CAD2 Vision A185GT 64

- 2.6GHz AMD Opteron 185 (dual core)
- 4GB DDR memory
- Asus A8R-MVP Deluxe (ATI Express 3200 chipset)
- ATI FireGL V5200
- 2x Seagate Cheetah 36GB SAS
- Adaptec SAS RAID Controller 4805
- 16x Dual Layer Dual Format +/- DVD-ReWriter
- Windows XP
- £2,550

www.cad2.com

Featuring a hard drive system for which you wouldn't get much change out of a grand, CAD2's latest workstation is certainly a specialist bit of kit. The system is based on the new Serial Attached SCSI (SAS) technology which is the next evolution of the Ultra 320 SCSI interface that used to be the mainstay of high end workstations. CAD2's system is centred on Adaptec's 4805 SAS RAID card, an eight-port controller that supports SAS, SATA or SATA II disk drives and features more Raid configurations than most users would know what to do with. Luckily, CAD2 is on hand for advice, and for this review opted for ultimate performance with two 36GB Seagate Cheetah 15,000RPM SAS drives configured in a Raid 0 array.

So how good is this technology? On test we did find SAS reduced the time taken to load applications and CAD models, though not by a huge margin. The greatest benefits came with small data sets or with short bursts of data when the system kicked instantly into action. This is partly down to the massive 1MB cluster size, which the test system had been set up with, but CAD2 is able to fine tune this technology for customer's individual needs and we are advised that smaller cluster sizes would improve performance for larger data sets.

The rest of the system is made up of much more mainstream workstation technology - a dual core 2.6GHz Opteron 185, 4GB PC3200 DDR memory and an ATI FireGL V5200 graphics card.

This combination provides an excellent platform for most CAD users and this is reflected in the benchmark results where the machine delivered solid results across all applications. It's

also interesting to note that our tests showed that there is virtually no difference in computational performance between CAD2's older generation Opteron 185-based Vision A185GT 64 and Sun's new Opteron 1218-based Ultra 20 M2. Both processors run at 2.6GHz, but the CAD2 machine uses DDR memory compared to Sun's DDR2.

As always, CAD2's attention to detail is exemplary - the chosen Silverstone chassis is classic in design and solid in construction and the system is put together with evident love, without a stray cable in sight.

CAD2 has produced yet another excellent workstation, albeit one for the specialist market, but for those that consider SAS a luxury, the Vision A185GT 64 is also available with a more standard Serial ATA hard disk system, which of course will take a good chunk off the substantial price tag.