

● MEDIA CENTER EDITION 2005 PC



# Hi-Grade DMS II 3400

PRICE £999 (£1,174 inc VAT)

DELIVERY Free

INTERNET [www.higrade.com](http://www.higrade.com)

SUPPLIER Hi-Grade 020 8532 6111

VERDICT A significantly better Media Center PC than the original DMS, thanks to whisper-quiet operation, a superbly designed chassis and a vast array of rear connections.

It's a shame we didn't receive Hi-Grade's new DMS II for last month's Media Center PCs Labs (see issue 125, p94), since it would have provided stiff competition to Elonex's Artisan LX. The DMS II's specification is much like the Artisan's – there's a dual-tuner analog TV card, a Radeon X300 PCI Express graphics card and a digital display at the front to provide useful information, such as playing time, TV channel name and various other items.

Despite the fact that this is a pre-production unit, the DMS II is easily the Artisan's equal. It feels supremely well built, even by AV standards – you'll feel you've got your money's worth the instant you lift the 9.5kg unit out of its box. Our only slight reservation is the front panel. Instead of looking modern, the blocky styling and green display is reminiscent of a 1980s VCR: it's retro, but won't be to everyone's taste.

Nonetheless, there's a nicely disguised DVD tray, and the green dot-matrix display is certainly visible. A row of playback controls are the only other things on show, giving a clean look. But like other high-end hi-fi equipment, flip down the magnetic cover at the bottom of the fascia, and you're faced with an array of extra controls and connections. The most unusual are the Media Center navigation controls, complete with Home and Back buttons. Pressing Home



The 250GB hard disk provides storage for more than 100 hours of high-quality recordings.

launches Media Center if it isn't already running.

Then there's a 7-in-1 media card reader, two USB 2 ports and a mini-FireWire connection. Also unusual – but welcome – are the 1/4in headphone and microphone jacks, matching the standard of mainstream hi-fi kits. Lastly, there are S-Video, composite and stereo RCA inputs, for connection of analog sources.

These connect to the AVerMedia A169-D dual-tuner TV card, which replicates these ports on the rear of the unit. The card also sports an FM radio. As you'll see from the picture (see left), there are a plethora of interfaces, but they're well labelled and arranged, so it's easy to hook up the DMS II to existing equipment. The eagle-eyed will already have

spotted the absence of scart sockets. Unlike other DMS models, the connection wasn't included, but the fact there are DVI, D-SUB and S-Video outputs mean it

isn't a fatal blow.

Audio is provided by the integrated Intel HD audio, and there are both optical and coaxial S/PDIF connections, along with 7.1 RCA analog outputs. Two IR Blaster outputs also allow you to control a variety of compatible set-top boxes, including Sky and cable receivers.

It all adds up to an incredibly competent Media Center system, and we found it worked flawlessly in our tests – even when recording two TV channels at once. And thanks to the 250GB hard disk, you'll have well over 100 hours of recording time at the 'Better' quality setting.

With 1GB of PC3200 RAM and a 3.4GHz Pentium 4 CPU, this is also a powerful PC, scoring 1.92 in our 2D application benchmarks. The Radeon X300 proved a decent enough performer too, managing 37fps in our Unreal Tournament 2004 test at 1,280 x 1,024.

Since the chassis and motherboard are built around an enhanced version of Intel's BTX (Balanced Technology eXtended) layout, internal airflow is as optimised as possible. Two 80mm 'silent' fans cool a huge heatsink, which is connected to the CPU by heatpipes.

In tandem with a silent-fan PSU, it means the DMS II runs very cool and is easily as quiet as the Elonex Artisan in normal use. You'll know the system is on in your quiet living room only by looking at the display.

Connecting the system to your home network is simple – either use the wired LAN or integrated 802.11g Wi-Fi. It's the same Intel PRO/2200BG mini-PCI card used in most Centrino notebooks, and the aerial is integrated into the chassis for extra neatness.

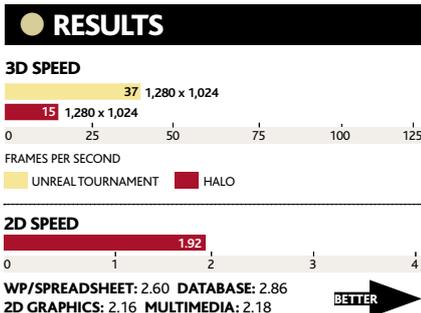
Comparing the specifications and performance results, the DMS II 3400 is better equipped than the Artisan LX and even more powerful. On the downside, it costs more because of this, and still uses the original DMS infrared keyboard/trackball combo, which needs line-of-sight to operate. Plus, there's a two-year, collect-and-return warranty with the DMS II – a year less than that offered by Elonex.

It's also worth bearing in mind that the DMS 3000 (see issue 125, p108) is still available, and has dropped in price by £100 to £899. But the real choice is still between the Elonex Artisan and the DMS II 3400. Both have eight-channel audio, high-speed DVD writers and dual tuners, although the Elonex costs £149 less (but you can buy the DMS II with 512MB of RAM for £935). While personal taste comes into play, the DMS II is better designed, both internally and externally. It runs cooler, theoretically leading to longer component life and, of more everyday use, even displays more information on the front panel. As such, it takes a place on the A List as our Media Center PC of choice.

JIM MARTIN



The huge number of interfaces makes it easy to connect the DMS II with existing hi-fi equipment.



**PC PRO RATINGS**

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

**SPECIFICATIONS** 3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 550; 1GB PC3200 RAM; Intel 915 custom motherboard; 250GB Western Digital Caviar SE hard disk; Lite-On SOHW-1633S DVD writer; 128MB ATI Radeon X300 graphics; AVerMedia A169-D TV card; Intel HD 7.1 audio; V.92 modem; Intel PRO/2200BG 802.11g WLAN mini-PCI card; Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005; 2yr C&R warranty.