

# *Collecting Chess Computers... Passion or Madness? Let's settle for a healthy mix of both!*

*\*\*\* by Rob van Son \*\*\**

Why do people collect all sorts of things? This question cannot be answered easily and in turn calls up other questions. Is it a longing for things passed? A longing not to want to lose the things you are familiar with in this fast-dynamic world? Or do people want to leave something to confront later generations with something that was?



**Chess computer collector Karsten Bauermeister shows his huge and impressive collection at the attic of his mother's house in Münster during the visit of Hein Veldhuis and Rob van Son on the 23rd of August 2003.**

*(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)*

A few years ago (25 June 2000), Hein and I went to see the German chess computer collector Manfred Vellmer and he showed us his extensive collection from times past. But there is always larger than large! Last year we saw the collection of chess computer expert Karsten Bauermeister in Münster (Germany) and his collection is a veritable chess computer museum.

### *Rating expressed in promille*

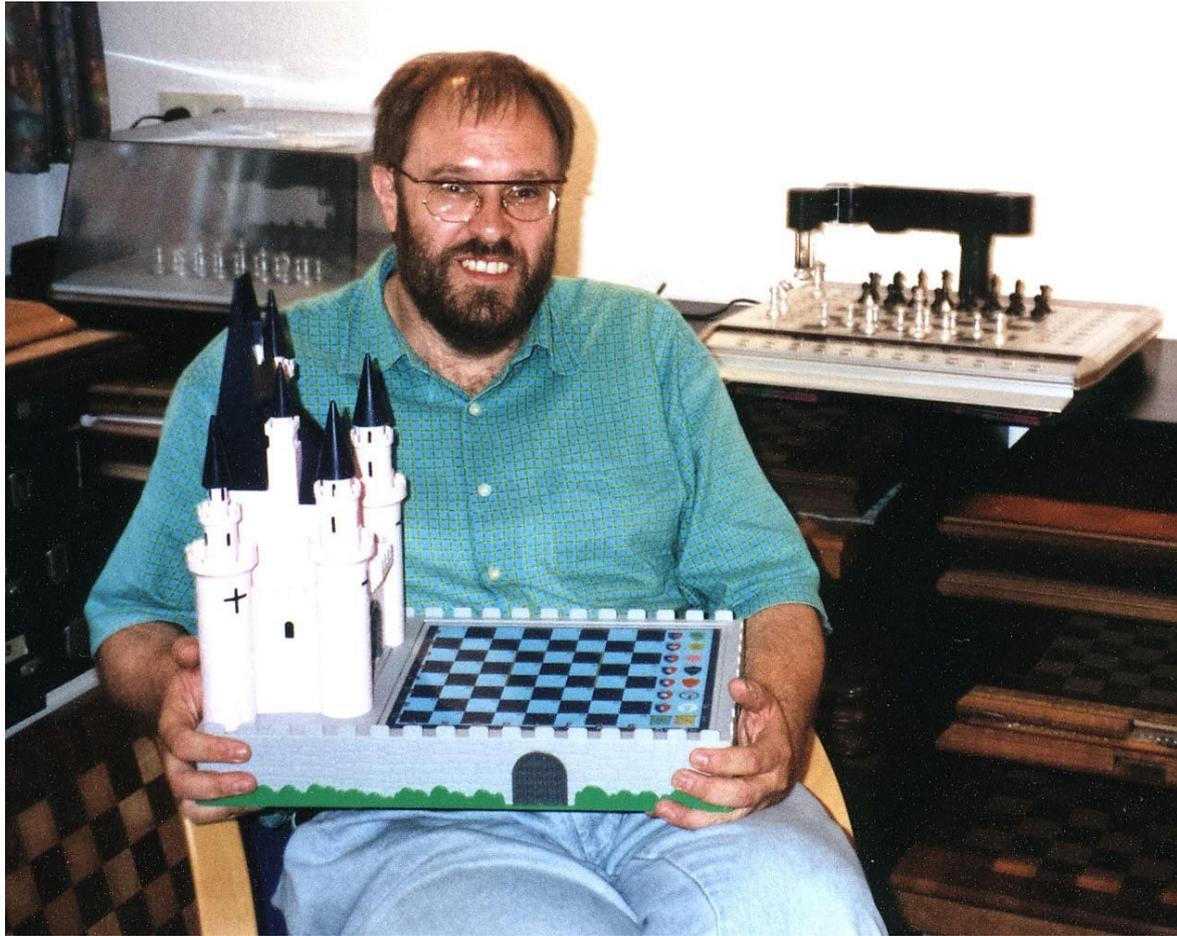
On September 4, 2004, I met Manfred Vellmer and Karsten Bauermeister at Hein's place in Tilburg. I was hoping that this meeting would allow me to have a better look into the world of thought of these great collectors of chess computers. Like many others before him, Manfred learned the first principles of chess from his father and Karsten was made familiar with the royal game by his mother. But Manfred's chess career lasted only a few years and was continued in the pub nearest to the university where he was a student. So, by his own words, his rating at the time could be better expressed in promille than in elo-points. Karsten learned to play chess in 1981 when he was twelve years old and in the same year joined a chess club. He turned out to be a talented player and in the eighties was twice junior champion of Münster. He finally attained an elo-rating of about 1880 and continued playing for his club until the early nineties. After that he stopped playing club chess.



In the Netherlands, historian and collector Hein Veldhuis, although with a smaller collection than Karsten and Manfred, has a miniature museum. Part of his splendid historical machines is on display in a nicely fitted and illuminated showcase, bringing as it were back to life in the glory of old times.

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

Both men did not immediately start out as collectors. In 1981, Manfred bought the Mephisto 1 Brikett, a small black computer. In the following two years two stronger modules of this computer came out, the Mephisto 2 & 3, which could be connected with a special cable to the Mephisto ESB (Electronic Schachbrett) 3000 and 6000 boards. Manfred wanted to increase his playing power with these machines. In 1982, Karsten got the SciSys (Scientific Systems, later Saitek) Mark V chess computer from his mother as a birthday gift.



Manfred Vellmer with his very special Novag Disney Magic Castle, manufactured in 1988 and intended for children 6 years and older. You can play no less than four games with the computer: Chess, Checkers, Tic-Tac-Toe, and Bingo. The chess pieces depict Walt Disney characters and consisted of the red Mickey Mouse team (white) and the blue Donald Duck team (black). In the picture, both teams are hiding in the castle!

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *Fidelity X & SciSys Mark V both winners in Travemünde*

In September 1981 the '2nd World Microcomputer Chess Championship' was held in the German city of Travemünde. The participating computers were divided into two groups, a commercial and an experimental. The Mark V became champion of the commercial group and the Fidelity X (experimental) was the winner of the experimental group. So, there were actually two world champions! In a decisive one-on-one contest, the Fidelity X played three games against the Mark V and won them all. In the end it was decided not to award the winner another, separate, title.



### *Dirt-cheap Chess Challengers*

Like Manfred, Karsten wanted to become stronger by practicing a lot with his chess computer. In the early eighties he did not have any collector ambitions yet and the main thing for him was the ready availability of an opponent he enjoyed playing with. Soon he mastered Mark V. Two years later he got the Fidelity Elite A/S Budapest as a birthday gift and shortly after a Novag Super Constellation. Karsten was not interested in the early chess computers; the Chess Challengers from the seventies played too weak and therefore of not interest to him. He preferred to have only the strongest playing chess computers. Manfred, 15 years older than Karsten, stopped playing chess after his study, but his love for chess computers kept on growing.



There is a 1983 booklet by Martin Gittel, who died in 1989, and he wrote that the Mark V should not have been announced as the World Champion: "Because according to the tournament rules only the winner of the decisive match is allowed to call itself the World Champion, and that's the Fidelity X." Anyway, after the tournament everybody announced the Mark V as World Champion because it had won the commercial section, and this was clearly shown on its box when it was released for sale.

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In 1984, Manfred bought a Conchess Ambassador, not only because he liked the looks of it but also because it was technically solid. At that time the old Fidelity Chess Challengers of the late seventies became dirt-cheap. He bought a large number of these first-generation chess computers. From the many price cuts on these models in the eighties it was evident that at first exorbitant profits were made on these computers. Manfred has for example a Voice Chess Challenger from 1979 with a price-sticker showing a price which has been crossed out and replaced by a lower one three times. In 1979 you could buy a 'Voice' for 798 marks (408 euros) in Germany and after three price reductions you could buy the same machine in 1984 for 50 Mark! Manfred laughs: "I almost paid the kilo price for the old Fidelity's." This in particular was a stimulant for him to start collecting chess computers.

In 1992 Karsten had 16 chess computers in his possession which he mainly used to train against frequently or to play against just for fun. It is true that his mother gave him a couple of computers in the eighties, but he also bought some himself at the local department store, often at a reduced price. Models made of synthetic materials that were affordable for him as student, like the Mephisto MM IV, the CXG Sphinx Dominator, the Super Enterprise, and the Fidelity Mach II.

### *Computer chess magazine*

In the early nineties Karsten released a computer chess magazine (Schachcomputerwelt mit Thorsten Czub) which apart from many interesting topics also listed his telephone number. Manfred called him to let him know he had a large collection of chess computers. Karsten thought: "How is that possible? What you do with chess computers is play against them to make you stronger. But collecting them?" Shortly after Manfred invited him to his house to look at his collection which had now grown to contain 60 machines.



**Karsten could hardly sleep when he got the chance to buy a real Novag Robot Adversary!**

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *Karsten discovers the chess robot at Manfred's home*

Karsten was very much impressed and also noted a couple of chess robots of which one was able to move the pieces with a special gripping-arm. It was the Novag Robot Adversary. Karsten: "I wasn't that much impressed by the playing-strength of those chess computers, but I very much enjoyed playing a game against a chess robot. Admiring Manfred's beautiful collection and playing against a chess robot actually increased my interest in chess computers. After this visit I saw an advertisement offering a used chess computer that could execute its moves by itself. I immediately thought of a chess robot of course and because the seller lived about 100 kilometres from Münster, I could hardly sleep from excitement and immediately phoned him the following day. The robot had not been sold yet and I immediately set off for the drive. And sure enough there was a Novag Robot Adversary and for 400 German marks I could transport it home on the back seat of my car. This actually took me 5 hours because it was the heart of winter and a thick pack of snow had fallen that day. I had acquired a particularly beautiful chess robot and I figured I could have some more. From that moment on I became a collector."



In the 1980s, Foto Witteman sold not only cameras and film rolls, but also an extensive range of luxury chess computers.

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### *Foto Witteman*

In the eighties Manfred did good business in Amsterdam for the development of his collection. In the CSVN magazine 'Computerschaak' he read an advertisement of Foto Witteman, at the time situated at the Gerrit van der Veenstraat in Amsterdam. In addition to photo-cameras and roll-films Witteman also sold chess computers. After a telephone contact Manfred later visited the shop: "Mister Witteman told me that there were a lot of American sailors coming into Amsterdam who regularly played their Fidelity chess computers during their trip. Yet they would squander so much money that they sold him their chess computers to come by money again. Mister Witteman and I developed a good contact and he sent me a couple of times a year a card announcing he had acquired some beautiful Fidelity machines. One day, it was around 1990, I again received a card like that but now he announced that he had a chess robot in his shop. Some days later I bought the rare Novag Robot Adversary for only 600 guilders (272 euros)!"

On January 21, 2006 your author visited Piet Witteman at his home, and he told me that he bought the robot from 'Electronics Nederland' in Amsterdam for only 300 guilders. The robot was manufactured in 1982 and already eight years old. Maybe he regretted this later, because a true collector nowadays pays a fourfold of this amount or even more for such an exclusive chess robot. Perhaps he also regretted that he did not sell the robot to his friend and tester Luuk Hofman! Luckily collector Hein Veldhuis is in possession of a Novag Robot Adversary.

*Many advertisements of Foto Witteman from the 1980s began with the following text...*

## **WITTEMAN specialist in CHESS COMPUTERS**

**Gerrit van der Veenstraat 65/corner Beethovenstraat – Amsterdam  
Phone 020-628... – For telephone appointments also in the evening.**



Foto Witteman sold the latest models including the winners of Travemünde, the Chess Champion Mark V and the Fidelity Elite Champion Sensory Chess Challenger, as you can see on this picture taken in 1982.

(photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

In my interview with collector Luuk Hofman (Selective Search 160, June/July 2012), he told me how he came into contact with Piet Witteman: "In the first half of the eighties, I was working as assistance officer at the municipal Social Services, the forerunner of the current division Work and Income. Gradually I discovered that Merkelbach was not the only company that was selling chess computers. During lunchtime, I walked in the Beethovenstraat in the southern part of Amsterdam, near my workplace. Suddenly I saw a Fidelity Voice Chess Challenger in a shop window called 'Foto Witteman'. I directly went inside and showed my interest to the owner of the shop, Piet Witteman.



Piet Witteman, owner of Foto Witteman at his home on 21st of January 2006. Piet, then already 78 years old sold his shop in 1992. However, when I visited him, he was still living above his former business. He told me how it all started with the selling of chess computers: "Around 1978, a Chinese friend of me visited the shop with a chess computer, a Fidelity Chess Challenger 3. I was immediately obsessed with this chess miracle and he let me borrow the computer. I was supposed to give it back after a while, but in the end, my Chinese friend told me that I could keep the Chess Challenger. This was the trigger for me to add this new product to the assortment."

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

He had the same fascination for chess I have. We both played not so strong but were deeply impressed by the first chess computers that could now reach a large audience. Because of our good contact, Piet asked me if I would like to test new chess computers for him. Every time when a new shipment arrived, he called me and asked me to test the new electronic harvest. We had a number of test positions that the computers had to solve in a certain time. Usually they managed it, but not always, as we saw with the Rebel 5.0 module. Piet's store in Photographic products changed in the mid-eighties into a shop specialized in the sale of chess computers. The cameras and film rolls disappeared into the background."



Luuk Hofman bought his first chess computer already in 1978! In the eighties he often went to Foto Witteman. First as a customer to admire the beautiful chess computers, but later as a tester of the latest models before they went on sale. He also accompanied the owner of the business, Piet Witteman, to the importers Wegam Trading in Amstelveen and Electronics Netherlands in Amsterdam to make purchases. In the picture Luuk proudly shows his display case, filled with the most beautiful chess computers. He has no less than three units of the world's first commercial chess computer, the Chess Challenger 1 with the swapped board coordinates!

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



HOFLEVERANCIER

Hofleverancier

# MERKELBACH SPEELGOED B.V.

KALVERSTRAAT 30  
1012 PD AMSTERDAM TEL. 020-249572 of 246992



Shop window Merkelspeelgoed Warehouse – Damrak 89 – Amsterdam / 1929

The history of the Merkelspeelgoed family goes back several centuries. In 1845, they already had a drug-store and trade in yarn & textile in Amsterdam. Later, their interest shifted more towards photography and all kinds of nouveau toys. In 1911, Merkelspeelgoed settled at Kalverstraat 30. The emphasis shifted more and more to the sale of electronic toys, such as model trains. In 1979, the first advertisement appeared in which chess computers were offered for sale. Merkelspeelgoed had its own service department and was able to replace the old program module of certain brands of chess computers with a new and more powerful one.

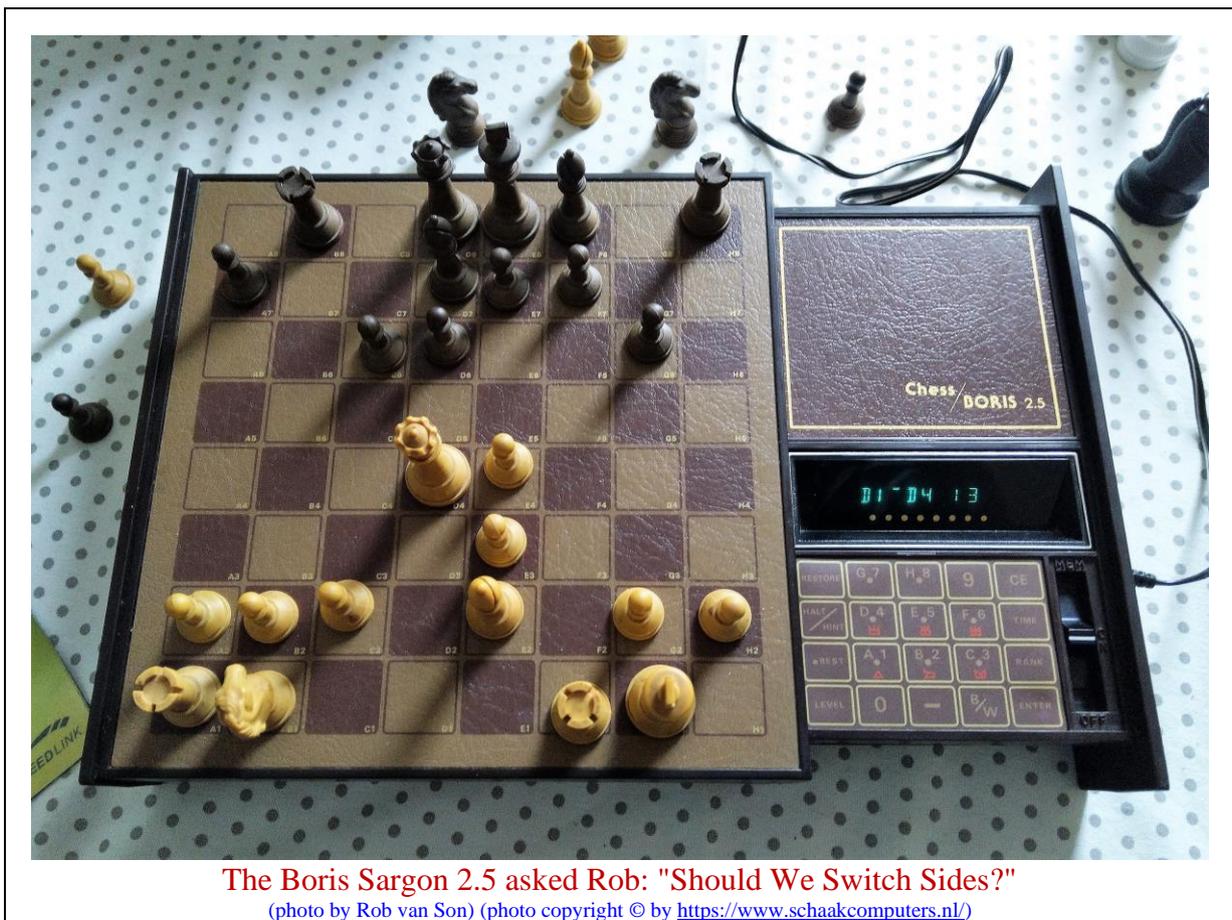
(photo by Atelier J. Merkelspeelgoed / Stadsarchief Amsterdam) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

Hein Veldhuis: "I visited Merkelspeelgoed in 1986. It made an overwhelming impression on me because the store had a very special atmosphere due to the sophisticated presentation of the chess computers and other goods on display. I bought nothing because my budget didn't allow it. You walked through that shop as if you were in a dream. You wanted to touch everything, but that was strictly forbidden! Just to look and be amazed was the only option."



### *Rob plays against the Sargon in Merkelbach's shop!*

At the time, your author got excited by the news of the Sargon 2.5 MGS. In the last quarter of 1979 several rumors circulated in the Dutch chess world about a very strong playing chess computer that would be on sale soon. The computer was even said to once have played a draw against a Grandmaster! Early 1980 I was about to spend all my savings on a Voice Chess Challenger (999 guilders, € 453), but after reading an article in the Dutch chess magazine "Schaak Bulletin" titled "The Micros" (March 1980 of the Dutch writer Tim Krabbé), I decided to wait with the purchase. What also kept me from buying was my experience with the predecessor of the Voice, the Chess Challenger 10, which was very easy to defeat. In 1981, I went with a friend to Merkelbach in Amsterdam, being still very interested in the new Sargon. But I first wanted to test its playing strength by testing it in the store.



**The Boris Sargon 2.5 asked Rob: "Should We Switch Sides?"**

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

The salesman of Merkelbach put the computer on a table in front of me and set it at a level where the Sargon doesn't think too long about its reply. The salesman apparently expected me to be swept off the board, after which I immediately would pull my wallet to get this supercomputer in my possession. I started to play, the salesman and my friend watched intently. Shortly after the opening, Sargon played some weak moves. My position on the board became quickly much better and I even was able to win some material. Sargon responded by rolling his lyrics, very fitting for his losing position: "May I Cheat" or "Should We Switch Sides?" I heard the salesman swallow and noticed his cheeks turning red. He obviously thought, 'there goes my sales...' I was proud I won the game, but also somewhat disappointed because I really had wanted to buy the computer. As it was, I no longer dared, especially considering it had a price tag of 1500 guilders (€ 681). Still, it's nice to know that today I am in possession of three Voice Chess Challengers and a Sargon 2.5 MGS. Moreover, I paid far less for them!

### *Manfred Vellmer comes into possession of an extremely rare chess computer table!*

The collapse of the GDR (German Democratic Republic), at the end of the eighties, also caused a unique chess computer to be added to his collection. Manfred: "It was a splendid chess table with the 'Chess-Master' built in. Through a chess-friend who sold goods he had bought up in 1990 from the former GDR to interested parties in Germany, I obtained this special chess-table. It came from the East-German company VEB (Volkseigener Betrieb) Mikroelektronik Karl Marx Erfurt." Later in the nineties Manfred discovered by internet contact with a former employee of this company that only ten of these chess computer-tables had been made and that they were all given to the leaders of the communists countries as state gifts. Manfred: "I don't know for sure if it's true, but the man revealed that at least one machine had been given to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and one to the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro."



Manfred is the proud owner of a splendid chess table that houses the program Chess-Master.

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *The Gerhard Piel museum*

At the end of the nineties Manfred was able to expand his collection with another 120 computers because the German chess computer expert Gerhard Piel sold his entire museum collection to Manfred. Gerhard Piel was the man who, amongst other things, in the eighties founded the magazine 'Schachcomputer' and had a chess computer museum in the cellar of his house in Hamburg, which was visited by many interested parties (even school classes). In 1998 he suddenly wanted to sell his entire collection because he no longer took pleasure in it. The 'drive' was gone, as he said. He contacted Karsten, who has been working for the German periodical 'Computer-Schach und Spiele' since 1993 and already has many articles on historical chess computers to his name. Karsten wrote a short item about it and Manfred, after contacting Gerhard, could transport his newly acquired computers home a few days later. Because of the 120 machines from Gerhard Piel he now had 118 doubles, but since then he has been able to trade some of these doubles against chess computers he did not have yet. The other machines were integrated into his own collection. When I asked him why he had bought up this collection knowing it contained so many computers he already had, he still didn't have an answer. This is where we enter the psychological sphere he said.

### *World Championship Computer Chess Travemünde*

In 1981 Gerhard Piel was the organiser of the world championship computer chess in Travemünde. The two winners of this championship, the Mark V and the Fidelity X were in Piel's collection that Manfred could add to his own collection by this takeover. The original Mark V has a light olive-green case as opposed to the models used in serial-production, which have a grey colour. The original machine has a sticker inside with the text: "Swiss embassy." Manfred told me that the big boss of Novag, Peter Auge, had organised this Mark V to be brought especially by car from Switzerland to Travemünde during a nocturnal action. The other champion, the Fidelity X, is characterized by a 5-millimetre-thick iron plate which has been bitted underneath the machine. This experimental version of Fidelity was later put on the market by the name 'Fidelity Elite Champion Sensory Chess Challenger.' Only 500 pieces were made of this machine and were sold for the not too modest price of 4,000 German marks.



### *Collecting chess computers via eBay*

At the beginning of this century a new phenomenon occurred enabling Karsten and Manfred to expand their collections even faster, namely the auction house eBay on the internet! Many old, but also new chess computers in all possible varieties are on offer here. Cheap models of synthetic material as well as beautiful expensive chess models equipped with fancy wooden Mephisto chess boards and read contacts. An ideal way to set up a collection the fast way, wouldn't you think, or perhaps not after all?

Karsten: "Before I started buying chess computers through eBay I had collected almost 200 machines, but since 2001 I have bought 450 chess computers in a good three years time. I now already have almost 700."



A wall full of beautiful lux lined chess computers, and this is only a part of Karsten's collection!

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *The thrill and excitement of hunting chess computers*

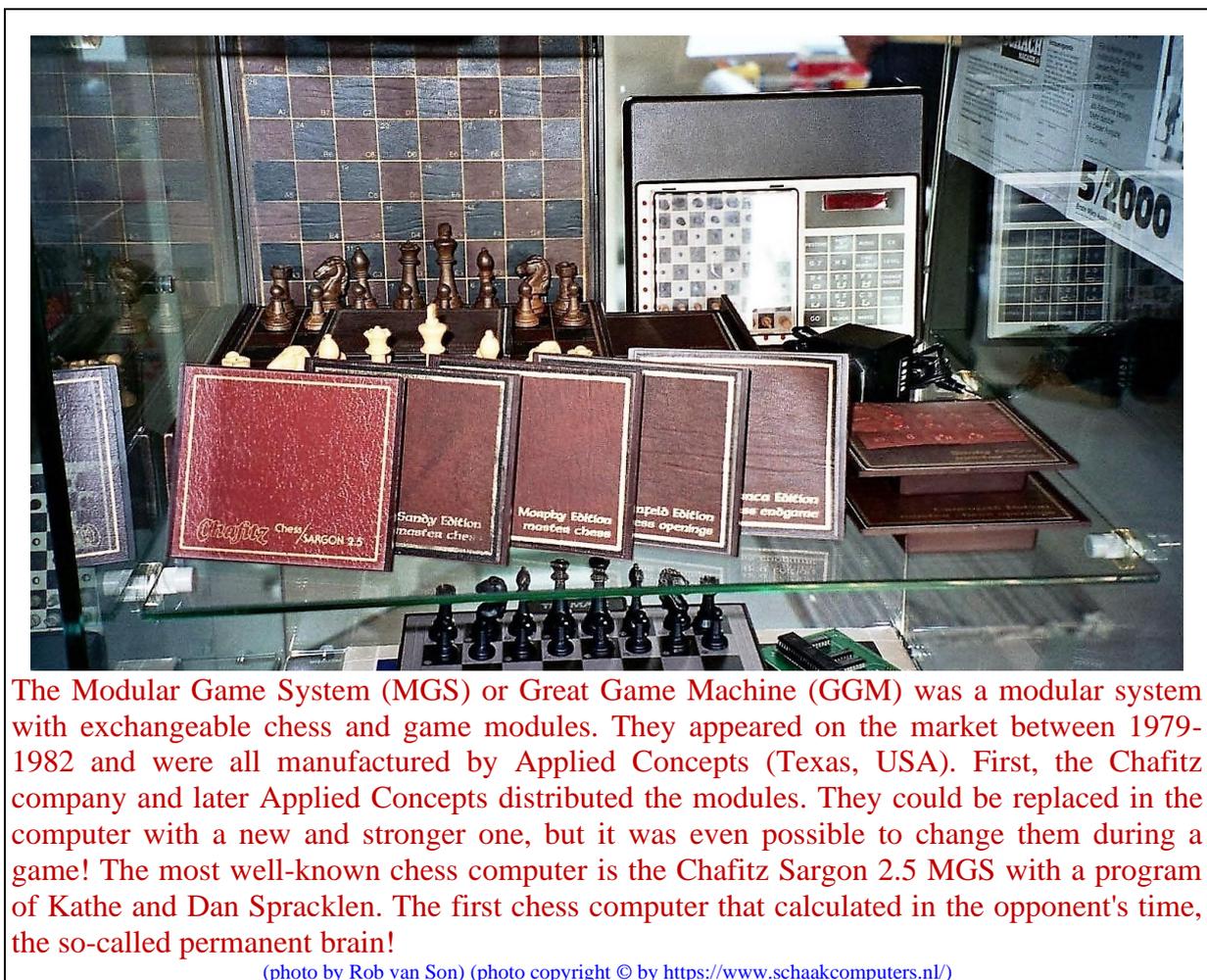
Karsten: "The chief motivation of a collector is the search for a specific model that is not yet in his collection. In the nineties you would look in all kinds of magazines in search of people that wanted to dispose of chess computers by means of an advertisement. You would phone them and drive over to buy the machine. The search for advertisements and picking up a chess computer in itself provided an enormous kick. The excitement is mainly in the hunt for a computer and not so much in the possession of it. The big advantage of eBay is of course that you can almost totally complete your collection in a very short time. But the disadvantage is that it's so easy, making the thrill and excitement of collecting disappear. You no longer have to go through a lot of trouble, which tends to take away part of the fun."

Before the emergence of internet and eBay Manfred already had over 400 chess computers and did not want to expand his collection much further. All he is interested in now are a few specific models which however are not easy to obtain through the internet.

### *The Karsten Bauermeister chess computer museum*

Two years ago (2003), Karsten opened a wonderful chess computer museum at the attic of his mother's house in Münster. People who are interested are always welcome, but only after having made an appointment. Hein Veldhuis and I already took a look there and we were very impressed.

It is safe to say that almost all models that have been manufactured between 1977 and 1997 are on display in this museum. Among others the first Fidelity Chess Challenger with the switched numbers and letters, of which – as Shane Samole, son of Fidelity-founder Sid, told Karsten – only a 1000 were made. This statement still gives rise to further discussion about the scarceness of this computer however. Karsten did for instance a little research to see if there was a relationship between the serial numbers of the machines owned by collectors. He sent them an appeal through the internet and received 15 different serial numbers. Some of the machines had a number between 3000 and 30000. Together with Ingo Althöfer (a math professor) he analysed these numbers to see if they could discover any logic in them. Unfortunately, they couldn't. So Karsten sticks to the number of 1000 manufactured machines mentioned by Shane Samole.



The Modular Game System (MGS) or Great Game Machine (GGM) was a modular system with exchangeable chess and game modules. They appeared on the market between 1979-1982 and were all manufactured by Applied Concepts (Texas, USA). First, the Chafitz company and later Applied Concepts distributed the modules. They could be replaced in the computer with a new and stronger one, but it was even possible to change them during a game! The most well-known chess computer is the Chafitz Sargon 2.5 MGS with a program of Kathe and Dan Spracklen. The first chess computer that calculated in the opponent's time, the so-called permanent brain!

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

All other Chess Challengers can be admired in all their glory here, same as many other splendid designs of Fidelity, like the Fidelity Elite Avant Garde version 10 with the then very expensive Motorola 68040 processor for which you could buy a new car for the same money! The former Fidelity-importer for the Benelux, Tom Fürstenberg, provided his friend and ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov with an Elite version 10 during his World Champion-match in 1990 against Garry Kasparov, as an electronic second for the opening preparations and analyses.



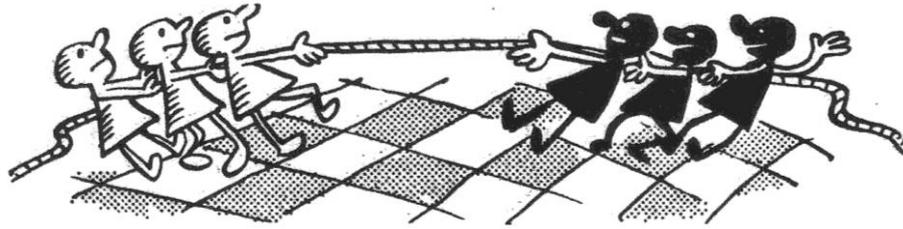
The most beautiful collector-items are shown in Karsten's chess computer museum!  
(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



Three 1979 Master I chess computers from the Hong Kong Conic company. In fact they were modified clones of the American version of the DataCash CompuChess II travel chess computer.  
(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



A real chess computer collector can spend hours in Karsten's museum!  
(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



### *Mephisto chess modules*

As a matter of fact, the well-know brand Mephisto is also fully present. Rows of chess-modules connected to the matching wooden read-contacts boards stand displayed very neatly next to, on top of, and underneath each other on shelves. Among these are also all micro world-champions, like the Mephisto Excalibur from 1983, the first chess computer in the world with a Motorola 68000 processor, and the original Mephisto Vancouver which in 1991, together with Ed Schröder's program Gideon, won the world championship computer chess. This machine houses a Motorola 68030 with 8 Mb RAM.



Ten versions of one of the world's first travel chess computers, the Chess Champion Pocket Chess, jointly marketed by Novag & SciSys in 1980. Several other manufacturers also marketed this computer under their own names. Do you see the differences? On the photo you see, lying in front, a more modern version of this travel chess computer: "The SciSys Intercontinental Traveler", manufactured in 1982. The program came from programmer Mike Johnson, who worked for David Levy and Kevin O'Connell's company 'Intelligent Software', at the time based in London.

(photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

Many other brands can be admired at Karsten's in various showcases, just as a large collection of specialist literature. To convince yourself of the beauty and the perfect state of these machines are still in and to allow yourself to be carried back to the chess computer-world of old times, it would be better if you personally paid a visit to the museum one of these days.

### *Schach Niggemann*

The chess wholesale dealer Schach Niggemann in the German city of Heiden (in 2019, they moved to Münster) has 65 computers from Karsten on display (approximately around 2004). This is because Karsten worked at Niggemann from 1996 to 1999 and hence gave Niggemann the opportunity to furnish a small section of the store with historical chess computers, so that customers in addition to buying chess requisites can admire these machines. Naturally they are not for sale and may go back to Karsten's own museum in the near future if Niggemann needs more room for the sales department. One of these 65 computers is the Novag Robot Adversary. In his own museum Karsten has another eight chess robots which, although they do not have a gripping-arm, can move the chess pieces by means of special magnet-tapes and engines underneath the chessboard. Karsten has the last-produced chess robot of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Excalibur Mirage from 1997, not only in black, but also in marble!

### *Boris Handroid*

Unfortunately, there is one chess robot missing in the collections of Manfred and Karsten, the "Boris Handroid" of the American company Applied Concepts. This robot was first presented to the public in 1980 but was technically far from perfect and has therefore never been taken into production. We don't know where prototypes of this chess robot, fitted with a gripping-arm, can still be found or if they still exist at all. The only known specimen is in possession of Rolf Bühler, who lives in the Swiss town of Zurich. Collectors like Karsten and Manfred are willing to pay a substantial amount to add this robot to their collection, or if needed trade a Novag Robot Adversary for this purpose. But it doesn't look like Rolf will part with his Boris Handroid.



The only known Boris Handroid is in the possession of Rolf Bühler from Zurich (Swiss).

(photo by Rolf Bühler) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *Chess computer tournaments*

They don't want to participate in the CSVN-Gebruikers (User) tournament in Leiden or the DACH-tournament in Kaufbeuren because Karsten much prefers to participate in chess computer-tournaments using a fast PC equipped with one of the strongest chess-programs. He feels the playing-strength of the oldies is too weak to actually enjoy it and during a tournament he likes to see only the best chess which as it happens only the current top chess-programs can produce. Manfred likes coming together and talking with a couple of good friends who share the same hobby better than participating in a tournament.



The Milton Bradley Chess Robot (1983). This chess robot, also known as the father of the Phantoms, came from the Milton Bradley Company (USA). Because of its complicated construction this machine was technically speaking a spectacular sight at the time, but this also made the machine more susceptible to failures. The Milton was obtainable in two models; one is named Milton and was intended for the European market and the other Grandmaster, attuned to the USA. Other than its successors this machine does not have a display to read the moves from and has a weaker program (Intelligent Software, London). Karsten also has this robot in his collection, but the Milton robot on display belongs to Hein.

(With special thanks to the late Kurt Kispert) (photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



The Excalibur Electronics Company, founded in 1992 by Shane Samole, son of Fidelity-founder Sid, brought in 1997 the chess robot Mirage on the market, which on the outside doesn't look very much like the old Phantoms, but on the inside does have the same technique. Unfortunately, this machine is even more susceptible to trouble than its predecessors and because of that is no longer on the market. There are still some specialized stores that have a single specimen for sale. The program is from Ron Nelson and I expect that in the future this machine will also become a collector's item. The photo shows a marbled-coloured Mirage which belongs to Karsten's collection.

(With special thanks to the late Kurt Kispert) (photo by Rob van Son) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)



On 25 March 2004 the time had finally come. The Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum presented a replica of 'The Turk, Chess Automaton' to the public. Karsten was allowed to shake his hand, but the photo does not show whether he also played chess against the Turk ...!

(Photo by [https://www.chessprogramming.org/Karsten\\_Bauermeister](https://www.chessprogramming.org/Karsten_Bauermeister)) (photo copyright © by <https://www.schaakcomputers.nl/>)

### *Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum*

The biggest computer-museum in the world, the Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum in the German city of Paderborn ([www.hnf.de](http://www.hnf.de)), had a replica made of the first automated chess-machine in the world, the Turk. On 25 March 2004, the museum organised a demonstration-match with this machine. They now also have six historical chess computers from the early times of computer chess. Karsten says they contacted him at the time to buy some specific chess computers:

- The Fidelity Chess Challenger 1, because this is the very first chess computer in the world.
- The Fidelity Chess Challenger Voice, this is the first talking computer.
- The Fidelity Kishon Chesster because of the funny statements of mister E. Kishon.
- The Fidelity Phantom, a chess-robot that can move the pieces by itself.
- The Schachcomputer SC 2, originating from the former GDR.
- The Mephisto Modular, because at the time the technology in this computer was a big technical innovation.

With the exception of the Schachcomputer SC 2, Karsten sold the chess computers mentioned to the Nixdorf museum. When I asked him whether he would ever want to display his complete collection temporarily in the Nixdorf museum, he said that for the time being he had no need for that. His first interest is making his own museum more complete.

Collecting chess computers; passion or madness? Let's settle for a healthy mix of both!

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### *Rob van Son, September 2004, May 2021*

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