Mercury Extreme G4/1.467-1.5GHz

POTENT PROCESSOR UPGRADE

A processor upgrade such as OWC's Mercury Extreme G4 can bring an aging Power Mac G4 up to a respectable 1.5GHz—but it can't help an old Mac's other hamstrings—for example, a slow hard drive and system bus, or low RAM.

Installation was simple, although we did have to visit OWC's Web site (http://eshop.macsales.com/Tech) to find the correct jumper settings for 1.5GHz—the manual included settings only for speeds up to 1.4 to 1.467GHz.

The Extreme's power boost was most apparent in processor-intensive tasks such as QuickTime compression and multitracked GarageBand software instruments. Running on the Extreme, QuickTime encoded a DV file into MPEG-4

This can help you put off replacing your old Mac.

2.5 times faster, and we loaded up a GarageBand session with 12 effect-laden tracks before the Mac choked—at 400MHz, we got only three tracks.

Photoshop junkies, however, would do better spending their money on RAM. Our Action test (for details, see "Upgrade Your Mac," Feb/04, p21) took 14:40 on the 400MHz G4 with 128MB RAM; The Mercury Extreme cut the time to 11:06. Adding two 512MB DIMMS ($135.99 each, www.macsales.com) cut that time down to 5 minutes on the 400MHz G4. Adding the Extreme G4 *and* 1GB of RAM gave us a time of 3:02 on the Photoshop tests but didn't surpass QuickTime or GarageBand performance on the Extreme G4 with 128MB of RAM.

Overall, the Mercury Extreme G4 is easy to install and dramatically speeds up CPU-dependent operations. It's a great choice if your old Mac is choking on GarageBand.—*Niko Coucouvanis*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MADEO

COMPANY: Other World Computing
CONTACT: 800-275-4576, www.macsales.com
PRICE: $529.99

REQUIREMENTS: Any AGP-equipped Power Mac G4 (Sawtooth or later), Mac OS 9.2.1 or later

GOOD NEWS: Fast. Easy to install. Plug-and-play operation. Big boost for older G4s.
BAD NEWS: Only speeds up processor-dependent tasks. Not as exciting as getting a new Mac.
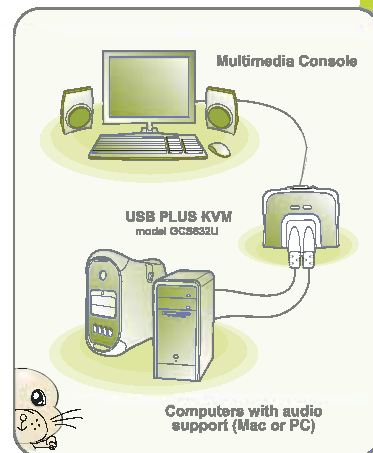
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GREAT