

Computer defeats humans at crossword

Crossword-solving computer program WebCrow has defeated 25 human competitors in a puzzle competition in Riva del Garda, Italy.

The program took both first- and second-place honors in the contest, which was staged as part of the European Conference on Artificial Intelligence, New Scientist reported Thursday.

The two English puzzles were taken from The New York Times and The Washington Post, while two Italian puzzles were taken from newspapers in the country. A fifth puzzle featured clues in both languages taken from all four sources.

"It exceeded our expectations because there were around 15 Americans in the competition," said Marco Ernandes, who created WebCrow along with Giovanni Angelini and Marco Gori. "Now we'd like to test it against more people with English as their first language."

Ernandes said the program uses four techniques to solve a clue. Two of the techniques involve searching a database of solved puzzles and dictionaries, one uses rules common to two-letter answers in Italian and the final technique is a search of the Internet.

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