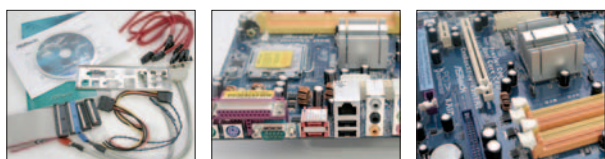# The Dynamic Core Duo Motherboard

ASRock ConRoeXFire-eSATA2

BY FRIDAY13

With the official launch of Vista inevitably looming closer and closer, an upgrade to support the new operating system's requirements is in order. ASRock's new Intel-based motherboard supports the new Core 2 Duo Desktop processor (a.k.a. Conroe) for improved multimedia performance, which makes it a likely candidate for an upgrading exercise.

An interesting thing to note about this particular motherboard is that while it supports the latest processor models and high Front Side Bus frequencies from 533MHz up to 1066MHz, the board only utilizes an Intel 945P in lieu of the newer 975X chipset for its North Bridge operation.

The 975 is more suited to fully take advantage of the newer processors, but also more expensive so this board is more likely to appeal to users on a limited budget.

The board is equipped with four DIMM slots that can handle a total of 4GB of DDR2 SDRAM chips. DDR2-667 and 533MHz memory modules are supported in order to take advantage of the faster Front Side Bus frequencies while running with dual channel memory architecture.

For 3D graphics and gaming, the board supports ATI CrossFire technology via one PCI Express x16 slot and one AGI Express slot. The AGI Express is basically a PCI Express x4 slot which is mostly used for SLI operation via CrossFire.

Only one IDE port is provided which supports up to ATA100 performance. The board relegates the bulk of its storage capabilities to the ICH7R South Bridge that handles four SATA2 slots. An additional two eSATA2 slots add the "Hot Plug" feature support but they share the same resources with the four internal SATA2 slots.

The two eSATA2 ports provide the convenience of hot-plugging external drives for mobility, but the space of two USB slots are sacrificed to house the eSATA2 slots at the rear I/O panel.

This means only two USB 2.0 slots are available there; as the board supports eight slots, the remaining six must be supported via expansion brackets and other means.

A Realtek ALC888 CODEC provides eight-channel audio support with High Definition Audio. Ethernet LAN capability is handled by an onboard Gigabit 10/100/1000Mbps LAN chipset.

This is a highly capable ASRock motherboard which offers plenty of features and support for various hardware including the latest Intel processors and graphics technologies. The lack of readily-available USB ports at the rear I/O panel may be an issue to some, but this can be overcome by using expansion brackets.

SPECIFICATIONS

Chipset	Processor	Memory	Storage	Price
Intel 945P	Intel LGA775 Pentium D / Pentium 4 / Celeron	4x DDR2 667/533	1x ATA100 4x SATA2 2x eSATA2	TBA

Chipset : Intel 945P North Bridge, Intel ICH7R South Bridge
Processor : LGA775 socket for Intel Pentium D, Pentium 4 and Celeron processors, supports Core 2 Duo Desktop (Conroe), Presler and Cedar Mill
Memory : 4x 240-pin DDR2 667/533 DIMMs
Storage : 1x ATA100, 4x SATA2 (on ICH7R), supports RAID 0, 1, 10, 5, Intel Matrix Storage, 2x eSATA2 (shared), supports "Hot Plug" function
I/O : 1x floppy, 1x serial, 1x parallel, 2x PS/2, 8x USB 2.0 (6x ports via bracket), 2x IEEE 1394 (2x ports via bracket), 2x eSATA2, audio ports for 8-channel, 1x RJ-45 Gigabit LAN
Contact : Intranet Sdn Bhd / Planet Technology (M) Sdn Bhd
Telephone : (03) 7804 7878 / (03) 5032 8383
URL : www.asrock.com

Available at

PLAZA LOW YAT shopping centre

HWM'S VERDICT

Features: **8.5**
Stability: **8.0**
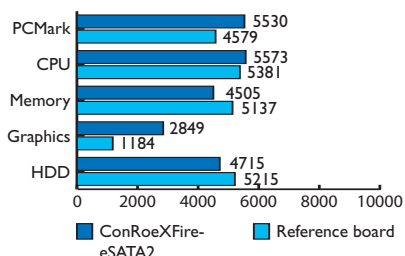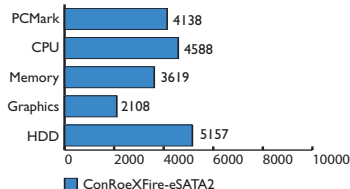Performance: **8.5**
Value: **8.0**

8.0
Out of 10

A well-featured motherboard with some out-of-the-ordinary features

HWM SILVER AWARD

PCMark 2004 Pro 1.3.0

	ConRoeXFire-eSATA2	Reference board
PCMark	5530	4579
CPU	5573	5381
Memory	4505	5137
Graphics	2849	1184
HDD	4715	5215

PCMark 2005 Pro 1.1.0

	ConRoeXFire-eSATA2
PCMark	4138
CPU	4588
Memory	3619
Graphics	2108
HDD	5157

*Test setup: The ConRoeXFire-eSATA2 was fitted with an Intel LGA775 Pentium D 2.80GHz and matched to 2x 512MB DDR2 533MHz SDRAM modules and a GeForce 6600 128MB graphics card. The reference board was fitted with an Intel LGA775 Pentium 4 3.40GHz and matched to 2x 512MB DDR2 533MHz SDRAM modules and an Intel Extreme Graphics chipset.