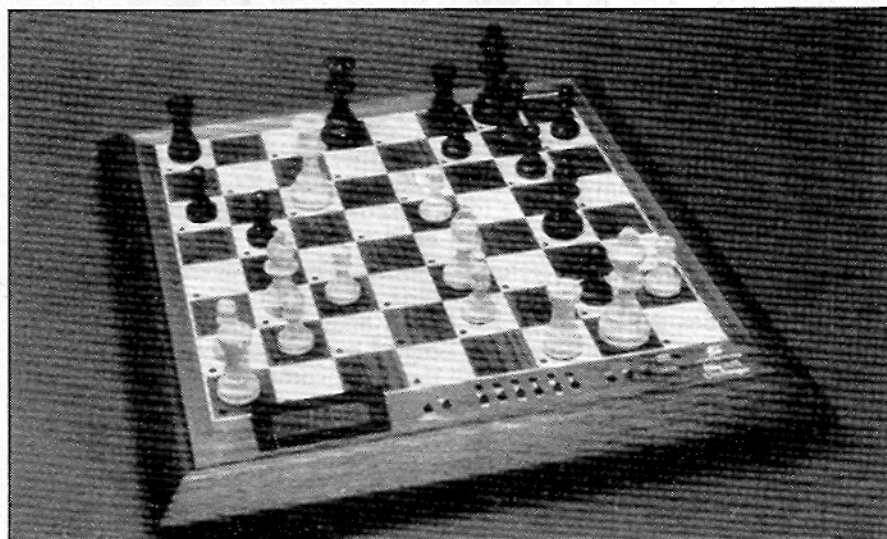
I have not yet had the opportunity to explore the Super Constellation, but I have, however, had Fidelity's Budapest program on trial for the last few weeks. Very impressive it is, too.

The Fidelity Elite Budapest program is a very expensive piece of equipment, costing nearly £600. It's a fine, auto-sensory wooden board and pieces with a manual comprising more than 50 pages!

But for those who don't have that sort of money, hang on for a bit. Fidelity will be launching the Sensory 12, priced at £295, in September, which will have the same program as the Elite (Budapest), and most of the features (though it will be a sensor board, not an auto-sensory board — in other words, touch-sensitive, and not automatically activated by magnets in the base of the pieces).

I was unable to establish whether or not it will have the Elite's glorious Blitz chess capability. It certainly won't have the full Blitz feature, since the little LCD display on the Elite, which, in Blitz games, shows the clocks for both players, is not on the Sensory 12.

The month of September will also see the release of Fidelity's Elegance Chess Challenger, the Fidelity Experimental. The Elegance will, however, have a removable EPROM program, so users will always be able to have the latest



The Fidelity Elite isn't cheap but it's worth its weight in gold for Blitz chess

'experimental' program.

For anyone under county strength who is keen on Blitz chess, the Elite AS (Budapest) is worth its weight in gold. Games are decided on time as well as on over the board play. The program has a very sure grasp of positional and tactical play and its blunders are as rare as they are surprising; but *when* they come, the blunders look as grotesque as any oversight made by a player. In complex mid-game positions, playing almost instantly under Blitz conditions it repeatedly found interesting attacking moves. In defence, it was resourceful. See the Blitz games (1 and 2) for evidence of its style in attack and defence.

My major criticism is that despite the pseudo sophistication of a voice chip, which computer speaks its way right through the game — even at Blitz chess — Fidelity is still sticking with a ludicrously complicated method of communication between user and processor.

Firstly, there are twelve little pins which form a sort of keyboard. You have to press the extreme left-hand pin,

labelled 'game control', pick up and put down Black's Queen, which lights the LCD at d8, then press the pin marked 'cl' for 'clear'. This clears out the memory and sets all the values to zero ready for a new game. It has to be done each time you want to play a new game. To get to Blitz mode there is another rigmarole to be gone through. Pressing the 'lv' pin, ('level') gets you into 'level-setting mode'; picking up the pawn on b2 and replacing it lights the LCD on that square and causes 'HO:05' to come up on the LCD display screen. This is your Blitz clock time.

It is adjusted by repeated pressings of the 'lv' key to add minutes to the time, the 'tb' ('take-back') key to add 10 minute chunks and the 'st' (time control/position score/level setting') pin to add one to nine hours to the clock. After all this, you are still not finished. There still remains the specifying of the computer's clock time, which is independently set. Picking up the pawn on b2 and replacing it once more changes the display to CO:00 and the pin pushing has to begin again to set this clock.

The process, once understood, is quickenough. It also has the great merit of allowing you to set the two clocks independently. This is useful not just for 'time-handicapping' but for strict fairness since, like all chess computers, the Elite 'steals' a little of its opponent's time during the piece moving operation—and in Blitz chess a half a minute or so over a whole game can often be the decisive factor.

But I am against the business of POKEing values into the processor by a whole host of complicated board-and-keystroke combinations. For a start it makes the process of learning to use all the functions available on the Elite AS unnecessarily complicated. And for a second, at that price I see no reason why a decent set of symbolic keys couldn't be provided for one-touch implementation of all the functions.

I would also have expected one or two additional functions to be present in such an expensive machine. It is perfectly possible to step back, move by move, all the way to the beginning of a game, but there is no facility for stepping forward. There is no 'replay' key, possessed by even the crudest home computer chess programs, which will automatically replay the game, move by move, from the beginning.

The voice chip is an unnecessary extra which can be irritating or endearing, depending on your mood.

Those are the grumbles. But on the positive side, the Elite AS (Budapest) program (not to be confused with the

ordinary AS program which predates Budapest and is definitely weaker) must, with the possible exception of the Super Constellation, be the best thing on the market at the moment.

Game No 2: Player versus Fidelity. Game time limit: five minutes each (Blitz chess). This time the Elite opts for a weak defensive line and pays the price.

1	e2e4	c7c5	12	b2xc3	Nh6f5
2	Ng1f3	Nb8c6	13	e4xf5	Bd7xf5
3	d2d4	c5xd4	14	O-O	e7e5
4	Nf3xd4	g7g6	15	Rf1d1	e5e4
5	c2c4	Bf8g7	16	Nf3d4	Nc6e7
6	Nd4f3	Ng8h6	17	Nd4b5	Ne7c8
7	Nb1c3	d7d5	18	Be3d4	a7a6?
8	Bf1e2	O-O	19	Bd4f6	a6xb5
9	h2h3	Bc8d7	20	Qd2h6	Bf5d7
10	Bc1e3	Qd8a5	21	Qh6g7	mate
11	Qd1d2	Bg7xc3		1-O	

Games section

The last two Micro Chess games have featured David Levy giving a superb demonstration of how to play against a computer (August & September issues).

This month's game is a sort of 'computer's revenge'. The Super Constellation is playing Black against five-times US Women's Champion Diane Savereide. Unlike David Levy, Diane entered into an ultra-sharp and highly theoretical opening variation. At the crucial moment she adopted a faulty continuation of the attack, easy to do in a very complex position. The Constellation took over the initiative and pressed its advantage home in ruthless fashion. Although the human played into the computer's hands by her choice of opening, this is nevertheless one of the most impressive games I have ever seen by a commercial machine.

White: D Savereide. Black: Super Constellation. (Level 7). Notes by Grandmaster Dr John Nunn

1	e2-e4	c7-c5
2	Ng1-f3	d7-d6
3	d2-d4	c5xd4
4	Nf3xd4	Ng8-f6
5	Nb1-c3	a7-a6
6	Bf1-c4	e7-e6
7	Bc4-b3	b7-b5
8	O-O	Bf8-e7
9	f2-f4	Bc8-b7
10	e4-e5	d6xe5
11	f4xe5	

(In this opening White stakes everything on a quick attack. If the assault founders White stands to lose the ending because of the weak pawn at e5.)

11	... Be7-c5
12	Bc1-e3 Nf6-d7

(The first new move of the game. 12... Nb8-c6 and 12... Bc5xd4 are the accepted alternatives, but the Constellation strikes out on new paths.)

13	Qd1-h5
14	Qd1-g4

(All that is new is not necessarily good, and here White missed the chance to play 13 Rf1xf7! Ke8xf7 14 Qd1-g4. The only reasonable defence is

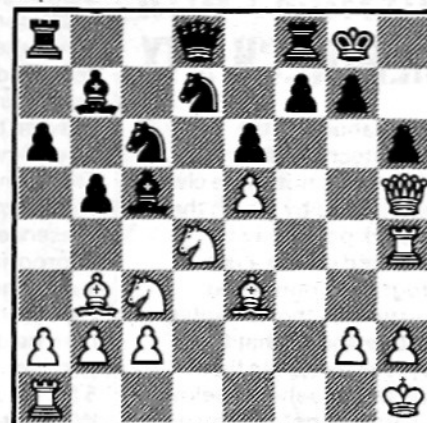
14... Qd8-b6, but then 15 Kg1-h1! gives White a tremendous attack for the sacrificed rook. After 15... Bc5xd4 16 Be3xd4 Qb6-c6, for example, 17 Nc3-e4 leaves Black in dire straits.)

13	... 0-0
14	Rf1-f4?

(This move is a serious error. White should have played 14 Kg1-h1 Nb8-c6 (14... Qd8-b6 is met by 15 Rf1-f4, since the queen has given up the chance to move to g5 as in the game) 15 Be3-g5 Bc5-e7 (after other moves Black is crushed by the sacrifice Nd4xe6) 16 Nd4-f3 with dangerous threats on the kingside.)

14	... Nb8-c6
15	Rf4-h4 h7-h6
16	Kg1-h1

(After this Black demonstrates a forced win, but there was no real improvement.)



16	... Bc5xd4
17	Be3xd4 Qd8-g5!

(A profound move. I commented earlier that an end game would favour Black and this move, which forces the exchange of queens, isn't easy for a machine to find.)

18	Qh5xg5 h6xg5
19	Rh4-g4 Nc6xd4
20	Rg4xd4 Nd7xe5

(White can regain the lost pawn, but only at the cost of allowing Black to develop a powerful counter attack.)

21	Ra1-e1 Ne5-g6
22	Rd4-g4 Ra8-d8
23	Rg4xg5 Ng6-f4

(The relative activity of the two bishops is the key to the position. White's cannot move, while Black's exerts terrible pressure against g2. Already 24... Rd8-d2 is threatened.)

24	Re1-f1 Nf4xg2!
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(This little combination finishes the game.)

25	Rg5xg2 Rd8-d2
26	Rf1-g1 Rf8-d8

(White cannot meet the threat of 27... Rd2xg2 28 Rg1xg2 Rd8-d2.)

27	Bb3-d5 Rd8xd5
28	Rg2xg7+

(After 28 Nc3xd5 Bb7xd5 White is utterly paralysed.)

28	... Kg8-f8
29	Rg7-g8+ Kf8-e7
30	Rg1-g3 Rd5-e5+

31 Resigns

(White is mated in two more moves.)

END

Game No 1: player versus Fidelity Elite AS (Budapest). Game time limit: five minutes (Blitz chess)

1	e2e4	e7e5	37	Rb2b5	Re6d6
2	Ng1f3	Nb8c6	38	h3h4	Rd6c6
3	Bf1b5	a7a6	39	h4h5	Rc6d6
4	Bb5a4	Ng8f6	40	Kg2h3	h7h6
5	O-O	Nf6xe4	41	Kh3g4	Rd6d4
6	Rf1e1	f5f7	42	Rb5xb6	Rd4xa4
7	Ba4xc6	d7xc6	43	Kg4f5	Ra4b4
8	d2d3	Ne4f6	44	Rb6a6	Rb4b5+
9	Nf3xe5	Bf8e7	45	Kf5xf4	Rb5xh5
10	c2c3	O-O	46	Kf4g4	Rh5d5
11	Nb1d2	f5f4	47	f3f4	h6h5+
12	h2h3	Nf6d5	48	Kg4g3	Rd5c5
13	Nd2f3	a6a5	49	f2f3	Kg8f7
14	a2a4	c6c5	50	Kg3h4	g7g6
15	d3d4	c5xd4	51	Kh4g3	Rc5d5
16	c3xd4	Ra8a6	52	Kg3h4	Rd5b5
17	Bc1d2	Bc8f5	53	Kh4g3	Rb5c5
18	Bd2c3	Nd5xc3	54	Kg3h4	Rb5d5
19	b2xc3	Qd8d5	55	Kh4g3	Rd5f5
20	c3c4	Qd5d8	56	Ra6c6	Rf5f6
21	c4c5	Qd8d5	57	Rc6c5	Rf6a6
22	Qd1d2	Bf5e4	58	f4f5	a5a4
23	Qd2a2	Qd5xa2	59	f5xg6+	Kf7xg6
24	Ra1xa2	Be4d5	60	Rc5c2	a4a3
25	Ra2b2	Ra6e6	61	Rc2a2	Ra6a5
26	Rb2e2	Rf8e8	62	Kg3f4	h5h4
27	Nf3d2	Be7f6	63	Kf4g4	Ra5a4+
28	Nd2f3	Bd5c6	64	Kg4h3	Kg6f5
29	Re2a2	Bc6xf3	65	f3f4	Kf5xf4
30	g2xf3	Bf6xe5	66	Kh3xh4	Kf4e5(+)
31	Re1xe5	Re6xe5	67	Kh4g3	Ke5d4
32	d4xe5	Re8xe5	68	Kg3f3	Kd4c3
33	Ra2c2	Re5e1+	69	Kf3e3	Kc3b3
34	Kg1g2	Re1e6	70	Resigns	
35	Rc2b2	b7b6		O-1	
36	c5xb6	c7xb6			