

i-technology

# Machine Trounces Man on Jeopardy!

Showcases  
advances in  
science and  
computing

(AP) -- Under the category of artificial intelligence, it represents both a loss and a triumph for humans.

What is "Watson"?

An IBM computer handily beat two human competitors on the popular U.S. quiz show "Jeopardy!" in a three-day showdown that ended last Wednesday, highlighting at the same time the progress people have made in making machines able to think like them.

The supercomputer, named after former International Business Machines Corp president Thomas Watson, is a showcase of the company's expertise in advanced science and computing.

Watson showed off its encyclopedic knowledge of topics ranging from ancient languages to fashion design, along with a few glitches.

"Vedic, dating back at least 4000 years, is the earliest dialect of this classical language of India," was one of the clues given by host Alex Trebek.

"What is Sanskrit?" Watson answered in the show's question-as-an-answer style, before going on to solve clues ranging from agricultural policy in the European Union to the designer Marc Jacobs.

The latest challenge shows that IBM -- which turns 100 years old this year -- wants to stay at the forefront of technology, even as companies such as Google Inc and Apple Inc have become the industry's darlings.

What makes Watson particularly advanced, even compared to Deep Blue, IBM's chess-playing supercomputer that beat world champion Garry Kasparov in 1997, is its ability to find answers from ambiguous clues, such as this one: "It's a poor workman who blames these."

"What are tools?" answered Watson.

Watson wasn't perfect, however, and made some baffling errors such as coming up with "Dorothy Parker" instead of "The Elements of Style" and repeating other contestants' mistakes.

In the end, however, Watson won with \$77,147 while Ken Jennings, who won 74 games in a row during the show's 2004-2005 season, came in second with \$24,000. Brad Rutter,



Contestants Ken Jennings (left), and Brad Rutter and a computer named Watson compete on the game show 'Jeopardy!'

who has in previous appearances won a total of \$3.3 million, followed with \$21,600.

"I for one welcome our new computer overlords," Jennings wrote next to his last answer, displaying one human quality conspicuously absent in Watson -- a sense of humor.

IBM plans to donate all of Watson's winnings to charity.

The Armonk, New York-based company spends around \$6 billion a year on research and development. An unspecified part of that goes to what it calls "grand challenges," or big, multiyear science projects such as Watson and Deep Blue.

IBM has said it plans to use Watson's linguistic and analytical abilities to develop new products in areas such as medical diagnosis.

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