

# Portable Gaming for (Almost) Every Budget

BY CISCO CHENG

Here, we test three of the latest gaming notebooks: Two \$5,000-plus models from Falcon Northwest and VoodooPC, and one of the more down-to-earth configurations from Alienware.

## Alienware Area-51m

The Alienware Area-51m is a solid gaming machine that doesn't give you the latest components, like the fastest Pentium CPU or PCI Express graphics. But where the best cost north of \$5,000, Alienware manages to provide a very appealing \$2,500 alternative.

The Area-51m has a sturdy case made from a metal magnesium alloy. Weighing 8.8 pounds, the Area-51m comes with a 15.4-inch widescreen LCD, as well as a DVD±RW drive and a 60GB, 7,200-rpm hard drive. It also has an SD slot for removable media and 802.11a/g wireless connectivity.

Although the Area-51m's ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 (128MB) graphics couldn't keep pace with the PCI Express graphics horsepower in the Voodoo Envy m:790, its scores were more than respectable. The games we test with were quite playable (though Doom 3, especially, will look smoother when played on the m:790). Though it's not the "ultimate" gaming machine, the Area-51m will satisfy gamers who simply can't afford the other entries.

### Alienware Area-51m

With Intel Pentium 4 540 (3.4 GHz), 1GB DDR SDRAM, 60GB hard drive, ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 graphics (128MB), 15.4-inch widescreen LCD (1,680-by-1,050), DVD±RW drive, WLAN 802.11a/g wireless, Microsoft Windows XP Professional, \$2,557 direct. Alienware Corp., www.alienware.com.

OVERALL ●●●○○ Music: 51 (out of 100); Photos: 60; Video: 40; Gaming: 45

## Falcon Northwest FragBook DR 6800

If agile performance and blistering graphics are what you're after, then the Falcon Northwest FragBook DR 6800 can answer the call. Having twin 80GB hard drives (in a RAID Level 0 configuration), a Pentium 4 560 (3.6 GHz), and nVidia's latest GeForce Go 6800 PCI Express graphics all in one sleek system is something most can only dream of.

The unit's 17-inch widescreen LCD has a bright, glossy coating that makes it great for watching movies. It also includes not one, but two DVD±RW optical drives. There are also a multitude of connectivity options: four USB ports, two FireWire ports, and S-Video (in and out) ports. You'll also find a tiny camera on top of the screen and a built-in TV tuner.

The nVidia GeForce 6800 Go PCI Express X16 is the best graphics solution we've seen so far. Our test results for playing Doom 3 and Halo prove this. Scores on SYSmark 2004 Internet Content Creation and Office Productivity also were high, but wireless throughput was unacceptable, as the unit couldn't connect past 60 feet in either 802.11b or 802.11g modes. Also, the custom paint job was a little sloppier than we're used to seeing from Falcon: The speakers were painted over, and certain areas on the notebook had white patches.

You can expect superb per-



Falcon Northwest FragBook DR 6800

formance with top-of-the-line features with the FragBook DR 6800. But when you're spending this much, you want the absolute best, and the FragBook just misses that mark.

With Intel Pentium 4 560 (3.6 GHz), 1GB DDR SDRAM, dual 80GB hard drives (RAID Level 0), nVidia GeForce 6800 Go PCI Express (256MB), 17-inch widescreen LCD (1,680-by-1,050), dual DVD±RW drives, Gigabyte Turbo-G 802.11g wireless, Microsoft Windows XP Professional, \$5,628 direct. Falcon Northwest, www.falcon-nw.com.

OVERALL ●●●○○ Music: 79 (out of 100); Photos: 80; Video: 72; Gaming: 84

## Voodoo Envy m:790

The Voodoo Envy m:790 rises to the occasion for gamers looking for bleeding-edge graphics (nVidia PCI Express) and a powerful processor (3.6-GHz P4). The hefty price (\$5,300) will set you back, but the bragging rights may just be worth it.

The ice-blue paint job offset with Voodoo's signature tattoo will definitely evoke envy from your fellow gamers. And for the times when you're not crushing your opponent in Halo or Half Life, you can kick back for an enjoyable movie experience thanks to Voodoo's dazzling bright 17-inch widescreen. For convenience, playback and volume controls are easily accessi-



### Voodoo Envy m:790

With Intel Pentium 4 560 (3.6 GHz), 1GB DDR SDRAM, dual 80GB hard drives (RAID Level 0), nVidia GeForce 6800 Go PCI Express (256MB), 17-inch widescreen LCD (1,680-by-1,050), DVD±RW drive, Centrino 802.11g wireless, Microsoft Windows XP Professional, \$5,300 direct. Voodoo Computers Ltd., www.voodoopc.com.

OVERALL ●●●○○ Music: 79 (out of 100); Photos: 80; Video: 73; Gaming: 84

## BENCHMARK TESTS

High scores are best. Bold type denotes first place.

	SYSmark 2004 Overall	3DMark05 1,024 x 768	Doom 3 1,024 x 768	Halo 1,024 x 768	Business Winstone 2001 BatteryMark
Anti-aliasing/Anisotropic filtering ▶		Off/Off	Off/Off	Off/Off	
<b>Alienware Area-51m</b>	143	1,320	22.5	26.9	<b>2:21</b>
<b>Falcon Northwest FragBook DR 6800</b>	<b>199</b>	2,700	<b>69.5</b>	55.3	0:52
<b>Voodoo Envy m:790</b>	185	<b>2,730</b>	69.2	<b>61.1</b>	0:58
<b>Dell Inspiron XPS*</b>	170	2,302	39.0	53.6	2:12

RED denotes Editors' Choice. \* Reported for comparison.