sinclair QL

11° Meeting Italiano QL – Raduno di Modena

Report of the 11° Italiano QL Meeting

Written by Davide Santachiara, July 2008

Premise

The QL has been my loyal companion since 1986 even if now I use it rarely. What it is more difficult to explain is how much I owe to this little computer: I have learned English reading the QL guides, I have learned programming in machine code and superbasic. All this know-how was a not negligible advantage when I started working. Even more important I had the honour to meet very charming people all over the world and among them one of my best friends (Marco Ternelli, author/co-author of most of the Ergon Development software). I had the chance to travel together with Marco to many Italian and international and I spent thousand of hours programming: it was really a lot of fun.

I owe a lot from the QL but I also tried to give something in exchange. Since 1995, when the economic aspect was already in huge decline and only passion mattered, I tried to keep unite the Italian QL users both organizing all the events/meeting, setting-up and moderating a mailing list, and trying to help as far as I could QL users solving their problems. This is the list of the Italian meeting I organized in Reggio Emilia where I live:

- 4° meeting QL January 1993
- 5° meeting QL September 1993
- Settembre 1994 – Garage meeting (looking at Antonio Gareffa's DVD – see later – it is amazing how many people my parents' garage have been able to accomodate)
- 6° meeting QL May 1995
- 7° meeting QL November 1995
- 8° meeting QL October 1996
- 9° meeting QL October 2000
- 10° meeting QL October 2003

Meeting 2008 – Organization

My free time is now reduced to a minimum due to my work and having now a 15 months child. For me it would have been impossibile to organize a meeting like the previous ones. In the last meeting (2003) that has been a good success, 35 people (including traders) have attended. To achieve this goal I sent a hundred of letters, I personally phoned to dozens of people. Today it was impossible for me to devote the same effort at the QL cause. Also, if you look at the frequency of the meeting that is decreasing exponentially, I decided it was time to be realist: probably even with the same effort of 2003 I would have not been able to gather more than 20 people. So I just made a few phone calls and sent emails to all the people I had in my records. Sadly I received one reply from the daughter of Maurizio Porzio who informed me that he passed away two years ago.

Luckily, thanks to the company for which I work, I had the authorization to use the two company meeting rooms. That was a very nice opportunity as it was free and I had the possibility to be flexible when deciding the meeting date.

It was of course a pity that for the first time none of the foreign trader could have attended. A part from the late notice it is clear that it is now almost impossible to even cover the costs of the trip. In a certain way I was relieved by this as the risk to make some people unhappy was extremely high. However, as we have now very nice and cheap opportunities to be in touch with videoconferences, I offered to everybody to participate via Skype. This allowed Daniele Terdina, author of QemuLator, to make a very nice and interesting presentation from his home in Seattle (you probably know he is been working for Microsoft since many years).

Partecipants

I would like to personally thank all the people who attended the meeting,in no particolar order: Romaldo Parodi (the Hardware man), Andrea Carpi, Paolo Carpi, Adelchi Moscardini, Antonio Gareffa, Emiliano Barbaini, Mauro Vanni, Augusto Del Sante, Gino Sestilli, Ludovico Marchisio, Alberto Rubinelli, Elia Bellussi, Daniele Terdina (from Seattle - Skype), Enrico Maria Giordano (from Roma - Skype)
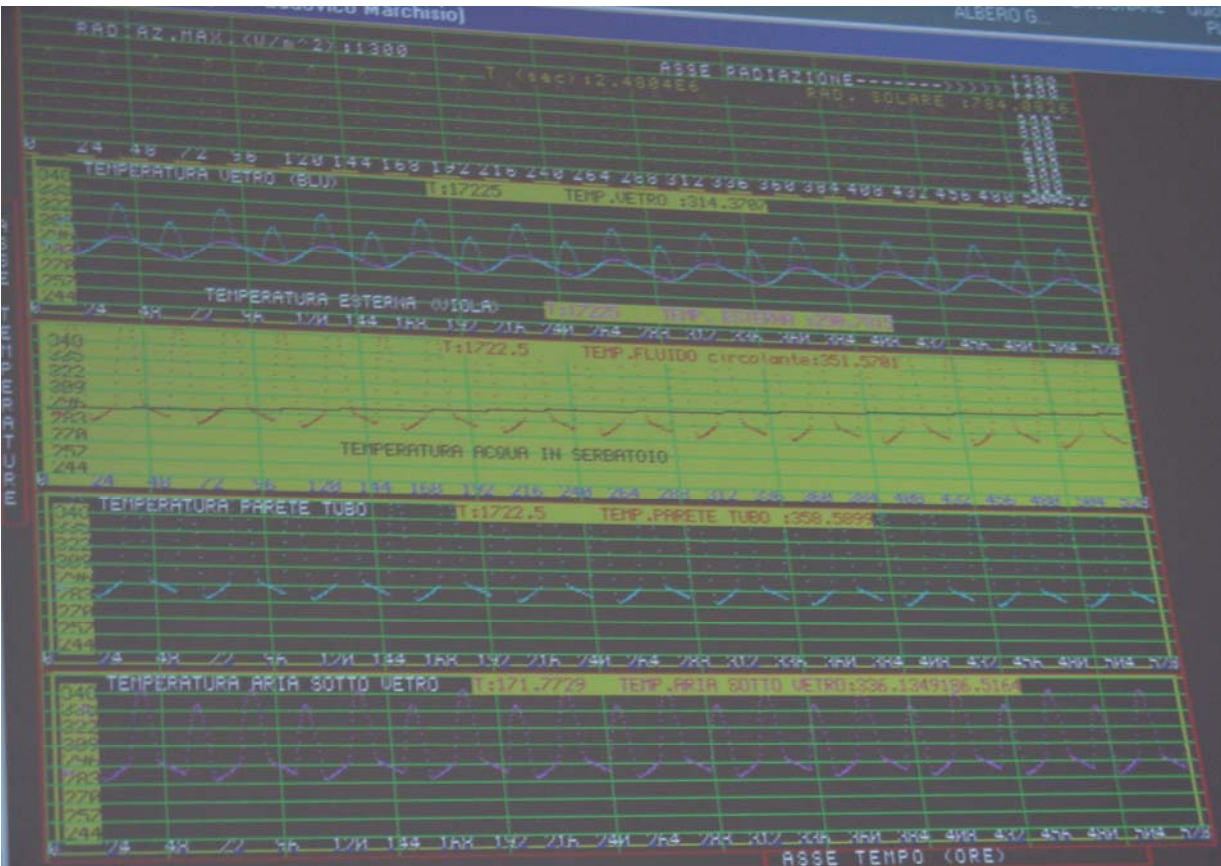
Meeting

The meeting did not followed a particular agenda, our only scheduled engagement was Daniele Terdina's telecom at 4pm. In the morning the following ideas and requests came out:

- It would be nice to have a PCI card (or USB?) with a network port in order to easily interface QPC2 with standard QLs.
- Romaldo Parodi described a clever way to refurbish microdrive cartridges. In fact after many years the small piece that keeps the tape against the microdrive just detaches.
- We talked about some lost QL users. Now most of them are just looking for the piece as collectors and no more as real users. For information the Italian mailing list has at present 60 users that appears to be active (i.e. people who apparently receive the emails)
- Ludovico Marchisio asked for a goal-seeker function in xchange/abacus. This function, that allows to automatically change a cell till another reaches a defined goal, is very useful to solve many type of mathematical problems. This is a function I personally use a lot on excel.
- It would be very useful to make QPC Print compatibie also with QemuLator. Perhaps both sales of QPC Print and QemuLator could benefit from this.
- One question was about the reason why Q40/Q60 have not been further developed, together with TCP/IP stack. It is a little bit sad that due to the licence saga we perhaps lost some developments. I have also understood that in the past it was not so easy to deal with Peter Graf.

Ludovico Marchisio's solar panels

Before lunch Ludovico Marchisio presented the software, developed on the QL, he used to develop a home-made solar panels that he built and installed in his home on the hills between Lombardia and Piemonte. You can see a screenshot of the QL sw and of the self-made solar panel in the next two pictures. Pity it was not possible to use the QL to drive the solar panel (a commercial PLC is being used).

Lunch time

We then had a very rewarding lunch at a trattoria close to my company with traditional Modenese dishes, tigelle and gnocco fritto. The second guy on the right with the white shirt is Alberto Rubinelli admiring his tigella with Nutella. Alberto since many years is collecting an incredible number of old computers (over 2000) which are not stocked in the "Computer Museum" www.oldcomputers.it

QemuLator -

In the afternoon we had a nice videoconference with Daniele Terdina from Seattle where he presented the latest feature of QemuLator. The latest version is v2.5, it is Windows Vista compatible and should be officially released very soon. For the time being v2.4.1 is still the official version, however some of the new features described below refers to the new version.

The main feature of this QL emulator is to guarantee the compatibility with all the QL software including old games with microdrive protection. A utility that is given to registered users allows to transfer the microdrive content including the protection to a file which
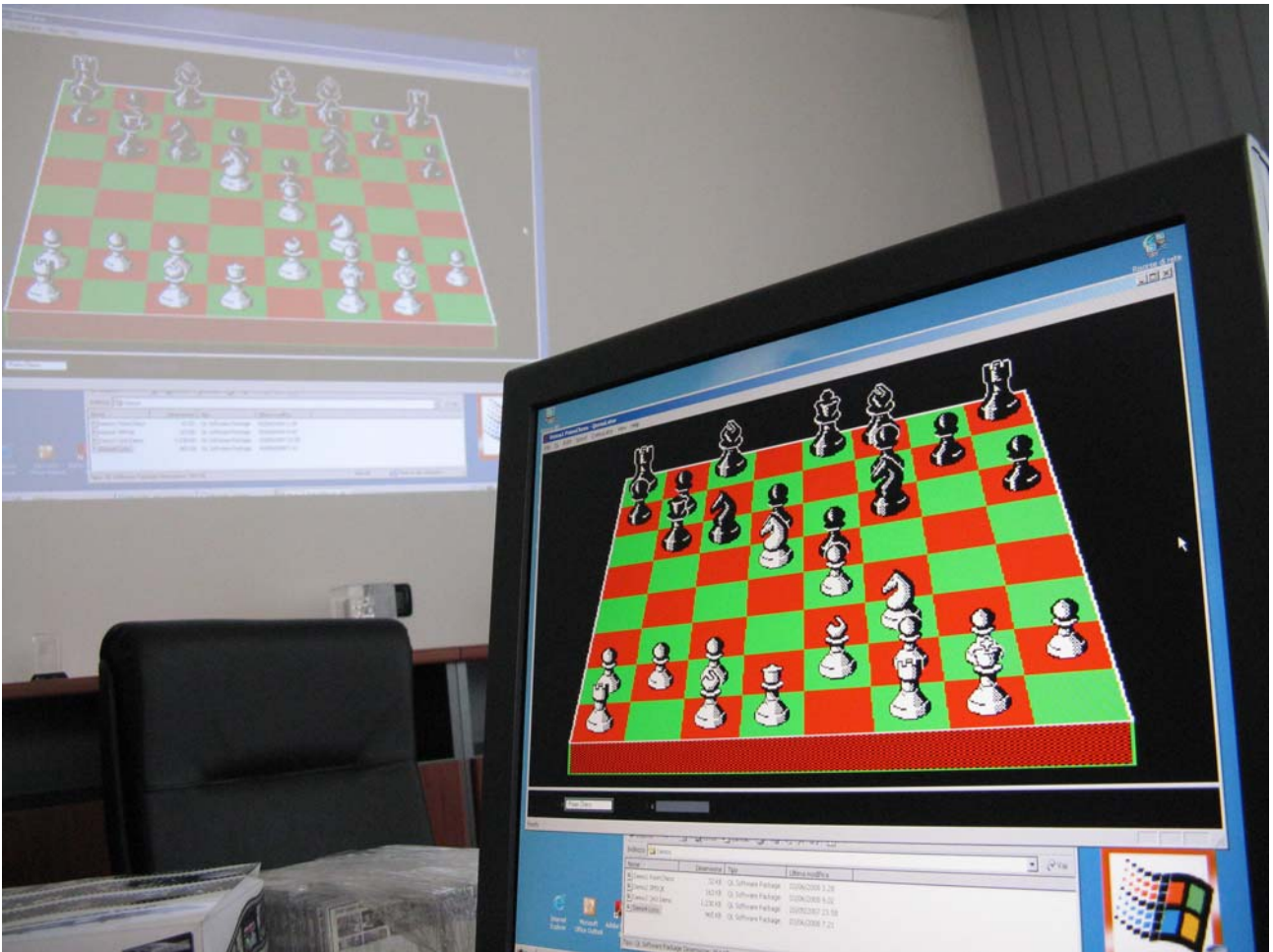
QemuLator will then read. All the ROM can be used on QemuLator including very old ones such as AH, JM, JS. Of course it runs with all Minerva versions and the Super Gold Card version of SMSQ/E. QemuLator also supports the extended graphics of Aurora like Mode 4 at 1024x768 or Mode 2 (256 colours) at 512x480.

Of course a large number of other parameters can be set like the QL memory, its speed (to be able to play old games on a fast PC), the presence of the QL EPROM, etcetera. These parameters can be saved on configuration files that cen be later retrieved to make the boot almost immediate.

QemuLator not only maintains compatibility with old QL programs but also supports new features such as the TCP/IP stack in case your host PC has an internet connection. The 8 QL devices (e.g. win1…win8) can be linked to:

- QDOS floppy disks
- QXL Hard Disk files (i.e. _win files)
- DOS Directory
- The latest version (2.5) also allows to link the virtual drive to a special zip file (QLPAK archive) which contains QL software and also the QL configuration like memory and so forth. In this way the loading process of a game can become almost instantaneous: just double click for instance on your chess QLPAK file on Windows and magically QL chess will appear on QemuLator (see picture below)

One question for Daniele was concerning possible future development of the MAC version of QemuLator. The answer was that no updates can be expected on this version as the latest version was developed for PowerPC and now with the new processors and MAC o/s 99% of the o/s calls changed so the effort would be unmanageable. All Daniele's effort will be put on the Windows version.

QemuLator includes an internal Mouse driver that work both with pointer environment and smsq/e. With SMSQ/E QemuLator emulates not only can emulate the Aurora extended graphics but also the Q60 graphic at 16 millions colours. This however can be only done by direct access of the screen (it cannot be used via standard QDOS calls). Daniele showed an interesting demo whose screenshot is represented below (unfortunately in b/w on QL Today)

Daniele also developed a faster version: it is named QemuFast and it is almost 4 times faster than QemuLator. However it does not work with programs that make use of self-modifying code. I remind that the registration for the full version of QemuLator costs 40$, less than 30 euro and can be easily done from the QemuLator web page **http://terdina.net/ql/q-emulator.html**

Euroconverter

Andrea Carpi showed the new version of Euroconverter with the new entries of the EC: Cipro and Malta. The new version can be downloaded from my web page: http://www.geocities.com/dsantachiara/qlpage.htm

Antonio Gareffa's DVD

The last section of the meeting was a presentation of Antonio Gareffa incredible DVD production which covers all the the Italian QL meeting since 1990. While the first DVDs were just a digital conversion of the videos taken with the camera, the last ones are really professional works with music, special contents, special effects and slideshow. Some of DVDs could also be of interest to foreing people as they include many interview (in

English) at the QL traders who participated at the past Italian meetings. You can contact Antonio at the following email address: astrelster at gmail.com

Conclusions

It was nice to have attended this informal randez-vous with the good old QL friends. The attendance was more or less what I could have expected, without new software and hardware development it is very hard to convince people to travel for hundreds of chilometers. What I will continue to do is to try to support Italian QL users (with help of other people of course) as far as I can and from time to time it would be nice to continue to meet even if in a very informal context. After all it was a nice occasion to use the QL (or better the emulators) again and remember some good software we developed in the past. For instance I still use Masterbasic that in my opinion is really an invaluable tool for Superbasic program development. I remind that most of our software can be freely downloaded from my web site www.geocities.com/dsantachiara

People who are willing to have more information can contact me. The colours version of this article will be put on my web site as PDF file.