CAD 2 IMAGINE Q64

CAD 2 has packed an incredible amount of technology inside its sub £1,000 workstation - so much that we had to double check the price. It's the only machine on test this month to offer a Quad Core processor and it does this without scrimping on clock speed either. The 2.4GHz delivered by its Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600 stands shoulder to shoulder with the dual core chips inside the HP and Scan machines, but you get an additional two cores to play with as you will.

> "With CAD 2's Imagine Q64, you'll not only be buying a machine that can satisfy your requirements today, but well into the future as your needs grow"

Four cores will be music to the ears of rendering and CAE users with multithreaded tasks to solve. It breezed through the 3ds Max rendering test we threw at it and concurrent CPU intensive tasks were dealt with little drop in individual application performance.

Specifications

CAD2 IMAGINE Q64

- Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600 (2.4GHz)
- Nvidia Quadro FX1500 (256MB)
- 4x1GB PC2-6400 800MHz Dual Channel
- Intel Workstation Chipset Motherboard
- 2x 160GB Seagate 7200.10 S-ATA (Raid 0)
- 18x Dual Layer Dual Format +/- DVD-ReWriter
- Windows XP
- £950.00 + VAT

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The graphics is provided by a Quadro FX1500, NVIDIA's excellent mid-range card. Mid-range CAD users are in safe hands here and even those dabbling in design visualisation should enjoy good 3D performance.

The 4GB of RAM inside the system gives you a built in upgrade path to 64-bit Operating Systems, which is a more than viable option for a machine of this specification. For those who are already bottlenecked by memory in their 32-bit OS, however, Windows XP Professional x64 Edition and Vista are also available, though check compatibility with your applications first.

In terms of storage, CAD 2 has opted for speed, rather than redundancy, with two 160GB Seagate 7200.10 S-ATA drives configured as a single drive through Raid 0. This will give you near on 320GB in total, with the data shared across both hard drives, but should one hard drive fail you'll lose all of your data, so regular backing up is essential with this configuration.

We found the machine to be very quiet in operation, even when hammering all four cores for an extended period. Removing the side of the compact solid chassis reveals the reason for this - one big CPU fan pushing all the air through to an adjacent fan at the back of the case. This seems to be the standard setup adopted my most workstation manufacturers today in order to reduce noise and it works very well indeed. Elsewhere inside the machine, there is excellent attention to detail with all cables carefully routed around the case.

If there's a downside at all it's that the hard drives are hard to get should they ever need replacing, and there aren't any memory slots free on the Intel motherboard - though you wouldn't really expect this in an entry-level machine and 2GB memory modules would push the price up considerably.

But this begs the question "is the CAD 2 Imagine Q64 really an entry-level machine?" If you told us a year ago that you'd be able to buy a four CPU workstation with mid-range professional graphics, 4GB RAM and a high performance disk system for under a grand, we simply wouldn't have believed you. The fact that you can today still beggars belief, and with CAD 2's Imagine Q64, you'll not only be buying a machine that can satisfy your mid-range CAD/CAM/CAE requirements today, but well into the future as your needs (and the needs of your software) grow.