

● MID-RANGE PC



Evesham nForce GT

PRICE £799 (£939 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £34 (£40 inc VAT)

INTERNET www.evesham.com

SUPPLIER Evesham 0870 160 9500

VERDICT Solid specs throughout make this a great-value system.

JAL's Daphne (see issue 123, p116) has held the coveted mid-range PC spot on the A List for three months – no mean feat considering the speed of evolution in the IT industry. This system from Evesham bears a few similarities to JAL's model, with some marked differences too. Both machines house a GeForce 6600 GT in a PCI Express graphics slot, but the Evesham pairs it with an nForce4 Ultra chipset and AMD processor, whereas JAL uses an Intel 915 chipset and Pentium 4 chip.

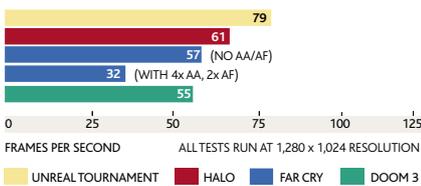
Evesham uses the older Newcastle-core version of the Athlon 64 3500+ in its machine. It runs hotter than the newer Winchester core and so requires some serious cooling. As such, the Evesham isn't a system that will be welcome in a quiet environment.

This processor is a great performer though, as shown by the benchmark score of 2.43. In media creation – where Pentium 4s tend to dominate – the Evesham matches the efforts of the Intel-powered JAL. In every other test, the Evesham far surpasses it.

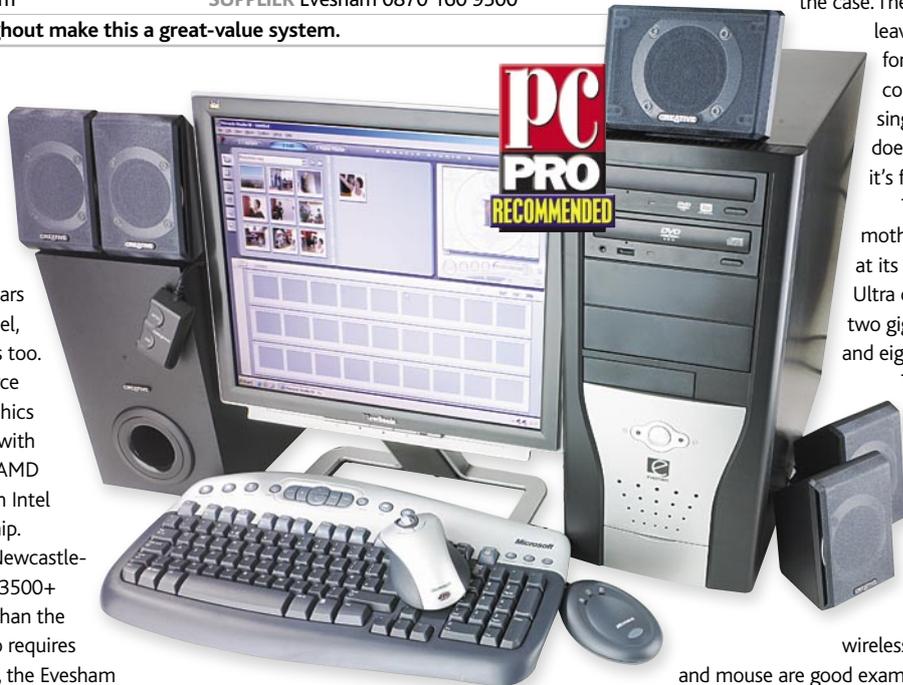
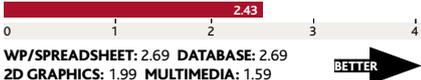
It isn't all down to the processor either, as Evesham has installed a 200GB Western Digital Caviar SE hard disk, which the company claims draws less power and so creates less heat, therefore prolonging its life. Western Digital also claims to have made the cache algorithms more efficient, as well as significantly reducing disk access noise – two claims we'll be putting to the test in next month's hard disk group test. The final innovation is more tangible, though: secure SATA connections. Rather than the current loose connectors that slip off all too easily, these need a firm tug to pull them free.

● RESULTS

3D SPEED



2D SPEED



Scorchingly fast in both games and desktop applications, and the ATX case leaves plenty of room for upgrades.

Gaming is handled by a 6600 GT card from Leadtek. Our standard 3D benchmarks gave it little trouble: Doom 3 at a resolution of 1,280 x 1,024 with high detail ran at 55fps – 9fps faster than the JAL's 6600 GT efforts. Far Cry ran beautifully with the detail set to very high and, even when we turned on 4x anisotropic filtering and 2x anti-aliasing, it still ran at a very playable 32fps.

Thankfully, Evesham hasn't compromised with ViewSonic's VX715 TFT. We noticed some slight pixel jitter even on the DVI input, but colour handling is more than good enough for everyday use. We saw little lag on moving images, and it's bright enough to make viewing photos and DVDs a pleasure. While not as technically good as the A-listed Sharp (see p47), it's still a fine screen for a system of this price.

We expected to see the DVD writer in a system costing this much, but Evesham takes advantage of the extra space over the JAL's small form factor to supply a DVD combo drive as well. Both are speedy 16x DVD drives, with the combo drive able to write CDs at 40x. Backups won't be a problem, nor will copying discs on-the-fly – just note the lack of dual-layer writing.

The case itself is the biggest visible cost-cutter. The plastic fascia, although solid, has a cheap look and feel to it. But it's otherwise

reasonable: a flap at the front hides a pair of USB ports, as well as a full-sized FireWire port and two audio jacks. Inside, there's ample space to manoeuvre, with the cabling tied to one side of the motherboard, giving good access to the CPU and RAM sockets. An 80mm fan whines at the front, blowing air over the hard disk and into

the case. The 300W PSU doesn't leave a lot of headroom for additional components, but its single 120mm fan does at least mean it's fairly quiet.

The MSI motherboard, which has at its heart an nForce4 Ultra chipset, provides for two gigabit Ethernet ports and eight SATA channels.

There are two free RAM sockets for when you need 1GB, three usable PCI slots (one of which houses a modem), and two PCI Express slots.

Elsewhere, the wireless Microsoft keyboard and mouse are good examples of their type. The mouse is comfortable in the hand (whether right or left) and the keyboard is good for prolonged typing. The Creative Inspire P5800 5.1 speaker set is more of a compromise: the unsubtle subwoofer leads to a distorted and uneven low end. There's plenty of scope for upgrading, though, with the integrated Creative Sound Blaster Live! audio providing 7.1 surround and Dolby Digital support.

All the care that Evesham has obviously taken in putting together a high-performance system on a shoestring budget is reflected in the warranty. The two years of on-site cover, with a further year of return-to-base, is reassuring.

If you're desperate for a small-form-factor case, the JAL Daphne is still a good buy, but the Evesham is far better value. If you're looking for a flexible and powerful mid-range system, the nForce GT is hard to beat.

CLIVE WEBSTER

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 2.2GHz AMD Athlon 3500+ processor; 512MB PC3200 RAM; MSI K8N Neo4 motherboard; 200GB Western Digital Caviar SE hard disk; 128MB nVidia 6600 GT graphics; 17in ViewSonic VX715 TFT; Sony DW-D22A DVD writer; Sony DDU1613 DVD-ROM combo drive; integrated Creative Sound Blaster Live! audio; Creative Inspire P5800 5.1 speakers; integrated dual-gigabit Ethernet; V.92 modem; Windows XP Home SP 2; Microsoft Works 8; 2yrs on-site & 1yr RTB warranty.