Digital Storm Twister Ultra 4

Back with a vengeance, the latest Twister Ultra 4 is fast and pretty darn stable

The Twister 4 Ultra carries the same name as the previous Athlon-based box, but its performance is all Core 2.

Maximum PC's mandate has always been that performance rules all else. But recently we've been harping about nothing but stability. It's not that we previously ignored this area, but lately we've been inundated with rigs that have been overclocked so aggressively they make our standard benchmarks blow up within minutes. Because of this, our new message has been stability, stability, stability.

Apparently, Digital Storm got our memo. The company shipped us its current speed king: Intel's 2.93GHz Core 2 Extreme Quad-Core QX6800 clocked up to a mere 3.46GHz running a pair of 8800 GTX cards and 2GB of Corsair Dominator RAM cranked up to 1,066MHz, all on an EVGA 680i SLI board. From a hardware perspective, this is nothing new; this setup is similar to what we've been seeing since January.

Normally, this would make for one big yawner of a story, but the Twister hits the right notes for us. First up: performance. Although it doesn't rip the speed crown from the wickedly fast Falcon Northwest Mach V that we reviewed in June, it does manage to top the higher-clocked Falcon in a few runs. Surprisingly, in Adobe Photoshop CS2, the Twister just squeezes by the Mach V with a score of 142 seconds versus 149. The difference is negligible due to the margin of error, but the Falcon Mach V has a 267MHz clock advantage, so count this as a win for the Twister. We're also marking the Nero H.264 encode test as a win for the Twister. Although its score in this test is about a minute slower than the Mach V's, the Twister is running a slower CPU and is 100 percent stable.

The Twister is top gun in our FEAR test, with a score that's just a tad faster than that of the similarly equipped ABS PC that we reviewed in February. So, in performance the Twister holds three Lab records and really doesn't have to apologize for performance elsewhere.

In build quality, we were interested to see if the company paid attention to items the techs missed last time, such as whether all the front USB ports were connected and operating. Fortunately, there were no such bone-headed errors. We do have to point out, however, that connecting two DVD burners to the same PATA port will kill your performance if you try to burn to multiple drives at once.

But is the Twister stable? Yes. We flew through all of our normal benchmarks with no issues—well, except for SYSmark2004 SE, which refused to run. We can't blame the Twister for this though, since

UNDER THE HOOD

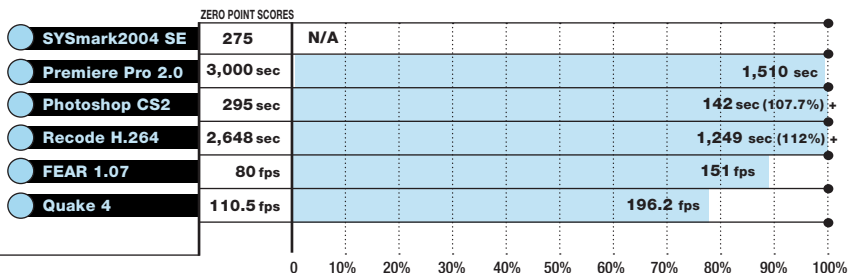| BRAINS	
CPU	Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6800 (2.93GHz overclocked to 3.46GHz)
MOBO	EVGA 680i SLI
RAM	2GB Corsair DDR2/800 (Two 1GB sticks@1,066MHz)
LAN	Dual Gigabit LAN (Nvidia)
HARD DRIVES	Two 150GB Raptors (10,000rpm SATA) in RAID 0, and one 750GB Seagate
OPTICAL	Lite-On LH-18AIP x2
BEAUTY	
VIDEOCARD	Two EVGA GeForce 8800GTXs in SLI mode
SOUNDCARD	Sound Blaster X-Fi XtremeGamer
CASE	Modified Cooler Master CMStacker 830
BOOT: 34 sec.	**DOWN: 9 sec.**

DIGITAL STORM TWISTER ULTRA 4

➕ **CASIO**
Fast, stable, and nicely configured.

➖ **ARMITRON**
Two DVD burners on one port. Is no Vista a plus or a minus?

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MAXIMUM PC KICKASS

$6,600, www.digitalstormonline.com

BENCHMARKS

	ZERO POINT SCORES	
SYSmark2004 SE	275	N/A
Premiere Pro 2.0	3,000 sec	1,510 sec
Photoshop CS2	295 sec	142 sec (107.7%) +
Recode H.264	2,648 sec	1,249 sec (112%) +
FEAR 1.07	80 fps	151 fps
Quake 4	110.5 fps	196.2 fps

0 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Our current desktop test bed is a Windows XP SP2 machine, using a dual-core 2.6GHz Athlon 64 FX-60, 2GB of Corsair DDR400 RAM on an Asus A8N32-SLI motherboard, two GeForce 7900 GTX videocards in SLI mode, a Western Digital 4000KD hard drive, a Sound Blaster X-Fi soundcard, and a PC Power and Cooling Turbo Cool 850 PSU.