



Big Al

Meet the Gaming Review Team



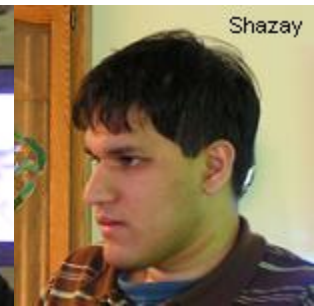
Dear God, what a machine!



Very smooth game play.



Too good. It's perfect!



Super detailed.



An all round quality machine.



Very sweet!



Very optimal.



Could use restore disks.

Introduction

Why do we buy computers? Are they necessary for doing household financial planning, tax preparation, maybe even homework? Well, sure. But there's something more than "real" work when it comes to certain types of computers. You know what we're talking about here – gaming machines! Ladies and Gentlemen, let me present the HyperKore HK-Xtreme!



The HyperKore HK-Xtreme arrived with a custom laser-etched window for www.fastlanehw.com!



Big Al

Fast Lane Hardware was fortunate enough to get this high-end gaming system to review from the boys over at HyperKore (www.hyperkore.com). This isn't just any gaming machine, buy the way. It's the same machine reviewed by Computer Power User magazine in their April 2006 issue. The only thing that's different here is the custom laser-etched window (oh, it's so sweet...) and the review process that we have used. The HK-Xtreme was placed in a LAN gaming session with five other machines at the home of Big Al's Computers (www.bigal-computers.net). We are going to see how real gamers, guys just like you and me, think the HK-Xtreme performs with real games – forget the benchmarks. Not only that, we're going to take a peek inside this beauty. You will soon understand what a good wiring job is all about. Believe me, it's been a humbling experience for me and my custom builds.

What's It All About?

Big Al's Computers, when it comes right down to it, is basically my basement filled with gaming machines that I have built over the past few years. I'm what you call a frustrated engineer (I have an MSEE), since I don't do much engineering design work at my regular job. So I make up for that by building and modding computers. Anyway, I enjoy hosting LAN gaming sessions periodically. Its fun for the local gamers and it helps justify the expense that comes along for the ride. My main gaming machines are the OsbornAgain (a rebuilt 1983-era CP/M portable computer now running an AMD Athlon 64 X2 3800+ dual core CPU), the Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu (two complete AMD Athlon XP 2500+ systems stuffed into an old HP LaserJet 4MX), and some more typical case machines (Ella, Tufts, and Tom) that are also running the AMD Athlon XP 2500+ CPU. The HK-Xtreme is running the Intel dual-core Pentium D 950 CPU. Videocard wise, OsbornAgain has a BFG 7800 GT OC, while the Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu has dual PNY 6800 GTs. Can my machines measure up to the HK-Xtreme's Asus ATI Radeon EAX1800XT with its 512MB of on-board RAM? We're going to find out...

But first, let me say a few words about HyperKore. The company was founded in November 2003 by three guys – Thomas, Chris, and Adam. Thomas has the artistic talents – he graduated from the prestigious School of Visual Arts in New York. Chris finished his studies with a Masters in Information Systems, and he has tons of experience with the wireless industry. If you need help with digital film and editing on high-end personal computers (like the HK-Xtreme), Chris is your man. Adam brought in the sales experience and works the marketing aspects. Each system is built by hand. Each of these guys is a system builder. There are no assembly lines, no mass production. One system builder handles the entire process of obtaining the hardware, assembling the system, tweaking and testing. Then a second system builder validates everything the first system builder did. Each system is built like it was their own personal computer. A support staff takes care of the other aspects of running the business, so these guys can remain focused.

The HK-Xtreme Arrives



UPS delivers the HK-Xtreme – the kitty likes it.



Let's open this box up. Hey, good protection on top.



Big Al

I made sure I got home early on the day of arrival. I knew that UPS wasn't going to leave a machine worth approximately \$3800 on my doorstep. Lucky for me the driver actually placed the box inside my house. Then he slid it a few feet on the wood floor! Yikes! I'll take it from here, thank you very much.



There's the keyboard and other accessories.



Here's the machine, nicely wrapped in plastic and surrounded by foam.



Say, who's that on the custom laser-etched window? Why, it's Big Al!



Let's open the door and see the optical drives. Nice etch of Zeebo.

The machine arrived in one piece. It powered up after I placed it on my workbench and attached the monitor, keyboard, mouse, power, and audio cables. I have a KVM setup on my workbench that has four ports. This is very handy for running multiple systems at one time, except that four systems running on one circuit would probably trip the circuit breaker!

Test Setup and Process

Eight gamers were assembled for an in-depth series of independent evaluations, pitting the HK-Xtreme against the best that I...er...Big Al's Computers has to offer. We played lots of games separately on all six machines, a few games across the LAN on both our own game server and an Internet server, and we used the same game on multiple machines. Every gamer had a chance to play on several machines in addition to the HK-Xtreme.

A few HK-Xtreme benchmarks were taken just to be sure everything was on the "up and up", but the whole point of the review was to see the HK-Xtreme in action. We ran 3DMark06 on the HK-Xtreme (4075 vs. 4087 obtained by CPU magazine) and on OsbornAgain (wouldn't run - blue screen). We ran the Sandra Lite 2005 CPU Arithmetic Benchmark on



Big Al

the HK-Xtreme (ALU = 16752 MIPS, Whetstone = 8017 MFlops) and also on OsbornAgain (ALU = 17989 MIPS, Whetstone = 8150 MFlops). We pushed all the machines by playing Doom III, Medal of Honor, Call of Duty 2, Arcanum, Battle Field 2, and things of this nature. We did this for more than ten hours. You know, a typical weekend if you are a serious gamer....

To ensure we collected independent thoughts and comments as the day progressed, an evaluation form was prepared ahead of time. A summary of the results will be presented later in this review. Some choice comments were shown on the first page below the gamer's picture, extracted just like they were stated on the evaluation forms. Every one of the gamers (except for me) completed an evaluation form. I spent \$50 on pizza, so I was determined to get my data!

Each machine on the wired LAN was allocated the same bandwidth through a common router, but the machines themselves varied in ability and cost. The "Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu" machine, which contains two complete gaming systems within one chassis, had its left side shut down so I could use the monitor and desk for the HK-Xtreme machine. Let me present a brief listing of the components in the major machines.

HyperKore HK-Xtreme

- HK-Xtreme Black Lian-Li PC-6070B Plus
- 680 Watt Thermaltake Silent PurePower Series
- Pentium D 950 3.4Ghz, 2x2M Cache, 800FSB
- Zalman CNPS7700-CU All Copper Heatsink/Fan
- Intel BAD AXE Motherboard D975XBX
- 2GB GEIL PC2-4300 533MHz DDR2 Ultra Dual Channel Ultra Low Latency
- 74GB Western Digital Raptor Serial ATA 10,000RPM
- 3x 200GB Western Digital Caviar Serial ATA 72,000RPM set at RAID 0
- LITEON 16x DVD-ROM/48x CD-ROM w/software
- Sony Dual Layer DVD DRU-810A 16x DVD±RW/±R/cd
- ASUS ATI RADEON EAX1800XT 512MB DDR3
- Creative Labs X-Fi Platinum
- Microsoft Multimedia keyboard and Optical Mouse
- Custom Etching Big Al "www.fastlanehw.com" Blackout v.2
- Windows XP Professional with CD
- 3 Year Limited Warranty - 3 Year Parts and 1 Year Labor (Return Shipping Only)
- Secondary Custom Etching
- Cost? About \$3,800

Big Al's Computers Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu

- HP LaserJet 4 MX chassis, modified to hold two complete systems
- Dual Power Supplies, OCZ 520W and RaidMax 500W
- Dual Athlon XP 2500+ CPUs
- Dual Thermalright Si-97 aluminum CPU coolers
- Dual Chaintech 7NIL1 Summit nForce2 motherboards
- Dual 1GB Corsair DDR CAS 2
- Dual PNY Geforce 6800 GT videocards
- Cost? About \$1700 for parts



Big Al
Big Al's Computers OsbornAgain

- Osborn Executive CP/M chassis (circa 1983)
- Enermax Liberty 500 W PSU
- Athlon 64 X2 3800+
- Zalman CNPS 9500 LED CPU cooler
- Hitachi HD250G 250GB SATA2 NCQ hard drive
- Asus A8N-VM-CSM motherboard
- 2GB Corsair DDR CAS 2
- BFG Geforce 7800 GT videocard
- Cost? About \$1600 for parts



Testing on the night before game day. Check out those cold cathodes!



Morning brings some light into my basement. It's almost time to start.

Gentlemen, Shall We Start?

Even before the noon hour arrived on game day, the gamers started showing up. I wasn't expecting this, as usually the gamers drift in an hour or so later than when I want them to arrive for our typical LAN parties. Yes, they knew something special was happening on this day, but somebody must have told them about the HyperKore machine. Everyone started gathering around the HK-Xtreme like it was a blue-light special. Well, there was a blue cold cathode in the glass table beneath it, but hey, what about my machines? I even moved my Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu over to the right side of the glass table to make room for the HK-Xtreme. On a side note, are you wondering about the "Deja-Vu" part? I named that machine as a follow-on to my successful Printer-to-Computer, which you might have seen in Maximum PC magazine as the Rig of the Month in the February 2005 issue (they called it Printer-to-PC). The old Printer-to-Computer, a smaller HP LaserJet 4 chassis, now sits near my workbench and helps me do a little Folding for Maximum PC's team now and then. Get more details on the Folding project right here: <http://folding.stanford.edu/>. I guess I could mention that PC Extreme magazine (a British magazine that folded late last year) liked my Printer-to-Computer-Deja-Vu so much that they named it Mod of the Month in issue number 26 (also in 2005). Good luck finding a copy of that issue over here in the states!

Ok, getting back to the review, let's take a look at our gamers in action. Most of them brought over their own games, ones they are familiar with. I liked this approach for the basic reason that you can immediately tell if a machine is playing the game well, or if something is amiss. Games such as Doom III would surely tax all gaming systems on my LAN, but how would the HK-Xtreme handle it? Lot's of gamers wanted to play Call of Duty 2 (my personal favorite right now) in a LAN situation. There's nothing like hearing the enemy take a head shot when you're across the room from them. It makes it a bit more personal. I should tell you one thing. There was a Marine among us. If you can't figure out who he is, let me give you a hint: he's built like a tank, he's able to take you out from a thousand yards, yet he's polite when he says, "Yeah, that's what I'm talking about!" Oh, his name starts with a "G".



Big Al



That's Shawn on OsbornAgain, and Tom playing on Tom.



Shawn is playing Doom III on the HK-Xtreme.



I'm not sure what Greg's playing on the HK-Xtreme.



Eli and Chris are deeply involved with a Call of Duty 2 map.



Mike's playing on Ella, in a Call of Duty 2 LAN game.



Greg's a sniper in this Call of Duty 2 LAN session. He's on Tufts.



Big Al



Mike's now playing Arcanum on OsbornAgain.



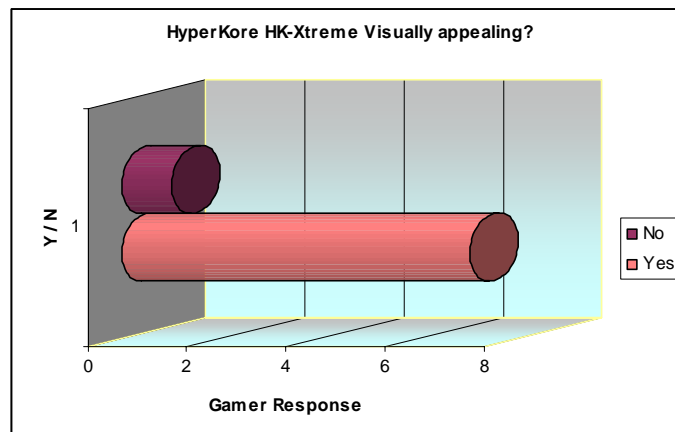
Shazay and Eli are playing some animation game in multiplayer.

As you can see in these pictures, the gamers had a good time. But they also took note of each machine they played on. Each gamer carried his evaluation form around with him, so if an issue came up it could be written down quickly before someone took him out with a head shot. I was playing too, even though I did not complete one of the forms. I was involved with too many other things, like taking all the pictures.

You would think the gamers would be tired and ready to leave after the pizza was all gone, but that's far from reality. The last guys didn't leave until 10:30PM! I was dropping hints about school the next day, and even powering down the machines that weren't being played, but the diehards stuck with it. And you know what? They were playing the HK-Xtreme up to the end. That machine was in constant use. Ok. Let's see what the gamers had to say about the LAN session, and the HyperKore HK-Xtreme in particular.

Evaluation Sheet Results

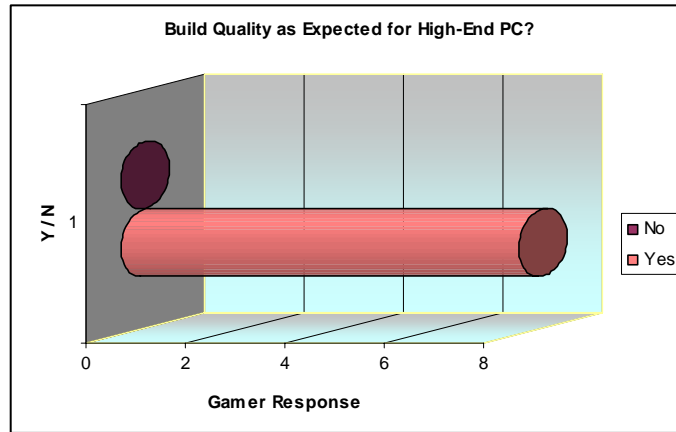
(1a) Did you find the HyperKore HK-Xtreme case visually appealing?



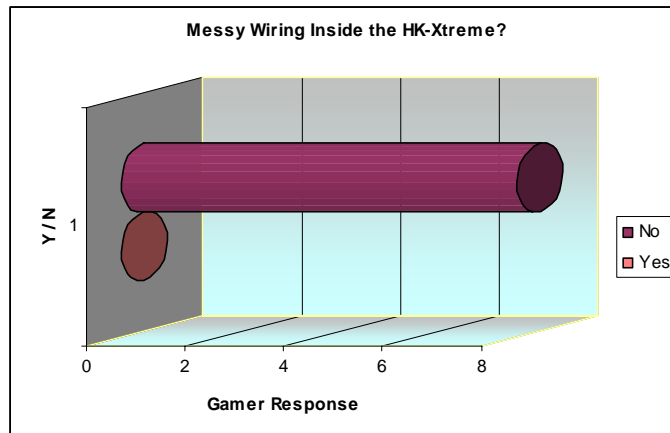


Big Al

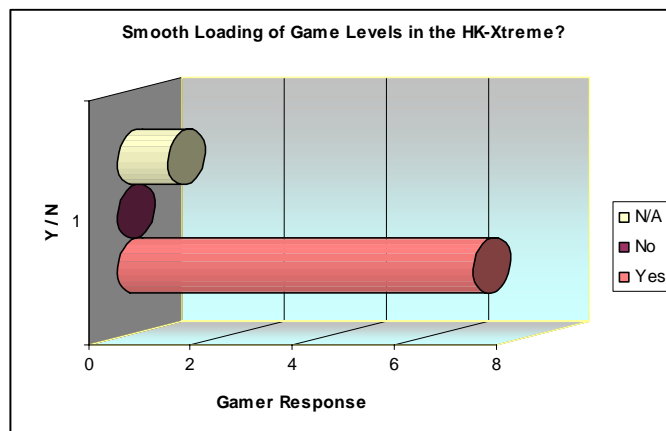
(1b) Is the build quality something you would expect in a high-end PC?



(1c) Look inside the laser-etched window (side panel off). Messy wiring in there?



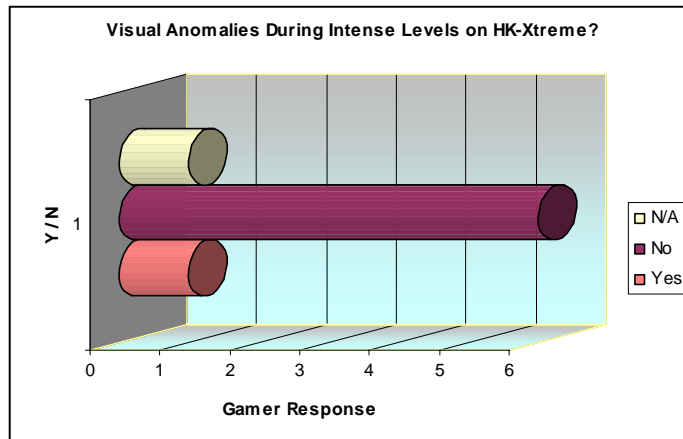
(2a) With the HK-Xtreme, did you experience smooth loading of the game levels?



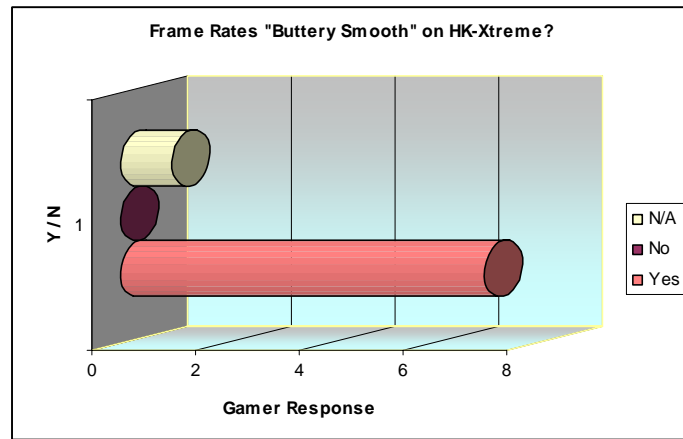


Big Al

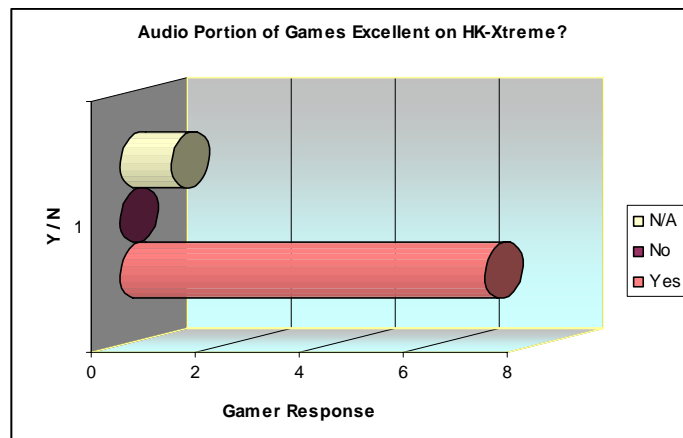
(2b) With the HK-Xtreme, were there any visual anomalies while playing intense levels?



(2c) With the HK-Xtreme, was the frame rate high enough to be considered “buttery smooth”?



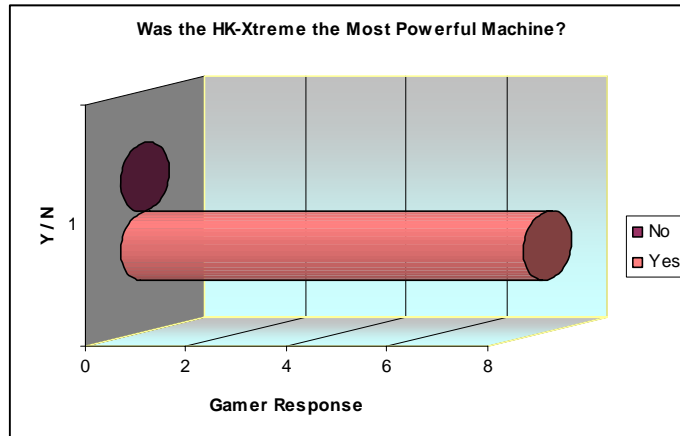
(2d) With the HK-Xtreme, would you say the audio portion of the game was excellent?



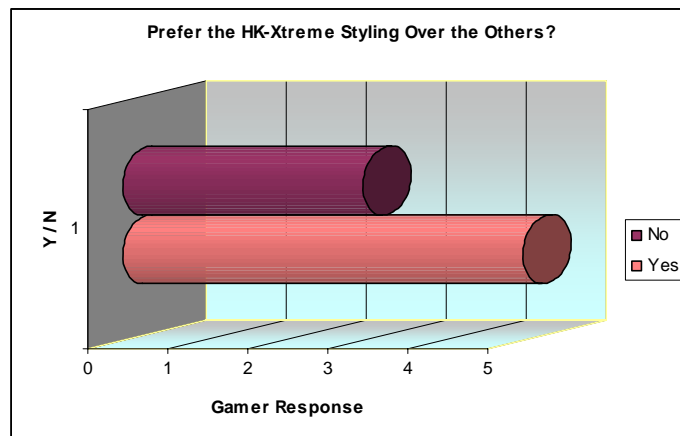


Big Al

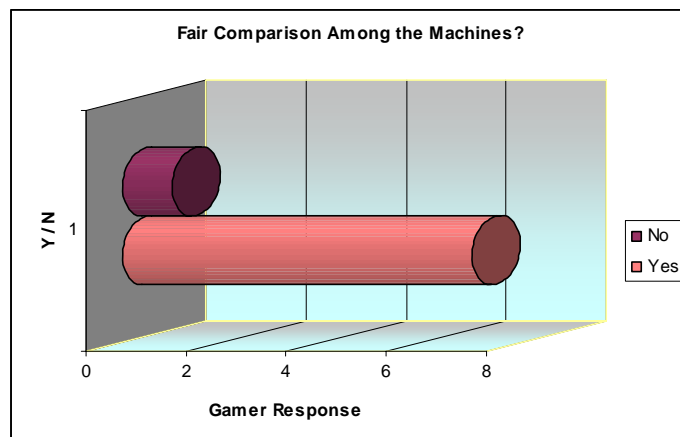
(3a) Was the HK-Xtreme the most powerful machine in your opinion?



(3b) Do you prefer the styling of the HK-Xtreme more than the other machines?



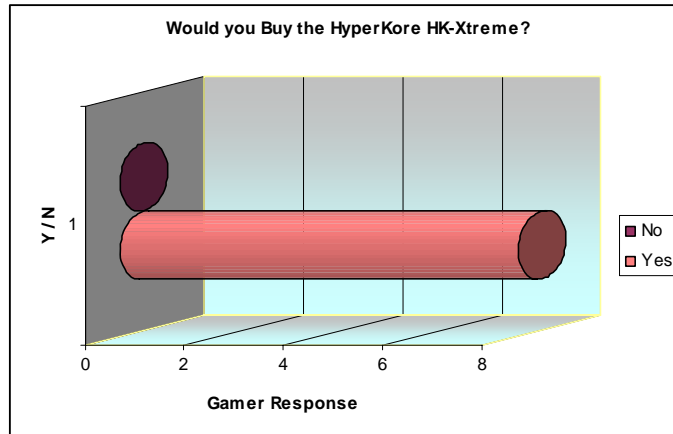
(3c) Do you think a fair comparison was made among the machines?





Big Al

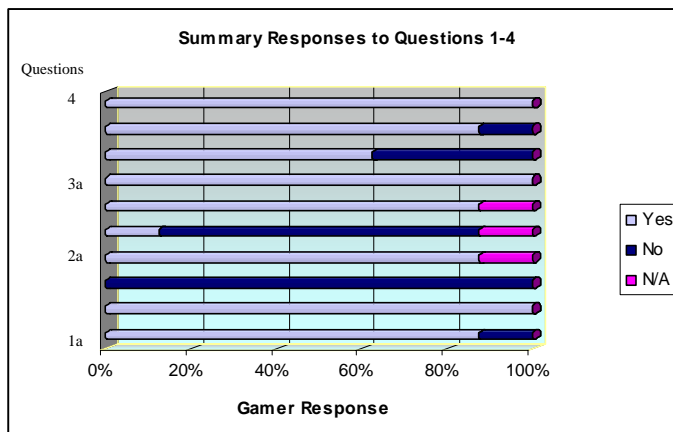
(4) If you were ready to purchase a gaming machine right now, would the HyperKore HK-Xtreme be one you would seriously consider?



(5) Please provide your overall opinion of gaming on the HyperKore HK-Xtreme.

Name	Comment(s)
Shawn	Dear God, what a machine. Just playing in the fiery depths of hell never sounded, nor looked, so damn good. The case of the HK-Xtreme reminds me of the HAL 9000. Overall rating 11/10!
James	Add restore disks. All the Intel motherboard documentation is unnecessary – provide it on a CD and print a quick install manual for the printed documentation. Run wires along the edge of the motherboard, so the user does not have to take out the board to work on the system. I am a system builder, so I'm looking at it from that point of view. Install virus protection and anti-spyware, for the good of the user. Install operating system on RAID configuration too; nice to have if the main system crashes. User can boot from RAID and recover any key data from the C: drive.
Tom	Very expensive but very optimal.
Michael	Very sweet! Great looking and very smooth graphics!
Chris	Looks very neat and tidy. Very smooth game play. An exceptionally gifted man is required to build a computer with this caliber of beauty and smoothness.
Greg	An all around quality machine, especially for those who enjoy gaming!
Eli	Too good. It's perfect.
Shazay	Very cool, very powerful, it's like playing on another level.

Summary of Graph Results





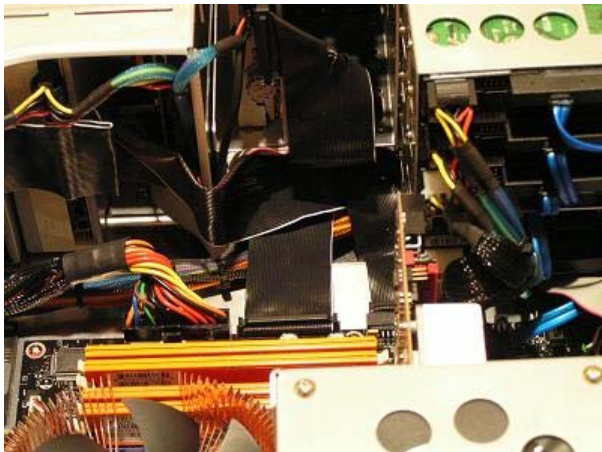
Big Al

Analysis of Charts and Gamer Comments

Hmmmm. This is a tough one. I get the sense that these guys like the HyperKore HK-Xtreme. They like the Big Al's Computers machines too, but it was obvious that everyone preferred to play on the HK-Xtreme. I think I might have an edge on the "unique" look or style of my machines, but even OsbornAgain couldn't match the gaming smoothness of the powerful HK-Xtreme. Of course, the whole point of playing the games and looking at what you could build yourself was to put the HyperKore guys on the line – to see if their machine was satisfying for the soul. Maybe I should have asked that question, but I did ask these guys if they would consider buying this machine from HyperKore. Everyone said yes. That should tell you something right away.

What's Inside the HK-Xtreme?

I just had to pull the side panel off and look inside the chassis of the HK-Xtreme. The v.2 laser-etched window is just like a black and white photograph, and you can't see through it at all. I even placed a few cold cathode lights inside and then placed the cover back on, and you still could not see any light. So are the boys at HyperKore trying to cover something up here? Not in the least. The HK-Xtreme interior is elegant. Every wire, cable, plug – they're all placed carefully and neatly tucked away. It makes my home-built machines look like they were wired by a 10-year old kid. But I've learned a few things here. For instance, the flat IDE cables are much easier to fold and tuck out of site. I remember some magazine did a feature on VooDoo machines, and that technique was discussed. Let me show you a few interior pictures.



See how the IDE cables are folded, Origami style?



Even the SATA cables and Molex power connectors are tucked away.



Turning the camera flash on reveals more power cables.



Look at that tasty ATI Radeon EAX1800XT videocard.



Big Al

Rating and Final Comments

I do truly believe that everyone was impressed by the HyperKore HK-Xtreme. After all, this was the first “high-end” gaming machine that most of these gamers have been able to play. Greg did buy an Alienware machine several years ago, so he knows what quality assembly is all about. In fact, I helped him upgrade that machine with a faster CPU about 2 years ago. I found that the HyperKore assembly methods were better than what I saw in the old Alienware machine. It goes without saying that HyperKore beats my custom builds too, on the aspect of neat and clean assembly.

Would I order a HyperKore machine for myself, if I had the money to use for such an endeavor? Yes, I think I would. But I would select a few different components, since I’m an AMD and nVidia fan. I would swap the Intel dual-core CPU for an AMD FX-60 dual-core CPU. I would select dual nVidia 7900 GTX Geforce videocards in an SLI motherboard. Two GB of RAM would be fine for me. Most importantly, I would use the v.1 laser-etched window so I could use some cold cathodes to light up the beautiful interior. But I wouldn’t swap out that image they used for the HK-Xtreme’s laser-etched window. That’s quite a cool picture of yours truly at the Washington DC motorcycle show this past January.

Pros

- Beautiful assembly, all wires and cables neatly tucked away, and custom laser-etched window
- Powerful gaming platform, easily handled all the games we played
- No signs of stress, completed selected benchmarks without crashing

Cons

- Stock case (special mods are available if you contact the boys at HyperKore with your requests)
- Need more options on web site configuration – keyboards, mice, etc.

Overall Rating: 9.3 / 10



Perhaps not the best place to set up your gaming machine, but it sure is pretty!