



● NFORCE4 SLI PC

Scan White Cobra



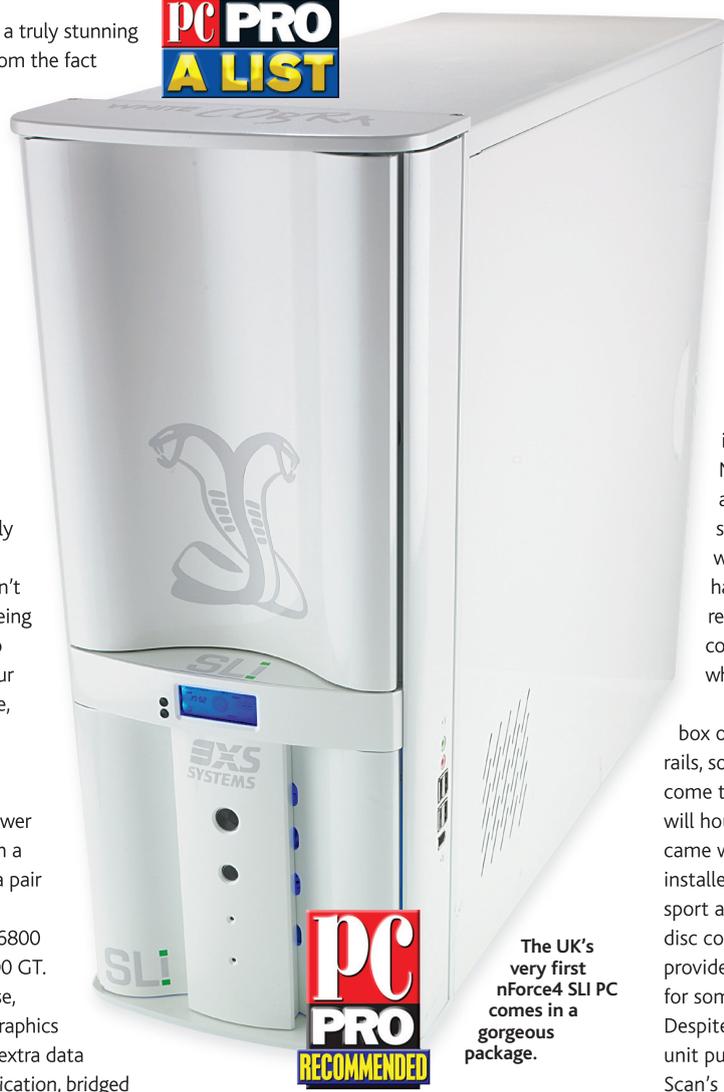
PRICE £2,749 (£3,230 inc VAT) system unit only DELIVERY Free
INTERNET www.scan.co.uk SUPPLIER Scan Computers 0870 755 4747
VERDICT A stunning and utterly desirable leviathan of a PC, with by far the fastest graphics performance we've seen.

If you've ever wanted to see a truly stunning PC, this is your day. Aside from the fact that the Scan White Cobra

is the first system any UK magazine has seen with an nVidia nForce4 motherboard with SLI (Scalable Link Interface) PCI Express graphics, it's quite simply one of the best looking – and biggest – desktop PCs we've ever seen. The pearlescent white finish of the White Cobra's paint job isn't done justice by these pictures: the interplay of light across it not only looks fantastic, the finish itself feels superb and extremely durable too.

nVidia's new SLI system isn't dual graphics in the sense of being able to attach two monitors to one card in order to extend your Desktop. It's exactly the reverse, allowing you to harness and combine the 3D power of two graphics cards for one display, giving very nearly twice the power for 3D graphics. It requires both a compatible motherboard and a pair of compatible graphics cards – currently only nVidia GeForce 6800 Ultra, 6800 GT or GeForce 6600 GT.

The motherboard, of course, requires two PCI Express 16x graphics connectors. The cards have an extra data connection for direct communication, bridged



The UK's very first nForce4 SLI PC comes in a gorgeous package.

hard disks. Usability isn't sacrificed for looks, with USB, audio and FireWire ports discreetly placed at the side but easily accessible.

Removing the side panel reveals some serious internals. The first thing is the presence of no less than four 120mm cooling fans: the standard front- and rear-mounted units, plus two more directly covering the motherboard, drawing air through vents in the side panel. These simply swing aside door-like to expose the Asus A8N-E motherboard and dual GeForce 6800 Ultra graphics cards in all their glory. Added to that is an Athlon 64 FX-55 processor and Crucial XMS memory; our test machine came with 1GB of RAM, but Scan will supply 2GB for the price quoted for the production model.

The case is designed with plenty of fast storage in mind. The main drive cage will accommodate five hard disks, mounted on snap-in rails. There's space for one more disk under the floppy drive and an integrated media card reader too. As supplied there are three hard disks: two 74GB 10,000rpm Western Digital Raptors in a primary RAID0 array, plus a 300GB Maxtor DiamondMax 10 for data storage and backup. This is pretty much the ideal setup for either a gaming machine or workstation: Raptors are the fastest SATA hard disks money can buy, and their relatively limited capacity is well compensated for by the Maxtor, which is itself a fast drive.

A superb touch is an integrated storage box on the floor of the case containing spare rails, so they'll always be to hand when you come to install new drives. The upper section will house four optical drives. Our review unit came with a Plextor PX-712A DVD writer installed; the production machine will also sport a Plextor DVD-ROM for quick disc-to-disc copies. A Tagan 480W power supply provides the power, and should see you clear for some extra drives without any trouble. Despite the fact that this is a pre-production unit put together to a very tight schedule, Scan's builders have done a great job of keeping the internals as accessible and free of clutter as possible – there's nothing hampering access to the motherboard (see left).

3D RESULTS

After the anticipation of unpacking such a gorgeous PC, we were worried that its performance might not live up to our expectations. How wrong we were: the 3D results of the White Cobra are out of this world. Rather than throw older-generation games at it, we decided to throw it straight in at the deep end with the two toughest current games.

We started with our Far Cry torture test, putting detail and effect settings at maximum, with full anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering and a resolution of 1,600 x 1,200. The Cobra barely broke into a sweat, returning a score of



by a ribbon cable (see opposite). Incidentally, nVidia also claims that for SLI to work you must have a pair of identical model graphics cards from the same vendor.

INSIDE THE SERPENT

While the SLI setup is the main draw of this PC, it certainly isn't the only notable feature. Moving on from the superb paint job and custom graphics, the front-mounted display shows temperature information for the case internals, CPU and