

Scan 3XS Black Widow

Immense power packed into a stylish, well-built chassis makes the Scan a worthy champion

Scan's 3XS Black Widow is the only system this month that's equipped with one of Intel's brand-new Core i7 processors. The part in question is the 965 Extreme Edition – the most potent in the range – and Scan has taken advantage of its unlocked multiplier to raise clock speed from 3.2GHz to an impressive 3.8GHz.

In our benchmarks, the Scan delivered a suitably ferocious score of 2.44 – not just the quickest score this month, but one of the best results we've ever seen. It's clear that, as well as being the fastest PC in the Labs, the Black Widow is capable of handling any application you wish to throw at it, no matter how demanding.

A trio of GeForce GTX 280 graphics cards, each with a core clock speed of 602MHz and 1GB of on-board GDDR3 memory, is a formidable setup that should sate the most demanding of gamers, too. In our Crysis benchmarks it eventually pulled ahead of the powerful CyberPower, with its triple SLI, GTX 260 setup and overclocked 4.1GHz quad-core CPU, and managed a superb 50fps in our very high quality benchmarks, run at a resolution of 2,048 x 1,536.

However, it couldn't outpace every contender in our 2,560 x 1,600 benchmark: here, the Scan faltered to a juddery 18fps, compared with a solid 35fps from the Chillblast and its pair of Radeon HD 4870 X2 cards – the only PC that maintained a playable frame rate in this, our most demanding of tests.

Our other benchmarks provided encouraging results. Call of Duty 4 performance was on a par with the Chillblast in most tests. Call of Juarez proved more of a challenge, with the Chillblast consistently quicker – 68fps to 50fps in the 1,920 x 1,200, very high quality test – but no other machine managed to keep up with this pair.

The rest of the Scan's specification is geared towards getting the most out of the core components. Its Asus Rampage II Extreme motherboard has Intel's new X58 chipset and offers plenty of expansion. The new processor also means that 6GB of 1,333MHz DDR3 RAM can be employed in a triple-channel

arrangement – an improvement over the dual-channel DDR2 fitted to every other PC this month.

For storage you get two Samsung SpinPoint F1 hard disks, offering a huge 2TB of space between them, while an 80GB Intel SSD is employed as the system's primary drive. It's ideal for using as your core gaming drive to dramatically reduce access times, while leaving less-demanding files – such as your media collection – on the huge Samsung drives. There's also a DVD writer and Blu-ray reader for watching high-definition movies.

As well as a fantastic core specification, the Black Widow is liberally sprinkled with neat touches and lavish attention to detail. This becomes immediately evident once you open the attractive Silverstone Temjin TJ07 chassis. Every cable has been routed in clinical straight lines around major components, beneath the motherboard and behind various structures, so they're as unobtrusive as possible.

Scan's careful planning also means that getting to all the components inside – the RAM, graphics cards, hard disks and optical drives – is easy, even though there's an awful lot packed into a chassis that's considerably smaller than the Chillblast's Lian Li case.

Build quality throughout is impressive: the aluminium case is solid, and sensible touches abound. The PSU and HDD area, for instance, is separated from the rest of the PC with a metal



panel, which ensures a clean flow of air is maintained throughout, and the Thermalright True Black-120 CPU cooler is more than powerful enough to keep a lid on the temperature of the overclocked Core i7.

It's also worth mentioning the customisation options: Scan offers a laser-cut side panel, decorated with a stylish spider and covered in mesh to provide a little extra cooling. It isn't cheap, however, adding £150 to the cost of the machine.

One final stylish touch is the lighting. Where most high-end machines come with dozens of garishly coloured lights – the

CyberPower is a prime example – the Scan boasts monochrome, white strip-lights. It may sound dull, but it's a tasteful topping on a superb build, and has the positive side-effect of lighting the components and layout inside to best effect. Scan also makes it easy to turn off the lights if you wish, via a selection of internal switches that are easy to access.

In fact, the only negative we can see here is the noise. While it's by no means the loudest PC on test – the CyberPower takes that honour with an incredibly loud 48dBA – the Black Widow ran at 41dBA, compared with 33dBA from the unobtrusive Chillblast Fusion Titan. It's worth bearing in mind, though, that the Fusion Titan had a larger case that was packed with sound-absorbing foam.

It all adds up to one of the best PCs we've ever seen. It may not be as quiet as the monolithic Chillblast, but it's fantastic in every other respect. There's ferocious, Core i7-driven power, mind-blowing 3D performance, a Blu-ray drive and SSD storage in one of the most thoughtful and well-conceived builds we've ever seen. It's for these reasons that it's our top-rated ultimate PC.



PRICE
£3,599
(\$4,299 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER
Scan 0871 472 4747

POWER RATING
Idle: 357W
Peak: 574W

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