

Falcon Northwest Mach V Icon 2

It's more a work of art than a PC

YOU CAN'T TRULY appreciate the paint job on Falcon Northwest's Mach V unless you can fondle it. We mean it—you just can't comprehend how damn smooth the paint is without lovingly stroking your hand on the side of this beauty as if you were a presidential candidate.

Inside the Mach V, you'll find a pedigree of hardware to match its stunning exterior. Intel's top gun—the 3.3GHz Core i7-3960X—gets top billing, of course. This hexa-core chip simply makes all other chips before it—quad- or hexa-core—seem downright weak. Falcon mates the chip with a top-end Asus Rampage IV Extreme board. In addition to sporting the very cool ability to update the BIOS from a USB key without a CPU or RAM installed, the Rampage IV caters to extreme overclockers with such over-the-top tricks as an "overclocking key." The overclocking key is an external video dongle that lets you display an overlay of any of the CPU's temps and various voltages on a single-link monitor in real time.

Why would anyone ever want to do this? Believe it or not, extreme overclockers need the information in real time during their liquid-nitrogen escapades, and this feature can save them the price of buying a very expensive Fluke meter.

The Mach V, of course, doesn't run on liquid helium or liquid nitrogen; it uses a Cool-It Eco II ALC cooler, which enables the CPU to go from a stock 3.3GHz all the way to 4.4GHz. Falcon takes full advantage of the Intel X79 chipset's support for eight DIMM slots, too, fully populating the board with 32GB of DDR3/1600 RAM. We know 32GB is overkill, but there's some appeal to

it: We're talking RAM disk, baby! Sure, an SSD can post read speeds of 500MB/s, but a RAM disk can post a staggering 4,000MB/s! It's a small RAM disk, but it delivers phenomenal disk I/O. For graphics, Falcon outfits the Mach V with a pair of EVGA GeForce GTX 580 Classified cards. These aren't just overclocked cards, mind you, they also pack massive 3GB frame buffers—double the size of a standard GTX 580 card.

So how does the Falcon stack up? It's wicked fast and handily pounds the crap out of our elderly zero-point system, as well as the majority of the Core i7-990X boxes we've tested in the last year. But how does it stack up against the Digital Storm HailStorm we reviewed in the Holiday 2011 issue? There's the rub: Digital Storm clocked its Core i7-3960X part even higher, to 4.7GHz. That 7 percent edge gives DStorm's system a boost in just about everything that's processor bound. Digital Storm also takes the lead in gaming performance, thanks to its tri-SLI GTX 580 configuration. That design choice endows the DStorm with a 20 percent boost in most high-res games. Yeah, we know, a pair of GTX 580s is crazy fast for every game out today; but three of a kind trumps a pair, no matter how you cut the benchmarks.

We have to note, however, that the Digital Storm rig costs about \$400 more than this Falcon. Still, when each price tag is pushing \$7,000, it's hard to snivel over a few hundred bucks. The Falcon Mach V is the sexier beast, though; and make no mistake: She's fast enough for you, old man; she's just not the fastest machine we've tested. —GORDON MAH UNG



Sometimes, it's the outside *and* the inside that matters.



VERDICT
9

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■ **HAL 2000** The smoothest paint job we've seen in a long time; damned fast.

■ **ED 209** Expensive; an SLI rig will never beat a tri-SLI config.

\$6,993, www.falcon-nw.com

BENCHMARKS

	ZERO POINT	
Vegas Pro (sec)	3,049	1,853
Lighthouse 2.6 (sec)	356	240
ProShow 4 (sec)	1,112	790
MainConcept (sec)	2,113	1,303
STALKER: CoP (fps)	42.0	94.3 (+213%)
Far Cry 2 (fps)	114.4	200.0

Our current desktop test bed consists of a quad-core 2.66GHz Core i7-920 overclocked to 3.5GHz, 6GB of Corsair DDR3/1333 overclocked to 1,750MHz, on a Gigabyte X58 motherboard. We are running an ATI Radeon HD 5970 graphics card, a 160GB Intel X25-M SSD, and the 64-bit version of Windows 7 Ultimate.

SPECIFICATIONS

Processor	Intel 3.3GHz Core i7-3960X OC'd to 4.4GHz
Mobo	Asus Rampage IV Extreme using Intel X79 chipset
RAM	32GB Kingston DDR3/1600
Videocard	EVGA Classified GeForce GTX 580 (3GB) in SLI
Soundcard	Onboard
Storage	256GB Crucial M4, 2TB WD HDD (7,200rpm)
Optical	LG Blu-ray UH12LS28K
Case/PSU	Mach V Icon 2 Case/ Silverstone Strider Gold 1,200 Watt