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## Chillblast Fusion Photo OC Lite IV Photo Editing PC - User's review

August 17, 2018  •  1 Comment

I decided it was time for a new PC specifically for photo editing. My trusty Asus laptop, while quite powerful (with an i7 quad-core processor and a pretty good screen), now over five years old, was beginning to frustrate me with the time taken for some Photoshop tasks.  It will still be useful for taking on location, particularly for shooting tethered capture, but I decided to get a new desktop and monitor for photo editing.  Actually I bought the monitor first, an Eizo CS2420, which is excellent and calibrates nicely using its own software with my Spyder5.



A review of a Chillblast PC in *Professional Photo* magazine alerted me to their range of machines designed with photo editing in mind.  After reading comments elsewhere I decided on the Chillblast Fusion Photo OC Lite IV.  Ordering on the Chillblast website was very easy, and although there were many options for configuring the PC, I found that the standard specification contained everything that I had envisaged.  (The full spec is appended to the end of this review).  The machine was delivered 14 days after I placed my order.

As I installed the PC I was at once impressed by the build quality.  I have the large tower case standing on the floor (deskside rather than desktop), where the sockets, DVD drive and card reader slots on the front are easily accessible.  I connected my Eizo monitor using a DisplayPort cable, and this monitor also needs a USB connection to communicate with its calibration software.  This was easy, as the PC has four USB 3.1 sockets on the rear panel (one of them is USB-C), as well as two USB 2 ports on the rear, and a further two USB 3.1 ports on the front, plus a USB 3.0 socket on the memory card reader.  I have the dongle for my Logitech wireless keyboard and mouse in one of the USB 2 ports, and use one of the USB 3.1 ports for an external hard drive containing archive material and backups.  I also have Logitech speakers, plugged into the rear socket accessing the on-motherboard sound card, which produces sound of more than adequate quality.  I have the PC connected to my network router via a Gigabit Ethernet cable.



The PC is based on an Asus Z370-A motherboard with an eighth generation Intel i7-8700K 6-core processor ("coffee lake").  The nominal clock rate for this processor is 3.7 GHz, but Chillblast have overclocked it at up to 4.7 GHz.  Whenever I have checked the performance as reported by Windows Task Manager, it does indeed seem to be running at around 4.7 GHz.  This gives, from my perspective, phenomenal processing power!  There's 16 Gb of 2.4 GHz RAM, more than enough to keep Photoshop happy.  The graphics card is an Nvidia GTX1050 with 2 Gb memory - not the very highest spec from a gamer's point of view, but very powerful for photo editing and Photoshop does appear to be making full use of its capabilities.

The storage is provided by a lightning-fast Samsung 250 Gb solid-state drive (SSD), and two 2 Tb Seagate 7200 rpm drives.  These two drives are configured as a Raid 1 array, meaning that all files stored on them are mirrored on both.  This gives me peace-of-mind against the possibility of a hard disk failure which, like most of us, I have suffered in the past (without losing anything thanks to a rigorous backup strategy).  When returning from a shoot I'm never comfortable until I have at least two copies of all the images stored away.  Now this is done automatically for me.  Of course one could envisage some calamity in which both drives are lost, so I still do occasional backups to my external drive.  But with much less urgency as the chance of losing anything due to hardware failure is now vanishingly small.  And frankly, whatever the disaster that took out both drives, such as a house fire, it would likely take out the external drive too!  The only protection against such events is to also store precious stuff in the cloud.

The power supply fan is pleasingly quiet, I can hardly hear it.  Very occasionally I hear the CPU cooler for a few seconds while Photoshop is doing a particularly tough operation.  I can just about hear the hard disk drives operating sometimes, but overall I would say this computer is noise-free.

Some configuration of Windows is necessary initially.  The SSD (drive C:) is to be used to store the operating system and software applications, but all your photos and other documents must be stored on the 2 Tb Raid array (which appears as drive

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E:, because the DVD drive is D:). This means setting the default locations of the Windows links for Pictures, Documents, Videos, and so on, to drive E:. It's easy to do, but I was a bit surprised that there was no instruction from Chillblast about the need to do this (or indeed, they could have done it themselves before shipping). When I contacted them about this, they told me that they do now ship this PC with set-up instructions including this point - they sent me a copy of these instructions and they are, indeed, clear.

Having the operating system and software on the SSD has an amazing effect on the speed of starting up the system and applications, if like me you're used to having just a conventional hard drive for everything. The system boots up from cold into Windows 10 in just 32 seconds! No need to use a "sleep" mode when starting up is so fast. **Lightroom loads in just 8 seconds, and Photoshop in only 6 seconds!** Amazing! Gone are the days when I would close down Photoshop, then remember I had one more job to do and think, shit, now I have to wait for it to load up again. The hard drives storing the photos are really fast too. I've been working on a 60 Mpixel image stored as a raw file, and even this loads into Photoshop practically instantly.



Installing Adobe Creative Cloud, Lightroom and Photoshop was easy and fast. Activating my licence by just providing my Adobe ID was instant. But then began the process of copying tens of thousands of image files from my old machine onto this new one. I did that using an ethernet connection via my network router. It was easy enough but did take a long time, and it was a case of set it going and then go off to watch a movie or something. But then there was the process of copying across all my Lightroom settings, preferences, presets and plug-ins (I have several, Jeffrey Friedl's Zenfolio plug-in, Canon Print Studio Pro for my PRO-100S printer, the Nik Collection, and Juicebox Pro for creating web galleries, although I never use this since migrating my website to Zenfolio). Making sure that you have copied across all the required Lightroom configuration files takes some care. At first I missed one or two and had to go back to get them later when I found Lightroom did not have every setting that I expected. I found some online guides which were helpful in making sure that everything necessary has been copied over.

I typically copy image files from my camera, an Olympus OM-D E-M1 Mk.II, using a USB cable plugged into a front-panel USB 3.1 port. The camera has a USB-C socket so this is very fast. With other cameras I tend to just put the SD card into the front-panel memory card reader, also very fast.

**The speed and responsiveness when editing with Lightroom or Photoshop is superb.** Everything happens as fast as I've always thought it should, and there's no frustration waiting for Photoshop to complete an operation, as I had grown used to on my laptop (which, remember, was not exactly a sluggish machine). Interestingly, other applications and plug-ins, such as PortraitPro Studio 17 and Silver Efex Pro 2, while working very fast, do not show such an amazing improvement as the Adobe apps. I put this down to Photoshop making good use of the power of the GTX1050 graphics card, but there may be other reasons.
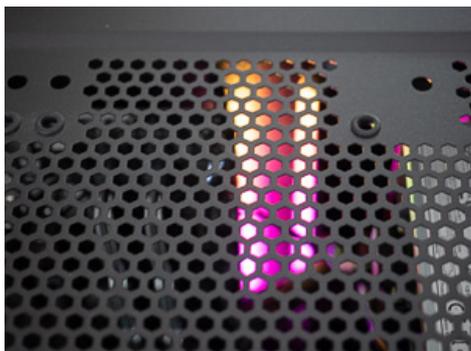


One quirky feature: inside the case, on the motherboard I think, are a row of bright coloured LEDs that keep changing colour, constantly fading through many hues. I suppose this sort of thing is popular with gamers! It's of no consequence, but it is an odd feature. Although they did no harm, I found the BIOS setting to turn them off!

You may gather from the tone of this review that I am enthusiastic about my new Chillblast computer. It's true, I'm very pleased with it, it is everything that I hoped it would be and more. It has transformed my photo editing experience. Together with the lovely Eizo display and my latest acquisition, a Wacom tablet (review of that to come later), I feel I now have the perfect editing environment.
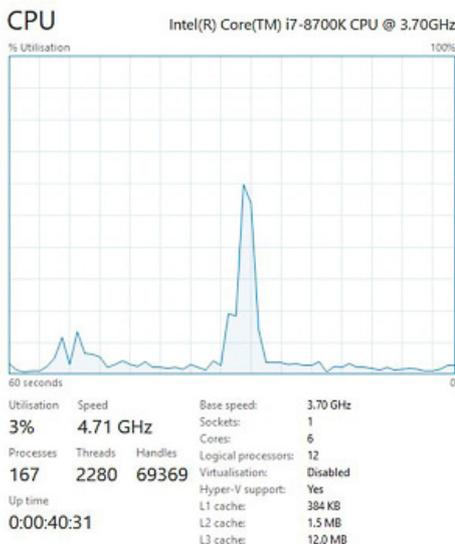
**Full spec**

Processor: Intel Core i7-8700K Coffee Lake CPU, 6 Cores, 3.7 - 4.7GHz
Overclocking: Overclock my CPU by up to 20%
Case: Corsair Carbide 200R Case - Black
Graphics Card: NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1050 2GB Graphics Card
CPU Cooler: Corsair Hydro H75 CPU Cooler
Motherboard: Asus PRIME Z370-A Motherboard
Memory: 16GB DDR4 2400MHz Memory (2 x 8GB Sticks)
OS Drive: 250GB Samsung 960 EVO M.2 PCIe Solid State Drive
RAID Volume: 2 x Seagate 2TB BarraCuda 7200RPM Hard Disk
RAID Configuration: RAID 1 Configuration - Choose 2 identical hard disks
Optical Drive: 24x DVD-RW Drive
Power Supply: Corsair CX650 80 PLUS Bronze 650W PSU
Sound Card: Onboard High Definition Audio

Internal Card Reader Drive: Akasa 17 in 1 3.5" USB 2.0 Internal Card Reader
Operating System: Windows 10 Home 64-bit

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## Comments

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**Phildj2** 🔒 **(non-registered)**                        3-Feb-19 17:20

Thanks Neill. I am looking at upgrading to the same computer - my existing is an old Chillblast PC! so a very helpful review!

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