

AMD and Intel are **locked in a battle** to have the quickest chip.

## On the fast track

After last month's cover story about the vapour phase refrigerated PC running at 800MHz, we're already seeing chips nipping at its heels without the need for overclocking. This month we've seen the launch of the 700MHz Athlon chip. This CPU needs no refrigeration unit and actually runs cooler than its 600MHz sibling due to a drop in voltage. With this latest release AMD has a significant lead on Intel in the performance processor market. At present Intel is stuck at the 600MHz level with its Pentium III chip. Even with the introduction of the 133MHz front-side bus, the performance hasn't made a significant jump forward. Add to this the fact that the RAMBUS memory employed by the new Intel 820 chipset is exorbitantly expensive and an Intel solution starts to look even less attractive.

Of course, you'd have to be a fool to count Intel out at this early stage, and just because AMD has the better product at the moment doesn't mean the game is won.

There are already rumours that Intel will be leapfrogging its scheduled 667MHz chip in favour of a 733MHz flavour, ultimately buying its way back into the numbers game. But whether this move will be enough remains to be seen, with AMD already preparing for a 750MHz Athlon. If Intel strikes back with a faster chip of its own, it won't be long before we see processors in excess of 1,000MHz.

However, a high MHz number is not the deciding factor when it comes to performance. The Athlon is a more advanced design than the Pentium III and we still haven't seen any software using it to its full potential. Add to this the fact that the Athlons we're seeing now are the basic versions – models with

faster and larger complements of Level 2 cache are on the way – and it's obvious that the PC processor market is about to surge forward faster than it ever has.



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The question that has to be asked is whether anyone needs this amount of processing power. Obviously someone rendering 3D animation scenes in LightWave or 3D Studio Max will want all the power they can get, but the majority of users could be paying for something they will never use.

Thankfully both Intel and AMD are offering budget alternatives to their sky-reaching premier chips, in the shape of the Celeron and the K6-III. Either of these processors will build up into a decent PC that should run anything you're likely to throw at it.

That said, Intel is well aware of this situation and has adapted its already successful marketing campaign around it. Intel isn't selling the Pentium III on the basis that it's a fast CPU, it's telling the masses that the PIII is a necessary component for utilising the Internet to its full effect. With the Internet being a major consideration for prospective PC buyers, the company may well have come up with its best idea since 'Intel inside'.

**Riyad Emeran, Acting Editor**

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