



PokerPro

If you've ever blamed a dealer for your inability to know when to hold or fold 'em at the poker table, a neat new piece of technology has done away with that excuse. PokerPro eliminates the need for dealers, chips and cards completely by automating Texas Hold'em (or Omaha Hi-Lo) with game control software, computer touch screens and realistic graphics. Since the beginning of 2007, more than 25 casinos and card rooms have signed up worldwide, including three in California, one in Michigan and others in Australia, Asia, Germany, South Africa and Panama.

Playing the game is easy. The game control software randomly deals two virtual hole cards (four for Omaha) to every player. To see the cards, players cup their hands over a computer touch screen, and the corners of the cards flip up. When it's time to wager, players bet virtual chips representing real money that they've loaded onto a special debit card. At appropriate times, the flop, turn and river appear as virtual cards on a large computer screen in the center of the table. Because players sit around a physical table, poker faces are encouraged.

While critics complain about missing real chips, the game offers a number of tangible benefits. For starters, the game control software doesn't make mistakes, meaning players always bet the right amount and never get out of turn. Random dealing also means no shuffling between hands, which translates into more hands an hour. The automated table, which is produced by Matthews, North Carolina-based vendor PokerTek, even saves players money—because a computer runs the show, there's never a dealer to tip after winning a big pot.

Since having a gaming device in a non-licensed facility can be a one-way ticket to racketeering charges, PokerTek only leases the 10-seat PokerPro tables to card rooms and casinos. To serve home users (and bars), the company recently released a heads-up version of the same game. This table, dubbed Heads-Up Challenge, retails for \$8,999, and pits two players against each other for a No-Limit Hold'em fight to the end. Forget that championship bracelet; sometimes, gloating can be more precious than gold.

Visit www.pokertek.com or www.playheadsup.com.

—Matt Villano

WE DOUBLE
EXCE