

£151+ GRAPHICS CARDS



Build	Value
★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	Overall
★★★★★	★★★★★

PC ADVISOR
BEST BUY

HIS HD 4870 ICEQ 4+ TURBO 1GB
£229 inc VAT · hisdigital.com



Build	Value
★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	Overall
★★★★★	★★★★★

PC ADVISOR
RECOMMENDED

SAPPHIRE ATI RADEON HD 4870 X2
£344 inc VAT · sapphiretech.com

Selecting a winner in the £151-plus graphics card category was always going to be tricky. There's a gargantuan £221 gap between the cheapest and most expensive cards, which means the various models are targeting different markets, and aiming to fulfil different criteria.

Nevertheless, the HIS HD 4870 stood out as the best deal. If you've got £250 to spend and want some impressive framerates - but don't feel the need to shatter the ceiling - this will do superbly.

Built around ATI's mid-range 4870 chip, the 4870 gets deluxe treatment courtesy of HIS. And while the brand name won't necessarily be familiar to you, this company has already garnered a couple of positive recommendations in the pages of *PC Advisor*. The card is part of the firm's IceQ 4+ range, so you'll get a very elegant cooling system, plus a little extra burst of speed that builds modestly on the base specifications of the 4870.

The core clock has been increased from 750MHz to 770MHz. The memory clock upgrade is more eye-catching, going from 900MHz to 1GHz. In fact, this difference is greater than it sounds. With standard GDDR3 graphics memory, the memory clock needs to be doubled to give the effective figure; with the 4870's fantastic GDDR5 memory you'll need to quadruple that figure instead. So, the 1GHz core clock results in an effective 4GHz rather than the 3.6GHz of the standard 4870. And you get a full 1GB of this souped-up memory, compared with 512MB on the original 4870.

The fantastic cooling system does a very good job of keeping the card rolling along at a low temperature. It wasn't the quietest card during our Crysis sound tests, although the 46-48dB generated by our test PC during normal use was very quiet indeed.

Compared to the cream of this chart, the 4870 isn't a stellar performer, although it still generates some very good framerates and it finishes marginally ahead of the more expensive GeForce GTX 260 (page 66). It should be said, however, that a standard 4870 card could provide even greater value for money.

VERDICT: This HIS card is the best deal on offer here. It's a particularly good choice for those with a slightly older CPU - if you've got a Core Duo, your PC will struggle to get the most out of a high-end card.

First time around, the HD 4870 X2 didn't make much of an impact in the *PC Advisor* Test Centre. We reviewed this card back in our November issue and, while we were enthusiastic about its power, we were put off by the £400-plus price tag.

Since then, it's been slowly dropping in price and, at £344, it's now good value. While you'll still need to be reasonably well heeled to afford such luxury, those shopping around the £350 mark will find the Radeon HD 4870 X2 a mouthwatering purchase.

There's actually nothing new about this card - it's really two 4870s fitted together so, even eight months ago, the technology itself was far from cutting-edge. It doesn't come with newer features such as integrated PhysX technology or Cuda (for more on Cuda, see the GTX 285, page 66). But you get a lot of brute force for your money. With two chips, two memory interfaces and two dollops of RAM, the 4870 X2 has an awful lot to throw at today's games.

Its 2GB of RAM (two sets of 1GB) eclipses even the GTX 295 (page 67). And, since ATI adopts a very forward-thinking approach towards the memory market, it's no surprise to see this card equipped with GDDR5 RAM. GDDR5 enables the X2's effective memory clock speed to be stretched to an astonishing 3,600MHz.

The 4870 X2 isn't as large or heavy as you might expect, given its wealth of hardware, but it generates a huge amount of heat. In fact, once we'd put it through our barrage of tests, it was almost too hot to handle. More encouragingly, it's not particularly noisy, given its firepower. You can barely hear the card during normal use. It got louder during our games tests, but still remained a good 2 or 3dB quieter than the GTX 295.

You will need supplementary power connectors with this card, however. Ideally, you need a power supply that can fit an 8-pin connection. An adaptor is included.

VERDICT: The 4870 X2 can't compete with the GTX 295's framerates - but that will set you back an extra £106. And, the 295 apart, the X2 is comfortably the fastest card here, easily slipping ahead of the newer GTX 285. Given that the latter costs just £19 less, we reckon the 4870 X2 is a much better deal overall.