

Duplimate Mark IV (bis) vs. PlayBridge Dealer4

Pete Matthews, March 8, 2008; minor updates July 3, 2009; remarks by Harold Jordan, October 29, 2009

Both the Duplimate Mark IV (bis) and the PlayBridge Dealer4 are fine machines that work well, but with significant differences. After almost a year of use, I returned the Duplimate under its warranty, and obtained a Dealer4.

Advantages of Duplimate

Manufacturer: Jannersten is a major bridge supplier, and is likely to be with us for years to come.

Jannersten guarantees parts availability for ten years. PlayBridge is still getting organized, with the manufacturer in Australia and sales in the UK.

Support: Harold Jordan, the 2005 ACBL Goodwill Member, sells and supports Duplimate in the U.S, <http://www.duplimate.us/>, see <http://www.duplimate.org/images/DuplimateVideo.mpeg>. Harold provides solid getting-started documents with your purchase, and runs occasional reduced-price sales of cards and boards. Terry Collier (terry@playbridgeuk.com) of PlayBridgeUK sells Dealer4; www.playbridgeuk.com is superseding <http://www.dealer4.com>. They claim to have a servicer in Virginia. Terry sent me a 4-page installation document, the new web site has a couple of usage documents contributed by users, and wrote a better one - there is a nascent forum, but no other Dealer4 documentation or help.

Price: Even with the dollar falling, Jannersten has just reduced its price from \$4,195 to \$3,995, including shipping, customs, case, dust cover, BOS and WinDup software, Dealmaster Pro, power cord, serial cable, and USB-Serial converter. Dealer4 costs \$4,000, including only shipping, USB cable, external power supply, and Dealer4 software CD. Customs (\$115), Dealmaster Pro (\$60), and AC power cable (from old computer) are extra. [Prices as of March, 2008]

Software: WinDup is used to generate the hands, control the Duplimate and deal the cards. BOS coordinates activities, maintaining session files, invoking WinDup and Dealmaster Pro for you, as you wish. WinDup can also do hand records, with all makeable and par contracts. Dealer4 software supposedly will generate the hands, but, in practice, it's only used to control the machine and deal the cards. With the Dealer4, DealMaster Pro is used to generate the hands as well as the hand records. The Dealer4/DMPPro combination is adequate but inferior.

Warranty: Jannersten provides a one year unconditional return warranty, and two years support. PlayBridge provides a simple one year warranty.

The Duplimate is clearly the safe choice.

Advantages of Dealer4

Hardware: The Dealer4 is a mechanically superior product, with multiple motors and a USB connection. The Duplimate uses bands (green ones visible, and orange ones inside). It has a serial interface, a problem if your computer has no serial port, or as for me, the port is already in use. The provided USB-serial device

routinely produced communication errors. My KeySpan USB-serial device (\$33) was better, but still gave me problems getting WinDup to initially recognize the device, especially if I had used my serial port since the last reboot. Dealer4 is a little quieter and deals a hand slightly faster. However, in my limited experience, the Dealer4 is likely to leave one or two leaning cards on about a quarter of flip-open boards, requiring extra care and time. About once in a set of boards, the Duplimate would misfeed, which would require attention. The Duplimate's hopper will hold three decks, compared to two for Dealer4.

Playing Cards and Bridge Boards: The Duplimate requires barcode playing cards. (You can manually pre-sort and then use plain cards, give me a break!) The barcode cards cost almost double what ACBL or Barclay cards cost. In practice, the Duplimate also requires flip-open (new generation) boards. You could cut the top off one such board and use it to deal and then transfer cards to other boards; I've never tried that. The Dealer4 recognizes the corner of each card, and thus does not require barcodes (but is not bothered by them). Dealer4 will deal onto a plastic plate; there is sufficient space for you to remove the cards from the plate and insert them into any boards.

In my opinion, this last reason trumps all others. The issue is not just the cost of the cards, but what you can do with the machine. You can use any boards that are available to deal an extra set of boards for a game, just in case. You can prepare boards weeks in advance, perhaps for a guest director. Or run a barometer game. With the Duplimate, you are limited to your flip-open boards with barcode cards. Aluminum boards, being sturdier, are better for tournaments.

Duplimate Barcode Cards

These cards are superior quality cards, made in France by Grimaud. (Other, more costly, brands are available.) The diamonds are orange and the clubs, gray. I used these cards for a year with each machine: perhaps 60 times over two years. They still had some life in them, but being thicker and slightly but normally warped, they tended not to fall cleanly into the card boxes of my flip-open bridge boards – as well as the occasional leaner. I replaced the Grimauds with ACBL cards, which are thinner: they rattle in the card boxes, while the Grimauds were always tight. Leaners are now very rare, and only an occasional shake or tap is needed to get the cards to nestle into the card boxes. Here is what the Grimauds look like:



Remarks on this article as it appears above:

While it is an impressive and fair analysis of what you experienced with the machines, it is out of date now as the Duplimate was significantly overhauled in the summer of '08 and current models are 30% faster, are USB not serial, and have significantly improved and expanded software features as well. The bar-coded cards are also significantly cheaper than they used to be - in fact in large quantities they are \$1.25/deck and might be the best option out there for quality and cost.

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