

Nofan IcePipe A43-H67 Silent PC

True silence comes at a cost, but many will consider the premium on this remarkable passive PC worth paying

» PRICE £936 (£1,123 inc VAT)
» SUPPLIER www.quietpc.com

Many PCs claim to be silent but, despite clever cooling and all sorts of case modifications, we usually find a fan or two somewhere to spoil the ambience. Not so with the IcePipe A43-H67 Silent PC. Set up by the founder of Zalman, Nofan does things differently.

For starters, despite a full-fat Core i5-2500K processor it's completely passive, and the interior is dominated by the most ridiculous heatsink we've ever seen. The Nofan CR-100A cooler (see 1) measures a massive 220mm across, and resembles a hamster wheel. Its doughnut shape houses dozens of metal fins designed to dissipate heat from the Sandy Bridge processor.

The chassis has no case fans of its own, instead relying on a meshed front panel to allow air to drift inside. The 400W Nofan power supply (see 2) is fanless too, instead built around an aluminium heatsink. There's understandably no graphics card – silence and gaming don't tend to mix – with the integrated Intel HD 3000 chip inside the processor taking charge of displays, and there's no sign of a crunching hard disk, either.

Instead, Nofan has installed Windows 7 Home Premium on a 120GB OCZ Vortex 2E SSD, which sacrifices capacity for silent operation.

The result is startling. We're used to hearing so-called quiet systems emit at least a low hum, so to put an ear to the side of the Nofan and hear absolutely nothing is somewhat bizarre. It's so quiet you'll need to check the lights on the front to tell you when it's on, and even with the side panel removed we could discern only the tiniest hint of the electric whine from the PSU's capacitors.

That cooler does more than eliminate noise. The Core i5-2500K idled at only 36°C, and under full load from our benchmarks rose to a comfortable 75°C. That's nowhere near its thermal limit, and lower than we see from many actively cooled, albeit overclocked, processors. Power consumption was also excellent, with an idle power draw for the entire PC



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of only 33W; under load that rose to a mere 124W.

Such a unique build inevitably creates restrictions elsewhere, with the huge heatsink the main culprit. It's big enough to block several DIMM sockets and some of the PCI Express x16 and x1 slots inaccessible. There isn't much room elsewhere in the diminutive chassis, either, with only two tool-free hard disk bays at the bottom of the case. You're buying Nofan's pre-assembled expertise, rather than a PC you'll add to over time.

The specification is understandably limited as well. The 3.3GHz Core i5-2500K is a powerful processor at stock speeds – the A43-H67 managed a respectable 0.94 in our Real World Benchmarks – but you won't be able to apply the same dramatic overclocks we see on today's noisier PCs. We'd imagine the current high of 4.8GHz is far out of range.

You also have to make do with integrated graphics (see 3), although this isn't a big problem these days unless you're interested in the latest games. Our tests proved the Intel 3000 HD chip is

adept when it comes to media, handling 1080p clips smoothly, but 40fps in our lowest Crysis test is an indication of its limitations.

Those working with HD movies might find the 120GB SSD restrictive, and the supplied 4GB of RAM feels a little stingy, but this isn't meant as a high-powered cutting-edge PC. You get a Blu-ray drive, so you could easily have the Nofan hidden away in a living room making barely a peep, or happily running away in a bedroom while you sleep.

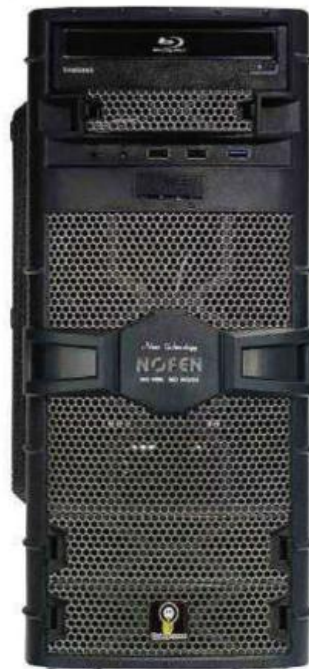
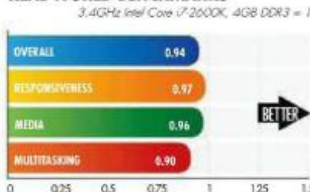
You'll pay for the privilege, with the price set at £1,123 inc VAT – and that's for the base unit alone. That cash could go further elsewhere, with the Palicomp Phoenix i5 Z68 Warrior (web ID: 368095) proving more powerful – with a monitor, keyboard, mouse and speakers included for almost the same money.

But the Nofan is a completely different proposition. Aside from the little Tranquil ixLS (web ID: 364582), it's the only entirely passive machine we've seen, and its silence really is something spectacular. Yes, it's rather niche, but if a silent PC is what you're after, you won't find anything quite like it. **MIKE JENNINGS**

3D BENCHMARKS



REAL WORLD BENCHMARKS



1 The meshed case allows air to reach the components

KEY SPECS

3.3GHz Intel Core i5-2500K • 4GB DDR3 RAM • Gigabyte H67MA-UD2H motherboard • 120GB OCZ Vortex 2E SSD • Blu-ray reader • Intel HD 3000 graphics • Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit • 1yr RTB warranty • 180 x 410 x 425mm (WDH) • Power: 33W idle, 124W peak

OVERALL ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★