ASRock Core 100HT

HOME THEATER PC MAGIC

TEXT // **KEVIN BOEY**

Its innards are packed to the brim with components fit for media playback

A wealth of connections on the back for both, PC usage and home theater connectivity

Usually, home theater computers are hand-built by enthusiasts wanting a media center of their own or comprising of network-attached storage devices that are able to initiate multimedia playback. With a dearth of HTPC builds from manufacturers themselves, it is not hard to see why ASRock's Core series deserve the limelight in this sector. Built from the ground up as a proper HTPC, it combines style, performance and compactness in a single package that will not look out of place on a home theater rack.

Dressed in a familiar glossy black, the Core 100HT is a complete hardware kit that requires no other physical installation besides connecting it to the power supply and one's home theater. However, customers will need to choose an OS of their own. ASRock has even provided a CD which has useful HTPC programs, apart from a driver suite for Windows operating systems. Our first impression of the system is that it's pretty silent in operation, even when there's a 60mm fan providing much-needed ventilation. During installation, the only apparent noise seemed to come from the optical disk drive itself. While ours came with a DVD multi drive, the Core 100HT can also be purchased with a BD-ROM drive too, with the Core 100HT-BD package.

Specifications for the Core 100HT are pretty strong for its size. An Intel Core i3 processor running at 2.13GHz crunches data while an Intel HD graphics processor churns out images. Despite having lesser than 300MB of shared graphics memory, we successfully ran a 1080p video in .mkv format without any major hiccups. Depending on the software package used, there will naturally be slight slowdowns when one forwards or jumps a full HD video and the Core 100HT soaks it up with pride. 3D gaming is quite possible on this computer as well although with its stock graphics accelerator, one can not expect silky-smooth 3D rendering at large screen sizes.

One of the first few computers to sport USB3 ports, the ASRock Core 100HT sports two of these high-speed transfer ports which are more than adequate considering that it has six more USB2 ports on its rear. Audiophiles will be glad to know that they can choose to use HDMI or S/PDIF optical outputs for their DTS audio while more traditional multimedia users will enjoy the five 3.5mm output jacks. There's also the bundled Media Center Edition remote control which makes life easier when it comes to flipping channels.

Apart from being a repository or playback center, the Core 100HT is still naturally a computer, allowing users to work and play on it. Its performance is doubled as compared to last year's ASRock ION-330 machine, in our synthetic PC tests. It gave us a PCMark05 score of 4109, no doubt thanks to the Core i3 processor which pulled the weight of its 3D chipset (as compared to NVIDIA's ION in the previous model). With double the performance, the Core 100HT is definitely a powerful computer which will serve well to display 1080p videos on a big screen!

SPECIFICATIONS PROCESSOR / CHIPSET Intel Core i3 M330 / Mobile Intel HM55 Express // **DRIVES** Slim DVD Super Multi, 320GB SATA II HDD // **NETWORK** 10/100/1000 Ethernet // **GRAPHICS** Intel HD Graphics // **AUDIO** HD Audio // **I/OS** 1x HDMI, 1x D-Sub, 6x USB2, 2x USB3, 1x S/PDIF (Optical), 1x Gigabit LAN, 5x audio jacks // **ACCESSORIES** External 90W power supply // **DIMENSIONS** 195 x 70 x 186mm // **WEIGHT** 1.75kg // **WARRANTY** One-year // **CONTACT** JW Power Marketing Sdn Bhd // **TELEPHONE** (03) 2381 4483 // **URL** www.asrock.com

VERDICT SCORES ARE OUT OF 10.

Verdict:

8.5

SILVER
HWM
MALAYSIA

FEATURES: 9.0
PERFORMANCE: 8.5
DESIGN: 8.5
VALUE: 8.5

Compact and powerful home theater computer