



Sparkle GeForce 6600 GT

With the arrival of Doom 3, and Half-Life 2 expected any minute, the appearance of the first retail GeForce 6600 GT board (we previewed the chipset last month) is a canny piece of timing from Sparkle. After all, this PCI Express card is designed to play all the latest games at a high resolution, yet it costs half the price of a 6800 GT.

Halo can be a killer for mid-range video cards, but at 1,280 x 1,024 it flew along at 58fps (frames per second) in our 3.6GHz test rig. Even at 1,600 x 1,200 with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering turned on the Sparkle produced 38fps. Unreal Tournament 2004 saw an enormous 78fps at 1,280 x 1,024, and 36fps at 1,600 x 1,200 – again with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering both turned on.

Doom 3 proved more of a challenge. The Sparkle stuttered through the first run of the game, but once the textures



were cached in the board's 128MB of RAM it scored a highly impressive 55fps at 1,280 x 1,024. You won't be able to switch anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering on though, with a stuttering score of 26fps.

In spite of excellent performance, we were disappointed with the software supplied. A trial of PowerDVD is the only packaged application. But this is the only negative we could find. Those who want the smallest hit in the pocket in return for the biggest boost in performance will be delighted.

PRICE £120 (£141 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

OVERALL ★★★★★