

ATI All in Wonder Pro

Reviewed by
Tony Thomas

ATI's All in Wonder Pro is touted as the "everything but the kitchen sink" video card and for good reason. It combines 2D/3D video, still and motion video capture, video output and a TV-tuner on a single AGP or PCI card all for well under \$200.

Installing the All in Wonder Pro was easy. I opted for the 8MB PCI version which I popped into my AMD 233 clone. I connected the breakout cable (which provides S-video in/out, composite video in/out and audio in/out) to the back of the card and hooked it up to the input of my sound card. Then, I installed the drivers, the ATI video player (which also functions as a video recorder and simple editor) and the bundled MGI Videowave software.

As a video card, the AIWP performs similarly to the ATI Xpert@Work card I replaced it with (which now happily resides in my other system), albeit with twice the memory. Its Rage Pro Turbo chipset provides stellar 2D and decent 3D performance. Open GL drivers are also available which allow you to play Quake I and II, among other games. With Quake II, I am able to get decent frame rates and performance using the ATI Open GL drivers available on their web site.

The real fun began when I hooked up my cable and video connections to the card. After clicking on the TV tuner, a TV signal appeared on the computer screen. I was able to re-size it from full screen all the way down to postage stamp size. The video image was extremely bright and clear and adjustable using the video player controls. Everything you would expect from a good TV is there: closed captioning, the ability to select and name your favorite channels, parental lockout, the ability to see what is going on at several channels at once (via thumbnail stills) and even zoom.

Using the recorder, I could record motion video or take a "snapshot" which I could save as a bitmap file in various standard formats. The player has a number of innovative features such as VCR mode which allows you to start and stop recording at preset times, closed caption capture which lets you save close captioned programming and stills into a RTF file and a feature that begins taping when a specific keyword appears in the closed caption.

Besides video recording and capture, the player also allows you to play back MPEG encoded audio and video files and AVI files. There is no support for Apple Quicktime at

present. The player is also capable of simple editing tasks and codec conversion. While you can capture and play back video using the codecs supplied with the AIWP, to make the captured AVI portable, you must convert to a common codec like Cinepak, Indeo or MS Video. (I learned this the hard way after trying to send a file to someone and it would not play his machine.)

The bundled MGI Videowave program is a powerful video editing package that allows you combine audio, video and still pictures into a powerful video presentation. It has transitions, titling, special effects tools and an array of codecs that allows you to output your work to many video formats including AVI, MPEG and Quicktime. Considering its power, I found Videowave's interface very easy to use—far less intimidating than something like Premiere.

While more than adequate as an amateur tool, video professionals will probably be disappointed at the AIWPs lack of hardware video compression, making it virtually impossible to capture at 640 x 480 at decent frame rates. It maxes out on my system at 320 x 240 at 30 fps. This is more than adequate for multimedia work or for creating video CDs, but creates somewhat fuzzy images when printing to videotape (not unlike using the extended play mode on your VCR). Also, the audio has a tendency to drift when capturing more than 15 minutes of video. This is because there is no real synchronization between audio and video tracks.

These limitations aside, the All in Wonder Pro is a tremendous value. If you had to buy separate pieces of hardware to do all that it does, you would easily spend three or four times the price. I highly recommend it!

For more information:

www.atitech.ca

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