



Gigabyte GA-8I915P-D Pro



PRICE £69 (£81 inc VAT)

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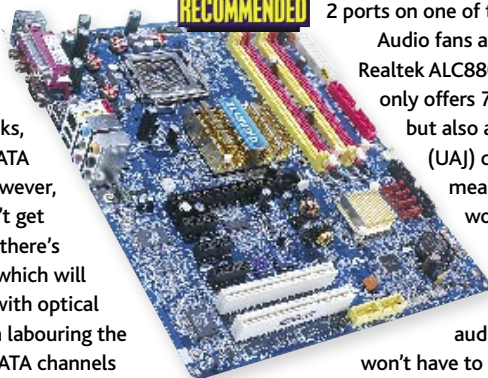
VERDICT A budget price, great performance and an impressive array of features adorn the Gigabyte. It's the clear choice if you're after an Intel PCI Express motherboard.

Looking at the GA-8I915P-D Pro, we can't help but feel that Gigabyte has been a good judge of what most people want from a motherboard. While power users may lament the loss of features such as a RAID controller, there are still luxury additions such as eight-channel High Definition Audio support.

There are plenty of other features too. Three single-lane PCI Express slots keep a 16-lane slot and two regular PCI slots company. For those with a collection of hard disks, there are four Serial ATA connectors. Note, however, that Ultra ATA doesn't get much of a look-in as there's only one connector, which will probably be tied up with optical drives. It's also worth labelling the point that the Serial ATA channels

all run off the non-RAID ICH6 south bridge.

There are two banks of two DDR2 DIMM sockets for more RAM than most people will ever need. We're also fans of the USB 2 headers boxed in with yellow plastic slots, which make it easy to plug in the bundled two USB 2 ports. Next to these are a couple of FireWire headers. One is elongated to connect to the FireWire and mini-FireWire ports that flank two USB 2 ports on one of the backplates.



Audio fans are in for a treat as the Realtek ALC880 audio controller not only offers 7.1 surround sound, but also a Universal Audio Jack (UAJ) configuration. This means you don't have to worry if you plug a microphone, for example, in the wrong port. With six audio jacks on offer, you won't have to choose between a

line-in and a full surround-sound experience. If that's not enough, there are coaxial S/PDIF in and out ports next to them. Unfortunately, there's no optical S/PDIF.

Two spare fan-headers join the CPU fan, while the front-panel connectors are colour-coded for easy identification. In short, there's no shortage of well laid-out components.

In terms of performance we found no real difference between the 915P chipset on this motherboard and Intel's 925 chipset. Therefore, there's little point in paying the premium for the latter. Some users, however, may feel constrained by the overclocking options, which see a maximum CPU voltage of only 1.6V and no divider between the front side bus and PCI Express slots. However, the CPU Intelligent Accelerator 2 offers 'dynamic' overclocking when the CPU is under load – though we found the performance increase to be minimal.

Overall, motherboard connoisseurs might not like the missing features, but for most people wanting to take the PCI Express plunge with Intel, this budget board is just the ticket.

PC PRO RATINGS

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