● AMD SLI MOTHERBOARD

Gigabyte GA-K8N Pro-SLI

PRICE £68 (£79 inc VAT) **DELIVERY** £8 (£9 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk **INTERNET** http://uk.giga-byte.com

VERDICT A reasonably priced, fast board and the second 16x PCI Express slot offers a frugal graphics upgrade path.

S LI, while initially targeted at the hard-core gamer, has been embraced by mainstream PC manufacturers with surprising enthusiasm. It offers even the casual gamer a simple, cost-effective way to keep up with the latest games releases. By the time your first card is struggling, a complementary card will cost an affordable amount and almost double performance.

It's just one of the many tricks that the nForce4 SLI chipset has up its sleeve. There's a hardware firewall on the Gigabit Ethernet connection, and the Media Shield RAID controller that will give you performance-enhancing striped arrays or more secure mirrored disks. Gigabyte provides two Ultra ATA connectors should you still have usable parallel interface disks.

In the box are a couple of Serial ATA data cables, as well as two backplates for a total of one FireWire, one FireWire 800 and eight USB 2 ports. The board itself has a typical complement of slots around the 939-pin socket. There are two 1x PCI Express, two conventional PCI, four DIMM sockets for a total of 4GB of dual-channel system memory, and the two graphics slots.

Unlike the Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe 9 (*see* **www.pcpro.co.uk/reviews/80936**), these graphics slots are separated by one 1x PCI Express slot instead of two, which makes us slightly apprehensive about fitting two dual-height graphics cards. Physically, there's enough room, but adequate cooling could prove a problem. However, our pair of single-height, standard GeForce 7800 GTX cards cooled themselves adequately during our overnight torture test (looping our intensive Far Cry benchmark).

As you'd expect, everything is in the right place for a tidy finished system. The main ATX power connector is up to the right, so that the

With features such as SLI, RAID and great board layout, you can't go wrong for this price.
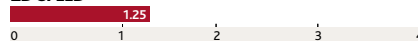
cable can be tucked away neatly. The IDE connectors are near to the optical drive bays of an ATX case, so ribbon cables can be tucked away around there, while USB and FireWire headers are arranged along the bottom so their attendant cables can snake across the bottom of your tower. This allows the airflow in a PC built with this motherboard to remain unhampered, allowing for cooler and quieter running components.

The Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe may offer a second RAID controller and a second (albeit unfirewalled) Gigabit Ethernet connection, but you pay an extra £20 for these luxuries. If you really want to push graphics power as far as possible, the extra spacing between the graphics slots gives you more cooling room too. However, our 7800 GTXs ran fine in the Gigabyte and that's near enough the fastest setup you'll find. With the £20 saving, and using SLI as a frugal upgrade path, this Gigabyte board is a great foundation for a Socket 939 system.

CLIVE WEBSTER

● RESULTS

2D SPEED

	1.25				
0	1	2	3	4	

OFFICE: 1.37 **2D GRAPHICS:** 1.18
ENCODING: 1.14 **MULTITASKING:** 1.27

BETTER →

TEST RIG AMD Athlon 64 X2 4800+; 1GB Crucial PC3200 RAM; XFX GeForce 6600 GT; 36GB Western Digital Raptor hard disk.

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

PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS Socket 939 motherboard; nVidia nForce4 SLI chipset; 4 x DDR RAM sockets; maximum 4GB memory; 2 x Ultra ATA/133 connectors; 1 x floppy connector; 4 x SATA connectors; 2 x PCI, 2 x PCI -E (1x); 2 x PCI-E (16x); Gigabit Ethernet; 4 x USB 2; parallel port; serial port; Realtek ALC850 7.1 audio; optical S/PDIF in and out. Part code: GA-K8N Pro-SLI.