

CROSSFIRE-READY PC

Evesham Axis Blaze 1800 XL

PRICE £1,531 (£1,799 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £35 (£41 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER Evesham 0870 160 9500

INTERNET www.evesham.com

VERDICT A powerful, well-configured machine that offers plenty of upgradability.

We've been waiting for ATI's next-generation graphics cards for months. Now that the X1800 is here (see p76 for our full review), Evesham has managed to get us the first system using the card, and it's fittingly luxurious.

Processing muscle is provided in spades by an AMD Athlon 64 X2 4400+ processor. This is paired with 1GB of RAM split over two sticks and leaving two DIMMs free on the MSI MS-7194 motherboard. With an application benchmark score of 1.19, the Blaze made mincemeat of application tests and stormed through CPU-intensive tasks.

The motherboard also contains a spare PCI Express 16x slot, making it 'CrossFire ready', so you can pair the X1800 with a second GPU should you wish. Just be aware that the pre-installed card isn't a CrossFire master (see *ATI CrossFire*, opposite). Even alone, the performance is stunning. Running at 1,600 x



21.3in of gaming goodness, courtesy of NEC's superb screen.

1,200 with 4x AA and 8x AF, Half-Life 2 ran at 58fps. We only managed to get a sub-30fps rate in Far Cry by turning on HDR, 4x AA and 8x AF: a sumptuously rendered, but only just playable 27fps. And this is all using pre-release patches and drivers – these scores will only improve.

Elsewhere, the 21.3in NEC MultiSync LCD2170NX TFT is a superb choice, with its 1,600 x 1,200 resolution perfect not just for next-generation graphics but also anything else you care to throw at it. Stylish looks and flawless viewing angles, together with height adjustment and excellent contrast, make using it an absolute pleasure. There's even a two-port USB hub built into the bezel.

Creative's X-Fi XtremeMusic sound card (see p87) takes care of audio processing. You

won't get the best out of it with the unobtrusive 7.1 Creative T7900 speakers, but the subwoofer offers a decent punch in games and movies.

Considering the specification and price of the Blaze, it would have been nice to see a case with more pizzazz than Evesham's standard offering, but it's well designed and built. Everything is tidy inside, with cable wraps much in evidence, and wiring carefully routed to improve airflow – an important factor given the standard AMD cooler on the CPU.

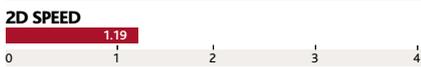
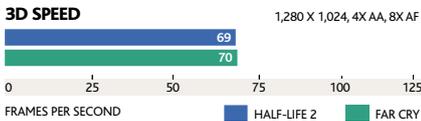
We're pleased to see that Evesham hasn't skimped on storage either: the dual-layer DVD rewriter and DVD-ROM drive are standard fare, but the 320GB Western Digital hard disk offers enough capacity for some time to come and, with five free SATA ports on the motherboard, adding to it won't be a problem.

There are few missed opportunities in the Axis Blaze, and none are critical. The Logitech wireless keyboard and mouse are good, but a rechargeable mouse would have been nice. There's also no memory card reader.

All in all, this is a fantastic package. With tremendous power and a great specification, it manages to inch out the Mesh Matrix Xtreme Pro to become our high-end PC of choice.

DAVE STEVENSON

RESULTS



OFFICE: 1.35 2D GRAPHICS: 1.15
ENCODING: 1.05 MULTITASKING: 1.23

An explanation of our new benchmarks can be found on the cover disc.

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

SPECIFICATIONS 2.2GHz AMD Athlon X2 4400+; 1GB PC3200 RAM; MSI MS-7194 motherboard; 320GB Western Digital Caviar hard disk; Sony DW-DQ28A DVD rewriter; Sony DDU 1615 DVD-ROM; 256MB GeCube ATI X1800 XL graphics; 21.3in NEC LCD2170NX TFT; Creative X-Fi XtremeMusic sound card; Creative Inspire T7900 7.1 speakers; Gigabit Ethernet; Windows XP Home SP 2; Roxio Easy Media Creator 7; Microsoft Works 8.5; 2yr on-site plus 1yr RTB warranty.