

GAMES

4TH
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ISSUE

CAN YOU FIND GAMES MAGAZINE ON THIS NEWSSTAND?
...and how many of the other magazines can you name?

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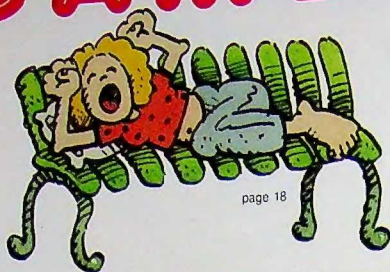
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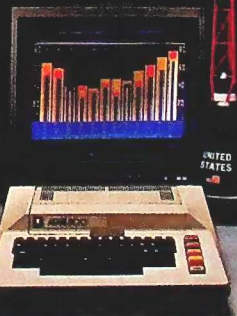
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Parleyvoo Pickens

How Not to Take Candy From a Child

The tracks of the Chicago & North Western pass not far from the nursing home where Parleyvoo Pickens, a century-old con artist, now lives. The rumble of a passing train a few evenings ago reminded Parleyvoo of a journey some 65 or 70 years back . . .

"Wanna buy a newspaper, mister? A book? An apple, maybe?"

The disturber of my reverie was a freckle-faced lad of perhaps eleven years of age. I was aboard the train from Cincinnati, bound for Chicago, where I would rejoin my partner, Buck Skinner.

"No thanks," I murmured, and closed my eyes again. But the lad was not to be deterred:

"How about a little box of candy, then?" Newspaper companies used to hire boys his age to peddle papers, refreshments, and knickknacks as a service to the railway passengers. They were simply known as train boys.

"No thanks," I repeated, and closed my eyes once more. But the little rascal persisted.

"Well, you look like a sporting sort of gentleman," quoth he. "What would you say to a sporting proposition?"

I opened one eye, half interested. "What manner of proposition might that be," I asked.

"Very simple, mister," the little urchin replied. And from the depths of his box of wares he produced three small candy boxes and three ten dollar bills. Both my eyes were now open.

"Very simple," he repeated. "I just fold these three tenspots together, like so. Then I slide open the drawer of one of these candy boxes, and place the thirty dollars therein. And then I slide the box shut so."

And, as the late Willie Shakespeare used to say, he suited the word to the action, the action to the word. He used no sleight of hand. There was no question but that the topmost of the stack of three boxes contained the money, as the little entrepreneur claimed.

These boxes, I should explain, each contained half a dozen pieces of cheap sucking candy. The box consisted of a colorful sleeve that encircled a sliding drawer, something like the boxes that trochees and wooden matches used to come in. These candies, as I recall, used to sell for a penny or two per box when I was a younger man.

"And now, mister," the lad continued, "I shuffle the three boxes to mix 'em up. See if you can keep your eye on the box that contains the thirty dollars. . . ."

And, having shuffled the boxes slowly enough for me to follow, the boy proffered the stack to me:

"There you are, mister. For only ten dollars you can purchase one of these little boxes of excellent candies, whichever one you choose. And if you are able to choose the right one, you will have three ten dollar bills besides."

I have to admit, I felt more than a bit ashamed as I fumbled for my billfold. It has never been my policy to swindle poor widows or children. But in this case, the game was a sure thing in my favor. The boy's shuffling of the boxes was a clumsy endeavor, to say the least. Moreover, the box that contained the money had somehow been bruised, so that a streak of white cardboard showed through the green ink. The box I wanted was the bottommost of the stack.

True, the boy had intruded upon my solitude and thrust this game upon me. But even so, I felt a pang of remorse as I handed him a tenspot and selected the bruised box. The boy snatched the bill from my hand, handed me the box, and loped down the car corridor in search of more passengers, i.e., suckers, to purchase his wares.

I opened my little candy box and found within six little pieces of candy. Nothing more.

How did the eleven-year-old boy fleece veteran con man Parleyvoo Pickens?

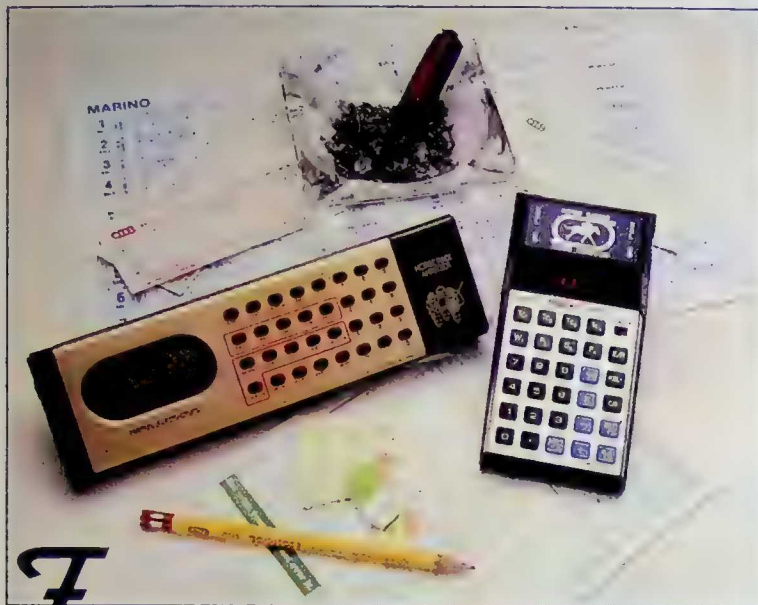
—Peter Van Note

Answer, page 44

A Day at the Races



by Jamie Adams



The Horse Race Analyzer (left) and the Kel-Co Class Computer (right) both picked more winners than their manufacturers' tests reported; but we found that turning those picks into profitable bets was a horse of a different color.

use Mattel's Horse Race Analyzer. Sporting a more computerlike look with its LCD display, the Mattel machine also has a much more complex program, requiring 30 pieces of information about each horse from the *Daily Racing Form*. After entering the post positions, races and earnings, performance in the last three races, and best recent times for each of the horses, the Horse Race Analyzer compares the data, rates the horses, and reports its four top ratings.

Unlike the Kel-Co Class Computer, Mattel's machine performs its entire handicapping procedure electronically. However, its betting recommendations are much less mechanical. The Class Computer instruction booklet contains strict rules on how to bet a race once all the handicapping procedures have been completed. The Horse Race Analyzer simply suggests that you choose from among the top four horses and offers potential modifications for its ratings.

For comparison, I took the two machines to the track for eight days. To make it a sporting proposition, I made my own predictions unaided by the machines. I also kept track of the consensus picks of a group of professional handicappers in the *Daily Racing Form*.

Both machines are more modest than your average tout, in that they claim to work only for certain races—those with experienced horses (defined as being at least three years old and having at least four lifetime starts) running on "fast" (dry) tracks. Thus, of the 72 races run in our eight-day trial, the machines would venture predictions in only 45. Each of the four systems (two machines, my own handicapping, and the professionals' consensus) was allowed three picks per race.

As it turned out, picking winners was the easiest thing about the test. To com-

From previous visits to racetracks, I have a clear mental picture of handicappers. They are the fellows with rumpled clothes, three days' beard, a well-chewed pencil behind the ear, an equally well-chewed cigar in the mouth, and a "sure thing" in the eighth. From all visible evidence, you wouldn't get rich by taking their advice.

But those who frequent the track may have noticed a new type of handicapper—sleek, tireless, cigarless, and small enough to fit in your hand. They are machines—small computers programmed to rate the horses in a race when fed information about them from the *Daily Racing Form*. Although the machines don't look like their human counterparts, they share one important characteristic—the giving of fallible advice. I know. I followed it.

Being curious about such things, and enjoying a day at the races, I decided to test two of the first electronic handicappers to appear on the market by taking them out to the track and putting them through their paces. The machines I used—Mattel's *Horse Race Analyzer*

and Canella's *Kel-Co Class Computer*—carry the same list price (\$100, though Mattel's can often be found for less), but are vastly different in methods of operation.

The Kel-Co Class Computer looks like a hand-held calculator, and that's just what it is. Actually, the machine is an electronic update of a slide-rule-based handicapping system the company has been selling for eleven years. It's preprogrammed to rate each horse by taking its earnings and dividing them by a number obtained by weighting its first, second, third, and fourth place finishes. That calculation yields the horse's "class rating," which is the purse level at which the horse can be expected to win.

Generating the "class ratings" of all the horses in a race takes about 20 to 25 minutes, and that's only the first step in the handicapping procedure. An instruction booklet outlines how to use the *Daily Racing Form* to qualify and disqualify horses for wagers on the basis of consistency, and recent activity and performance. All in all, it takes about 30 to 40 minutes to fully handicap a race.

A similar time investment is needed to

Microchips meet The Sport of Kings





pare the systems' performance, consider the 7th at Aqueduct on the seventh day of the trial. It was a mile-and-a-sixteenth race for high-priced three-year-old claimers. Both the Horse Race Analyzer and I chose a 7-1 shot named Surf Club (my choice was based on the nag's being the only front-runner in the race, and I suspect the machine made the same observation). The Class Computer gave Surf Club the second highest rating, but disqualified him from betting consideration because of poor recent performance; it recommended instead a consistent performer named Dee Dee's Deal as the best bet. The handicappers' consensus focused on the favorite, a recent winner named Coq Au Vin, rating Dee Dee's Deal second best and Surf Club third.

Taking this information to the \$2 window, I placed two win bets on Surf Club, and one each on Dee Dee's Deal and Coq Au Vin. I hurried back to my seat, getting there just at post-time. One minute 46 and $\frac{2}{5}$ seconds later, I was shouting as Surf Club barely lasted through the stretch to cross the wire ahead of the

pack. Dee Dee's Deal finished third, and Coq Au Vin ran out of the money.

My two tickets on the winning horse paid \$16.80 each, and my other two bets of course paid nothing. It was one of the best payoffs in the trial—and that points to a problem. Even though all of the systems proved to be good at picking winners and finishers (see chart)—better even than their manufacturers' tests reported—turning those picks into profits was a horse of a different color.

For example, if you had placed \$2 win bets on all of the first choices of the Class Computer, which had the best record of picking winners, you would not have won enough money to cover the cost of *Daily Racing Forms* and track admissions for the eight days. Furthermore, because the machine had good and bad streaks, if you had gone to the track for only one day of the trial, the odds were even that you would have had a losing day with the Class Computer. And you would have done worse with each of the other systems. This is because both the machines and the humans tended to

pick low-priced favorites, so that payoffs were less than losses even if you won nearly half the races you bet.

If you had bet \$2 to win on each system's top three picks, you would have turned a profit only on my selections—and you would have lost \$89.90 following the professional handicappers' advice (despite their listing 80 percent of all the winners among their top three choices). Your wallet would have been even thinner if you had decided to bet \$12 on each race—\$2 to win, place, and show on the top pick, \$2 to place and show on the second choice, and \$2 to show on the third choice. The loss would have been \$63.80 with the Class Computer, \$166.40 with the Horse Race Analyzer, \$25.40 following my selections, and \$117.00 with the *Daily Racing Form* consensus picks.

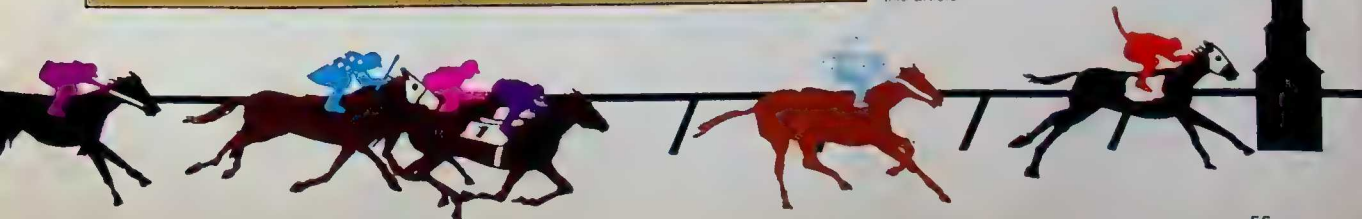
To be fair, I should point out that simply betting the top three picks is a deviation from the rigid betting system outlined in the Class Computer instruction booklet. Had you followed their system of adjusting bets to the odds and not betting low-odds horses, you would have bet between \$20 and \$48 on each of thirty races, winning money in 10 of them and showing a small profit (approximately \$3) over and above the cost of track admissions. (If you had bet via Off-Track Betting in New York, the state's surcharge on off-track wagers would have wiped out all profit and a good deal more.) But to win that \$3 you had to bet \$750 over the course of the eight-day test. If you had put that \$750 into money market funds, you would have earned \$3 interest over the same time. But then again, money market funds are a lot less exciting than a three-horse stretch drive.

When it comes to recommendations, I have to say that no one system stood out. Each had very good days and very bad days, and your chances of hitting one or the other were about 50-50. In the long run, both machines and humans came out losers. But at least the machines don't have to worry about keeping themselves in cigars.

Jamie Adams, an administrative assistant at Games, has not returned to the track since writing this article.

MAN VERSUS MACHINE

Handicapper	Percentage of correct picks during 8-day test		
	Win (1st Place)	Place (2nd Place)	Show (3rd Place)
Class Computer			
First Choices	46.7	11.1	20.0
Second Choices	24.4	20.0	22.2
Third Choices	4.4	22.2	6.7
Horse Race Analyzer			
First Choices	22.2	20.0	22.2
Second Choices	24.4	6.7	17.8
Third Choices	15.6	40.0	15.6
Professional Handicapper's Consensus			
First Choices	33.3	20.0	15.6
Second Choices	20.0	26.7	24.4
Third Choices	26.7	13.3	22.2
The Author			
First Choices	46.7	13.3	31.1
Second Choices	13.3	13.3	26.7
Third Choices	8.9	26.7	15.6





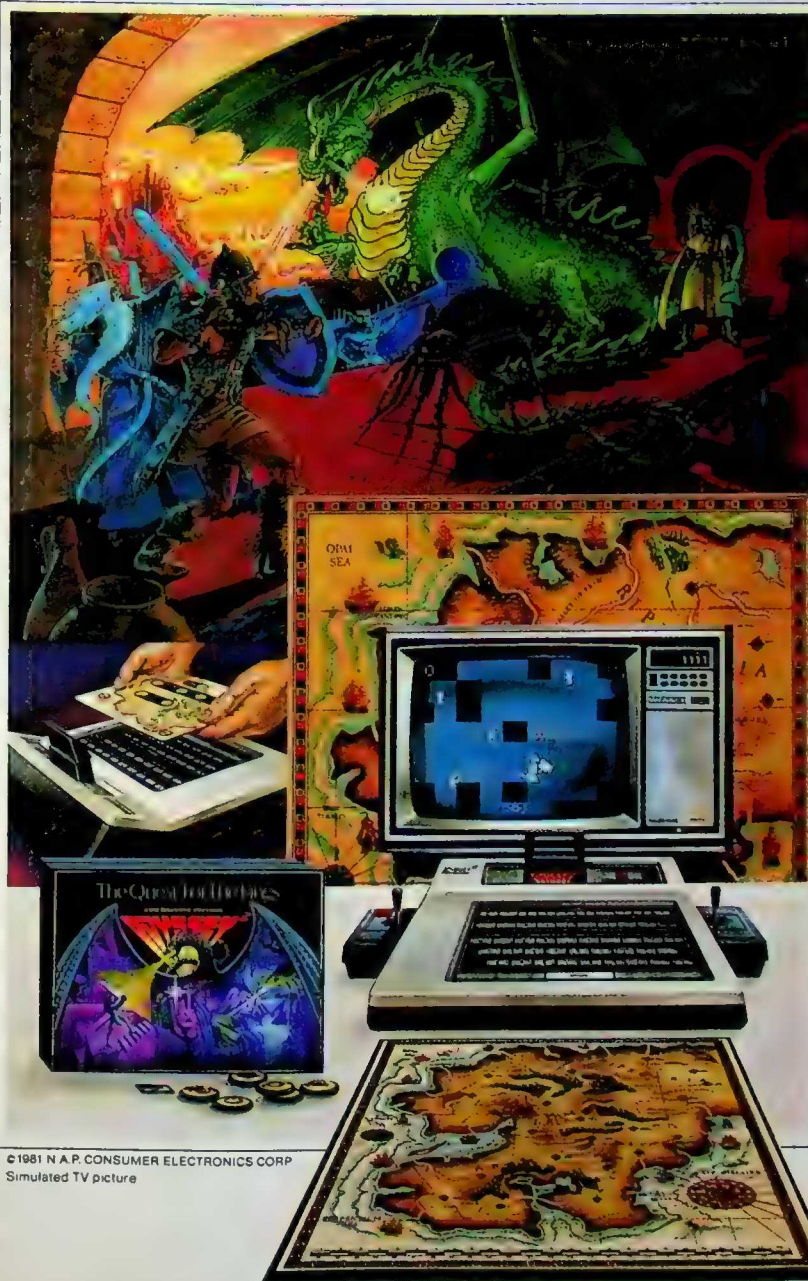
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