

Station 11: The Zuse 1, 1989 (Replica)

Without our really being aware of it, computer science governs just about every aspect of our modern-day lives. Micro-processors – essentially minute computers – are everywhere: in our cars, our mobile phones and our wrist watches. Even ovens and other kitchen appliances can't do without them.

The world's first-ever computer dates back to 1936 and was still fully mechanical. It was developed in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg by a construction engineer called Konrad Zuse. But the so-called Zuse 1, or just Z 1, and all its components were completely destroyed during aerial bombardment. 52 years later, from 1987 to 1989, Konrad Zuse rebuilt the machine from memory, specially for the German Museum of Technology.

Interview Zuse

The experiment with the Z1 had shown the machine's mechanical construction had certain shortcomings.

After a short experiment with the Z2 machine, I then built the Z3. It works exclusively with communications technology, a few relays and sequencers.

I'll start by keying in four decimal figures and the position of the comma. Then you press the compile button, and that makes the machine transform this decimal figure into binary code. I'll do the same with the next figure. I press the plus button. And the result appears on the first operand. I can then have that result transferred from binary code back into decimal figures. And the machine automatically reproduces the four figures and the decimal point.

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