● MID-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MSI NX6800 GS

PC PRO A LIST

PRICE £140 (£165 inc VAT)
DELIVERY £5 (£6 inc VAT)
SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com
INTERNET www.msicomputer.co.uk
VERDICT The best mid-range graphics card, with plenty of power for a competitive price.

In a GPU market rapidly approaching saturation, the NX6800 GS occupies a lonely spot. Its price point is one curiously missed by ATi's new range of cards (*see p66*), meaning that if £150 is your budget for a Shader Model 3 card the NX6800 GS is an obvious choice.

Whereas the original 6800 GPU was fabricated at 130nm, the GS is made using an 110nm process. It's a small difference, but one that allows nVidia to raise the clock speed from

The NX6800 GS makes an excellent job of PC gaming without the need to spend more than around £150.

350MHz on the GT to 425MHz on the GS.

There are five vertex and 12 pixel pipes, which mean it's worse off than the 6800 GT by one vertex pipe and four pixel pipes. It does boast a faster clock speed, though, and it's cheaper than the GT by about £50.

We put the NX6800 GS through the same benchmarks we ran on ATi's new range, and it scored 44fps in Half-Life 2 and 51fps in Far Cry at 1,280 x 1,024. The Doom 3 score of 71fps is actually better than the X1800 XT's 62fps.

Even using HDR didn't defeat the NX6800 GS. Our Half-Life 2: Lost Coast timedemo
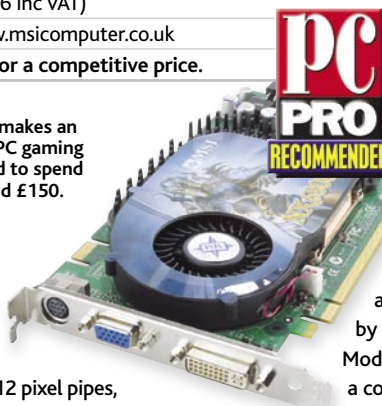
produced a score of 34fps, while Far Cry ran to a comfortable 33fps, both at 1,280 x 1,024.

It was the two newer games that revealed the NX6800 GS's weaknesses. Call of Duty 2 lurched its way to 19fps, while F.E.A.R. scored 22fps. Rais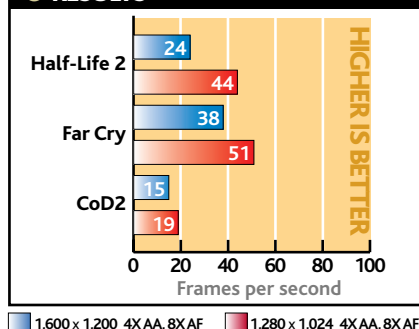ing the resolution to 1,600 x 1,200 inevitably made things worse, and the only games that scored over 30fps were Doom 3 and Far Cry.

A price of £140 is pushing the boundaries of a mid-range graphics card and, although the X800 GTO isn't Shader Model 3 compatible, it does cost around £40 less. However, once you start looking at brand-new games, as well as the rash of games sure to be sparked by the release of the Xbox 360, Shader Model 3 is a must, and the NX6800 GS is a convincing winner.

DAVE STEVENSON

● RESULTS

HIGHER IS BETTER

Half-Life 2	24 / 44
Far Cry	38 / 51
CoD2	15 / 19

Frames per second

■ 1,600 x 1,200 4X AA, 8X AF   ■ 1,280 x 1,024 4X AA, 8X AF

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS nVidia GeForce 6800 GS GPU; 425MHz core clock; 256MB 500MHz GDDR3 RAM; 256-bit memory interface; DVI-I, D-SUB and S-Video outputs; 5 x vertex, 12 x pixel pipelines. Part code: NX6800GS-TD256E.