

Alienware Area51

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Alienware - it's a word that strikes fear in the competition and lust in the eyes of gamers – regardless of what comes to mind when you hear that word, there's one thing that's abundantly clear here; they are in fact the premier builder of high-end gaming PCs and have been doing so for over a decade. The PCs Alienware produces are as "American" as their story of success.

It's quite evident that they forward that success into each and every PC they produce – it's a quality standard that seems to be so sorely lacking in many of today's "gaming PC's". We've seen just about every PC maker I can think of jump into the mix and try their hand at this market; however, there are no others which have enjoyed the same level of success.

If I at all sound like a fan-boy of Alienware – well I guess I sort of am. They produce ass-kicking PCs – what's not to like? So what exactly makes their PCs so top-notch? I'm glad you asked – let's dive in.

{mospagebreak title=Specs and Closer Look}

Specs:

- Processor: Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9770 3.2GHz 12MB Cache 1600MHz FSB
- Alienware P2 Chassis: Alienware P2 Chassis with AlienIce 3.0 Video Cooling - Space Black
- System Lighting: Alienware AlienFX System Lighting - Astral Blue
- System Cooling: Alienware High-Performance Liquid Cooling
- Acoustic Dampening: Alienware Acoustic Dampening
- Power Supply: Alienware 1000 Watt Multi-GPU Approved Power Supply
- Graphics Processor: Dual 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 280
- Memory: 4GB Dual Channel DDR3 SDRAM at 1066MHz - 2 x 2048MB
- Motherboard: Alienware Approved NVIDIA nForce 790i Ultra SLI
- Includes PCI-Express 2.0, DDR3 Memory, and Support for Intel 1600 FSB
- Operating System (Office software not included): Windows Vista Home Premium with SP1

- System Drive: Extreme Performance (RAID 0) - 600GB (2 x 300GB) Velociraptor SATA 3.0Gb/s 10,000RPM 2 x 16MB Cache
- Additional Storage Drive: Additional Storage Drive - 500GB SATA 3Gb/s 7,200RPM 16MB Cache
- Optical Drives : Single Drive Configuration - 4x Dual Layer Blu-ray Burner (BD-RE, DVD±RW, CD-RW)
- Enthusiast Essentials: Killer K1 Gaming Network Interface Card - Smoother Online Gaming!
- Sound Card: High-Definition 7.1 Performance Audio
- Keyboard: Gaming Keyboard - Logitech G15 Keyboard
- Mouse: Gaming Mouse - Logitech G5 Gaming Mouse
- Warranty: 1-Year AlienCare Toll-Free 24/7 Phone Support w/ Onsite Service
- AlienRespawn: AlienRespawn v2.0 Recovery DVD – Windows Vista Edition

First of all you'll notice that they partner with some of the best brands in the business – in this PC, for example, we find an eVGA motherboard, twin GeForce 9800GTX cards in SLI (you can opt for other cards as well with Alienware's online configurator).

A computer's power-supply is of great significance – especially if you plan on keeping it for any length of time. There are fewer things more frustrating than to finally get around to upgrading a PC, only to find out you have the ghetto-PSU from hell. No the case with Alienware, they hand-picked a kick-ass Thermaltake 1200-watt monstrosity which means you should have adequate power to run pretty much anything that comes your way over the next couple of years.

{mospagebreak title=Even Closer Look}

Intel inside has brought on an entirely new meaning of life for gamers and PC enthusiasts ever since it rolled out the Core2Duo – this particular unit features Intel's Quad-Core QX9770 which runs at 3.2GHz. Today, you can order Intel's barn-burning Core i7 processor which is an even faster solution – at this point in the game, there really is no reason whatsoever to consider AMD's processors, unless you're talking really low price-points and even then, Intel remains a better, overall solution.

One of the great things Alienware can now do that it's a part of Dell is place certain demands on its partners like it did in the case of this eVGA motherboard which uses an nForce chipset- eVGA custom-coded a special BIOS for the board which allows it to run either SLI or Crossfire. Doing this makes things a lot easier on Alienware as it can help keep costs down by using the same motherboard for either configuration.

Another example of Alienware's commitment to delivering a best-of-class gaming experience is its implementation of water-cooling on this particular PC. The on-board cooler keeps the CPU temperatures well within spec – even if you decide to ever ratchet up the clock speeds of it. One of this system's better attributes is this water cooler as it'll let you potentially squeeze even more performance from it than how it originally shipped.. In addition to its cooling capability, it also helps to keep the noise down as this unit operates very quietly.

{mospagebreak title=Nice and tidy}

Equally as impressive to me is the cable routing and tie-backs – most of today's "gaming PC's" from leading OEMS are nothing but a glorified rat's-nest of wires and mess. Not so on this computer – in fact, the wires are very methodically laid out and use the shortest-possible runs to ensure that airflow inside the case stays at a premium. Other large-scale system builders would do well to learn from Alienware in this regard.

They seem to have done a really good job of implementing enough system cooling to keep overall internal temperatures at bay. As you can see from our internal shots, there are auxiliary cooling fans on both the backside and front of the case – these are setup in a pull/push fashion to keep cooling air coming in and the warmer air on the way out.

Overall fit and finish is totally spot-on – there's little Alienware could do, in my opinion, to make it better. My only complaint at all is on the heavy-ass case itself – good Lord, you almost need a forklift to move this beast around and the side-panels can prove to be a bit tricky to get seated back on properly. Outside of those two minor issues, however, it's a great system. Users also have the ability to adjust the lighting scheme on the case to a variety of colors using an included windows application that lets you change them in real-time – not very practical, maybe, but still has that cool "geek factor"; nonetheless.

{mospagebreak title=3DMark Vantage}

Benchmark Results:

{mospagebreak title=Call of Duty 4 and Far Cry 2}

{mospagebreak title=Unreal 3 and PCMark Vantage}

{mospagebreak title=Conclusion and Rating}

Keep in mind that right now you can go to Alienware's website and outfit this rig with all the latest bells and whistles – Core i7, GeForce 295, 6GB of DDR3 etc; however, even with all that said, one thing remains – you'll be getting a quality-built PC that has a company behind it that's 100% committed to bringing you the absolute best in what the PC gaming experience can be.

Additionally, there are also less-expensive configurations you can do should you want to find ways to lower the price a bit. I'm keenly aware that in today's economy that not everyone's rushing out to dump \$5-\$6k on a new PC – in fact, Area51 PCs start as low as \$999.

In the end, I'll have to give it up to Alienware for putting together what is arguably the nicest PC I've ever used.

Rating: 9/10