

## VELOCITY MICRO GAMER'S EDGE FX

It's hard to believe that Velocity Micro has gone from kitchen-table PC maker to high-end contender in just a few short years. The company definitely seems to "get" PC-building. The understated-looking Gamer's Edge FX is a great example.

Even though it lacks a laser-cut door, exotic water-cooling, or a fancy-pants paint job, a large number of people in our office love this system's looks. Using the same Lian Li chassis as the Voodoo case, Velocity Micro's presentation eschews ostentatious over-the-top adornment in favor of a unified, utilitarian theme.

Internally, an overclocked Athlon 64 FX-53 is paired with an Asus A8V Socket 939 motherboard, a pair of Raptors, an overclocked GeForce 6800 Ultra card, and 1GB of DDR400.

Unfortunately, like the Voodoo Rage F:2, the Gamer's Edge experienced a few hiccups during Lab tests, forcing us to reset the CPU clock speeds to stock levels just to install certain applications. And even then, we experienced odd video corruption. After a full system restore and some troubleshooting assistance from Velocity Micro, we were able to get the Gamer's Edge FX's GeForce card running at its original OC'd speed of 440MHz and were also able to bump the CPU clock back to 2.47GHz. Everything worked fine except for our *Jedi Academy* test. Ultimately, no matter how we tested it, the Gamer's Edge never hit the frame rates we expected. It's not clear to us—or the company—what the hell went wrong.

At press time, Velocity Micro officials told



The Gamer's Edge FX has strong aesthetic appeal even though it lacks the exotic paint and flashy looks of some other rigs here.

us they were a week away from implementing a water-cooling solution, which would make for a much quieter system than the current air-cooled, overclocked configuration is capable of. As it stands, the Velocity Micro is one of the loudest in the group.

One thing we love about the Gamer's Edge FX is its price. At \$3,600, it gives you 95 percent of the performance afforded by the top-tier systems here at just two-thirds the cost. Unfortunately, performance and stability matter more than anything else in this deathmatch. Just as we dinged the Voodoo Rage F:2 for forcing us to tinker, we have to do the same with the Gamer's Edge FX.

### VELOCITY MICRO GAMER'S EDGE FX

**MAXIMUM PC verdict** ..... **6**  
\$3,655, [www.velocitymicro.com](http://www.velocitymicro.com)

## FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V ICON EXOTIX

Falcon Northwest likes to say it was the very first US company to build PCs that cater to gamers. This is a legitimate claim, and as such, the old-time gaming PC shop has an arsenal of tricks in its toolbox. A shining example of Falcon's prowess is the Mach V Icon Exotix.

Instead of using the popular Athlon 64 FX, Falcon attempted to out-muscle its competitors with a highly overclocked Pentium 4. How high? How does 4.28GHz sound? That's well beyond the clock speed we hit with last month's overclocked Dream Machine 2004 (which ran at 3.97GHz). But Falcon has two advantages: The first is a new custom-designed water-cooling scheme that vents hot air out the top of a Silverstone Nimiz case through a massive radiator. The second is the base CPU. We started with a 3.6GHz Pentium 4 in the DM2004; Falcon started with a 3.8GHz P4 for this monster rig. You haven't heard of a 3.8GHz P4? Neither had we until Falcon's PC arrived.

The 4.28GHz P4 is locked into a Socket T in an Asus P5AD2 Premium mobo that's stuffed with 2GB of DDR2. This is the same board we used in the Dream Machine, and it continues to wow us with its dual GB LAN and onboard Wi-Fi. Storage is handled by a pair of Western Digital Raptors and a single WD 250GB drive. Falcon ditched the mobo's onboard 24-bit audio in favor of the Audigy 2 ZS.

One nice touch we appreciate: like the Zeus PC, the

Mach V Exotix offers a dual-layer burner.

The exotic, hot-rod-worthy paint job, dubbed "Red Death," received mixed reviews from our staff. Not everyone went for the Khmer Rouge motif (a pile of skulls painted along the side of the case), but gamers who get a kick out of shot-gunning zombies will dig it.

Of the six boxes here, only the ABS Ultimate X6 and this Mach V are truly forward-looking. While there's no real indication that PCI Express graphics cards offer better performance, we're certain that in 12 to 24 months (around the time you'll want to replace your videocard), you'll be kicking yourself if you haven't invested in the technology.

Finally, of all the overclocked boxes in this roundup, the Mach V gave us the least problems on boot. The machine booted quickly and ate its way through the benchmarks without a single crash or glitch. The Mach V smoked all others in *AquaMark 3* and was one of just three machines here to break 13K in *3DMark 2003*. Let's just say the Mach V's only real competition came from Alienware.

Our only qualm with the Mach V is its hefty price. We're used to seeing big price tags on systems, but this pushes the top end at \$7,300. (You can shave a grand off the price if you forego the paint job.) Regardless, Falcon Northwest continues to impress us with its technical prowess. If money is no object, this is clearly the PC for you.

### FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V ICON EXOTIX

**MAXIMUM PC verdict** ..... **9**  
\$7,300, [www.falcon-nw.com](http://www.falcon-nw.com)



The paint job is called "Red Death" and features a subtle pile of human skulls.

