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The Video Card Rankings - Spring 2014

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By Ari Altman
Published March 16, 2014

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For PC gaming enthusiasts looking to keep their systems up-to-date, knowing how current components compare to what they have installed is critical in deciding when it's time to upgrade. To help our fellow gamers out, we've created a ranking system for graphics cards, comparing many of the most popular models released over the past seven years. Our Speed Rating system uses a baseline of 1x Speed, represented by the venerable and very popular GeForce 8800GT, and we currently profile cards from one to eight times faster than the 8800GT.

Note that we don't necessarily recommend all these cards - the purpose here is to map out the current video card market and relative performance to price ratios, which we provide as a "P/P Rating." Our goal is to get you the maximum performance gain per dollar with your next upgrade. To give you a better understanding of how the performance per dollar equation has changed over time, take a look at our Cost Curves on the last page of this article, followed by a complete table of nearly all graphics cards released since 2007.

We publish this ranking quarterly, along with our Video Card Buyer's Guide, which provides recommendations on the best products for the money. New video cards are released about every three months, and the most recent releases were the AMD Radeon R7 265 and R7 250X, which are essentially rebrands of the HD 7850 and HD 7770, respectively, along with Nvidia's brand-new GTX 750 and 750 Ti, based on the ultra-efficient "Maxwell" architecture. All of these products are entry-level or midrange - we'll need to wait until later this year to see anything new at the high end.

A few notes about our methodology - first, we determine the Speed Ratings of each card based on both our own testing of many of the cards profiled in this guide, along with our analysis of the professional reviews of each card listed. We then calculate the P/P Rating, which is simply the Speed Rating divided by the original retail price (and today's price for current cards in each class), multiplied by 100. We group cards together as long as their performance is within 10 percent of the Speed Rating in which they appear. We do not consider factory-overclocked cards, nor do we consider potential overclocking headroom, which varies not just by model, but also by individual samples. Models that fall evenly between Speed Ratings are not ranked, but you can estimate where they'd fall based on our inclusion of video cards from the same product family.

And now, on to the rankings!

1x Speed: **GeForce GT 640 2GB DDR3 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.25**

Released: June 2012
Intro Price: $100
P/P Rating: 1.0

Once upon a time, this level of video processing power was absolutely overkill. Most monitors had a resolution of 1280x1024, and games were still based on DX10. It wasn't until 1920x1080 monitors become common and DX11 games arrived that this class of card finally became obsolete.

We base our 1x Speed Rating on one of the most influential and game-changing video cards of all time, the Nvidia GeForce 8800GT, introduced in October 2007 at the $250 price point. In one fell swoop, it brought high-end graphics power to the masses, coming in at about half the price of the previous high-end card, the GeForce 8800 GTX, while offering almost the same processing power.

Nothing stands still in the technology world, though, and it took just one year to drop the price of "1x

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Speed" from $250 to $130, with the introduction of the Radeon HD 4830. Today, this level of performance is below any mainstream gaming cards, which start at the 1.5x Speed Rating. Note that the price for this level of performance has only decreased about $20 over three years, which suggests that prices can only drop so low on video cards - as they trend towards $100, they often stall there, as the battle rages on in the price tiers above.

GeForce 8800GT 512MB DDR3

Released: Oct. 2007
Intro Price: $250
P/P Rating: 0.40

Radeon HD 4830 512MB DDR3

Released: Oct. 2008
Intro Price: $130
P/P Rating: 0.77

Radeon HD 6670 1GB GDDR5

Released: Apr. 2011
Intro Price: $100
P/P Rating: 1.0

1.5x Speed: GeForce GTX 650 1GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.36

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Zotac GeForce GTX 650 1 GB...
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Released: Sept. 2012
Intro Price: $110
P/P Rating: 1.36

This is where the ability to play modern games begins today, and one of the more popular cards at this Speed Rating over the past few years has been the Geforce GTX 750. It performs almost identically to the Radeon HD 7750, which has been discontinued (but may still be available in limited quantities. The truth is, however, that if you're shopping in this price range, you can often find cards occupying the 2x Speed Rating or higher for around the same price. That means that cards falling into the 1x, 1.5x, and 2x Speed Ratings are all available within about $30-40 of each other. In fact, the GTX 650 sells for exactly the same amount today as it did back in 2012. That's why it's important to know your cards before you put your money down! We still like and recommend the GTX 650 for home theater PC use, as it remains the most powerful card available in a low-profile format.

While this Speed Rating is far from the focus today, there was a time when all the action happened right here. Nvidia thought it had the market all wrapped up when it released the GeForce GTX 260 896MB in June of 2008 at $400, but AMD pulled a fast one on Nvidia, dropping the price of the 1.5x speed level $100 in a few weeks with the $300 HD 4870 512MB. And while the HD 5770 provided similar performance for about half the price just over a year later, gamers simply weren't impressed - the 1.5x Speed ship had sailed. AMD could do little to avoid disappointing critics with the $109 HD 7750 released in 2012 at the same performance level, but the HD 7750 eventually gained respect as one of the fastest cards that operates without the need for PCIe power cables, even if it's never been a particularly great bargain. When the GTX 650 arrived 6 months later at the same price, it certainly wasn't going to make waves, but it remains a popular entry-level card, especially for sale in pre-built systems.

GeForce GTX 260 896MB DDR3

Released: June 2008
Intro Price: $400
P/P Rating: 0.38

Radeon HD 4870 512MB GDDR5

Released: June 2008
Intro Price: $300
P/P Rating: 0.50

Radeon HD 5770 1GB GDDR5

Released: Oct. 2009
Intro Price: $160
P/P Rating: 0.94

Radeon HD 7750 1GB GDDR5

Released: Feb. 2012
Intro Price: $109
P/P Rating: 1.37

2x Speed: GeForce GTX 650 Ti 1GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.59

Released: Oct. 2012
Intro Price: $150
P/P Rating: 1.33

The current 2x Speed champ, the GTX 650 Ti, doesn't really get people too excited. In fact, products just slightly faster, like the GeForce GTX 750, are actually less expensive. Are we seeing a trend here? Yes, indeed, it seems that cards falling into Speed Ratings 1x, 1.5x, and 2x are really past their prime at this point, ready to be put out to pasture. There are a few rare instances where they fill a niche role, as in low-profile cards, but for gaming purposes, it almost always makes sense to step up to a product above this speed level. Interestingly, AMD's latest GPU entrant in this category, the Radeon R7 260, which performs identically to the GTX 650 Ti, never truly made it to market. AMD's board partners just weren't interested in creating a product based around the GPU. Our theory is that the margins in this price range are just too tight to spend the money marketing new products that perform just like old ones, so we'd bet that the GTX 650 Ti will be the very last video card in the 2x Speed Rating. To get our advice on the cards that are actually worth buying in the $100-200 range, see our Video Card Buyer's Guide.

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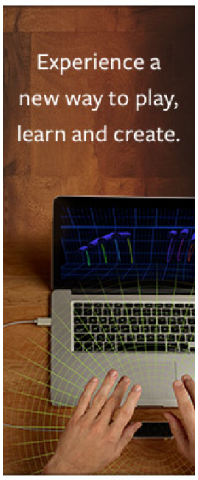

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There was a time not too long ago, however, when products at this Speed Rating were at the heart of many gaming systems. In fact, when it was introduced in June 2010 for $230, the GTX 460 turned the gaming world on its head, offering unheard of bang-for-the-buck, just as the 8800GT had done three years earlier. AMD more than matched Nvidia later that year with the HD 6850, but then things really slowed down between 2011 and 2012 in this category. That being said, many a gamer likely still rocks a card from this era, and there's no doubt that these cards are still quite competent for modern gaming.

GeForce GTX 285 1GB DDR3

Released: Jan. 2009
Intro Price: $400
P/P Rating: 0.50

GeForce GTX 460 1GB GDDR5

Released: June 2010
Intro Price: $230
P/P Rating: 0.87

Radeon HD 6850 1GB GDDR5

Released: Oct. 2010
Intro Price: $180
P/P Rating: 1.11

3x Speed: Radeon R7 265 2GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.76

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Sapphire Sapphire...
$168.86 Prime

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$170 at time of publication

Released: Mar. 2014
Intro Price: $150
P/P Rating: 2.0

After the discontinuation of several popular cards in this category, including the Radeon HD 7850 and GeForce GTX 650 Ti Boost, AMD has finally brought a card back to the $150 price point. Sort of. You see, the R7 265 was launched in early February 2014, and yet, as of our publication date a month later, it's still not available in large quantities. Nonetheless, we use it as a placeholder in this category because it is the least expensive 3x Speed card ever released, at least on paper. The R7 265 is simply an overclocked HD 7850, providing performance about 8-10 percent higher than its fraternal twin. Interestingly, at one point, products in this class went all the way down to $100 as they were being liquidated, which made for some amazing deals. Why AMD and Nvidia conducted this fire sale when they had nothing to replace these products with remains a mystery, but trust us, it happened.

Let's take a quick stroll down memory lane to see where the 3x Speed Rating began. The first single-GPU card to offer performance at the 3x Speed Rating was the awesome Fermi-based GTX 480, released in March of 2010. It was an impressive product, but it launched late and it launched hot. Some said it could even fry an egg! Despite its tarnished legacy, it can still handle even the newest games with relative ease. Perhaps there's a lesson to be learned here - don't over-promise and under-deliver, even by a little! To compete with the formidable GTX 480, AMD released the HD 6970 (which we'd say also under-delivered, by the way), and then about a year later the HD 7850, both of which just about matched the performance of the GTX 480. Nvidia itself matched the 480 with its own GTX 570 and then its bargain-priced GTX 650 Ti Boost, which was released in a hurry to preemptively cut short the life of the Radeon HD 7790. We'd say it succeeded, but it has since been discontinued, as it was never meant to have a long-term presence in the Nvidia product stack.

GeForce GTX 480 1.5GB GDDR5

Released: Mar. 2010
Intro Price: $500
P/P Rating: 0.60

Radeon HD 6970 2GB GDDR5

Released: Dec. 2010
Intro Price: $370
P/P Rating: 0.81

GeForce GTX 570 1.25GB GDDR5

Released: Dec. 2010
Intro Price: $350
P/P Rating: 0.86

Radeon HD 7850 2GB GDDR5

Released: Mar. 2012
Intro Price: $250
P/P Rating: 1.2

GeForce GTX 650 Ti Boost 2GB GDDR5

Released: Mar. 2013
Intro Price: $170
P/P Rating: 1.76

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THE VIDEO CARD RANKINGS (PAGE 2)

The Video Card Rankings - Spring 2014

Now we come to the big guns, starting with the 4x Speed Rating and going all the way up to the 7x Speed Rating. While you can achieve higher performance than that by teaming up two or more cards in one system, we focus only on single cards in this article. We do, however, list several cards using dual-GPU configurations, as these are products you can buy off the shelf that offer SLI or Crossfire performance right out of the box. The truth is, however, that the dual-GPU cards currently on the market are terrible values - please don't buy them! We expect next-gen cards to finally exceed 7x speed without the need for two GPUs, likely by the Fall of 2014.

The last page of the article will discuss the 8x Speed Rating, which is essentially a placeholder, along with our data-rich cost curves and our complete listing of all video cards since 2007.

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4x Speed: **GeForce GTX 760 2GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.60**

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$250 at time of publication

Released: June 2013
Intro Price: $250
P/P Rating: 1.60

The GTX 760 is the sole survivor of a bitter fight at this Speed Rating that's claimed many a good card. It all began when the Radeon HD 7950 was released in January 2012 at $450. It was considered a major failure on AMD's part, as it actually lowered the price/performance ratio compared to previous-gen cards. Nvidia came along with its GeForce GTX 660 Ti later that year, more than matching the 7950's performance at two-thirds the price. Not afraid of a fight, AMD endowed the HD 7950 with "Boost" and dropped its price to $330, transforming it into one of the most popular video cards of its generation, in no small part due to its prodigious overclocking capability.

Then along came the GTX 760 in June of 2013, making life difficult for the HD 7950 for a second time. No rest for the weary! AMD again had to aggressively cut the price on the HD 7950, and for a while many models were available under the $200 price point, which was the bargain of the century. Well, that time has passed, and the GTX 760 soldiers on, without a hint of a price cut or a worry.
AMD still doesn't have any competition for it in this price range, although the paper-launched R9 280, which is a carbon copy of the HD 7950 Boost, may be hitting the market shortly at $280. We'd say too expensive, too late, AMD!

Radeon HD 5970 2GB GDDR5

Released: Nov. 2009
Intro Price: $600
P/P Rating: 0.67

Radeon HD 7950 3GB GDDR5

Released: Jan. 2012
Intro Price: $450
P/P Rating: 0.89

GeForce GTX 660 Ti 2GB GDDR5

Released: August 2012
Intro Price: $300
P/P Rating: 1.33

Radeon HD 7950 Boost 3GB GDDR5

Released: August 2012
Intro Price: $330
P/P Rating: 1.21

5x Speed:

GeForce GTX 770 2GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.47

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MSI Computer Corp. Video...
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Released: May 2013
Intro Price: $400
P/P Rating: 1.25

This level of performance has been available for quite some time, dating all the way back to the hot-running HD 6990 released in March 2011. But it wasn't until AMD released the Radeon HD 7970 GHz Edition in June 2012 for $500 that you could finally get this kind of power in a single-GPU card. That card was a pumped up version of the original HD 7970, which offered much lower performance per dollar when it was released in January 2012 at $550.

Bowing to AMD's strong move, Nvidia introduced the GeForce GTX 770 in May of 2013 at $400. The card was itself a hot-rodded version of the more expensive GTX 680, but what was really new was the price - it undercut both the GTX 680 and the HD 7970 GHz Edition by nearly $100. Most recently, AMD decided to play it safe with the introduction of the R9 280X that would replace the 7970 GHz Edition - AMD actually detuned it slightly from 7970 GHz levels, dropping the core clock 50MHz. But it dropped the price a whole lot more, all the way down to $300. It's about 5 percent slower than the GTX 770, which was reasonable at its introductory price, but in the interim, two things have happened that have made the R9 280X less appealing. First, Nvidia dropped the base price of the GTX 770 down to $330, and second, the crypto-currency mining craze drove the R9 280X's price well beyond $400. That most definitely is not a great deal, so we no longer give it prime billing at this Speed Rating.

It's interesting to observe Nvidia's market behavior in this segment - it held the prices of its products steady for an extended period of time, while AMD competed with itself on pricing. Nvidia's price cut on the GTX 770 was unusual, but it turned out to be a great turn of events for gamers, as the GTX 770 is the *only* card available between $300 and $400 as of our publication date!

Radeon HD 6990 4GB GDDR5

Released: Mar. 2011
Intro Price: $700
P/P Rating: 0.71

GeForce GTX 590 3GB GDDR5

Released: Mar. 2011
Intro Price: $700
P/P Rating: 0.71

Radeon HD 7970 GHz Edition 3GB GDDR5

Released: June 2012
Intro Price: $500
P/P Rating: 1.0

Radeon R9 280X 3GB GDDR5

Released: Oct. 2013
Intro Price: $300
P/P Rating: 1.67

6x Speed:

Radeon R9 290 4GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.20

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XFX Double D R9 290...
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Released: Nov. 2013
Intro Price: $400
P/P Rating: 1.5

Nvidia had been dominating this Speed Rating since the introduction of the GTX Titan in early 2013, and then the similarly-performing GTX 780 a few months later, but AMD swung for the fences with the release of the hot-blooded 512-bit Radeon R9 290X 4GB, and then knocked one out of the park with the $400 R9 290. But some market forces just can't be controlled, and these cards quickly sold out as crypto-currency miners grabbed them up. We also assume AMD was having a bit of trouble taming the heat of its hot-running GPU, as it simply was never available in large numbers. That was due to somewhat subpar coolers, which proved inadequate to let the 290 series really run to its full potential. At this point, enthusiasts are more excited about the various custom-designed versions trickling out, all of which unfortunately are priced quite a bit higher than the original reference card. Maybe the price on that card really was too good to be true. Even at well above its retail price, though, the R9 290 is a formidable competitor. It nearly matches the older GTX Titan's speed at half the cost, and also competes head-to-head with the GTX 780. That card, however, enjoyed a steep price cut to counter the 290's release, dropping from $650 to $500, so they are about even at this point in terms of the P/P rating.

We should note that the 290X, if run in its optional "uber" mode (with a higher fan setting), or with a custom overclock using an aftermarket cooler, actually approaches the 7x Speed Rating. Because the reference model ships by default in "quiet" mode, however, we list it at this Speed Rating.

GeForce GTX Titan 6GB GDDR5

Released: Feb. 2013
Intro Price: $1,000
P/P Rating: 0.6

GeForce GTX 780 3GB GDDR5

Released: May 2013
Intro Price: $650
P/P Rating: 0.9

Radeon R9 290X 4GB GDDR5

Released: Oct. 2013
Intro Price: $550
P/P Rating: 1.09

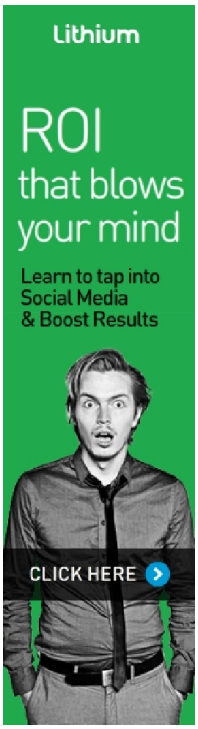
7x Speed:

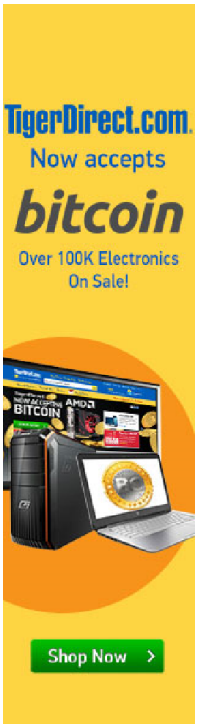
GeForce GTX 780 Ti 3GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 1.00

Released: Nov. 2013
Intro Price: $700
P/P Rating: 1.0

The 7x Speed Rating was carved out by the GTX 780 Ti, which jumped ahead of all the products that had come before it, providing just enough of a boost to create its own performance class. Keep in mind that the spread between 6x and 7x is approximately 15 percent, so the performance differences we're talking about are relatively minor. Of course, you pay a lot more for the privilege of jumping up to the fastest single-GPU card ever released.

The 780 Ti in fact played the role of a spoiler back in November 2013. Nvidia took the wind out of





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EVGA GeForce GTX 780 Ti,...

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AMD's sails with a card that defeated the R9 290X before that model had even been released in quantity. In the process, the GTX 780 Ti also made obsolete the $1,000 GTX Titan. Nvidia has since announced a GTX Titan Black, which is simply a higher-clocked 780 Ti with 6GB and much higher double precision floating point performance, critical in GPU computing applications. Because that card doesn't offer much over the 780 Ti to gamers, we don't list it here.

The 780 Ti is likely the last of its breed - a big, power-hungry GPU based on the 28nm manufacturing process. It's interesting to note that this node arrived back in December 2011 with the release of the Radeon HD 7970, a card that would fall into the 4.5x Speed Rating, if we had one. With the GTX 780 Ti, we are witness to over a 50 percent speed boost on the same manufacturing process. Not bad at all, even if it costs an arm and a leg! If you'd like to learn more about the GTX 780 Ti, check out our review!

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THE VIDEO CARD RANKINGS (PAGE 3)

The Video Card Rankings - Spring 2014

Finally, we get to the highest of our Speed Ratings, 8x, and present our Cost Curves and full Table of Graphics Cards stretching back to 2007. An interesting fact about the 8x Speed Rating - while it's been around since early 2012, it's really just a theoretical class today. The two cards that previously graced us with their 8x Speed prowess have all but left the market at this point. A few remain in stock, at higher prices than they sold for two years ago, just waiting for some unsuspecting buyer to pounce. Perhaps the reason that these cards came and went is that they relied on dual GPUs on a single card, and these can be notoriously unreliable due to heat, as well as the need for fully-functioning Crossfire/SLI drivers. Furthermore, it became much more economical to simply buy two separate cards with the GPUs offered by these behemoths, rather than put all your eggs in one expensive basket.

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8x Speed: **GeForce GTX 690 4GB GDDR5 - P/P Rating (Mar. 2014): 0.73**

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ASUS GeForce GTX690...

$721.99

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$1,090 at time of publication

Released: May 2012
Intro Price: $1,000
P/P Rating: 0.8

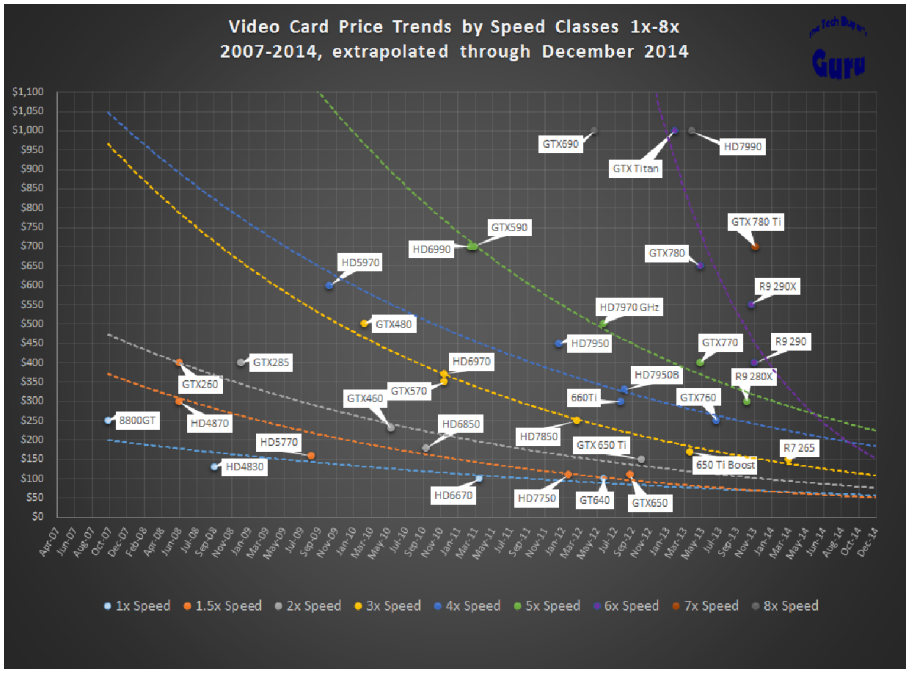
The GeForce GTX 690 stands as the lone representative of this Speed Rating, soldiering on in limited quantities after having been axed from Nvidia's product line. It was released back in the Spring of 2012, and boy was it an impressive piece of hardware at that time. Its extraordinary price of $1,000 was deemed fair given the extreme performance, but today it's really a terrible value. Despite a copious amount of GPU power, with only 2GB of VRAM per GPU, it is far from the ideal card to handle resolutions over 1080p. In the interim, its only challenger, the theoretically faster Radeon HD 7990 6GB, has come and gone, having lived a short and tumultuous life. It was released a year after the GTX 690, at the very same price, with a lower-quality cooler and some serious driver issues that made gameplay anything but smooth. AMD eventually worked out the driver issues and dropped the price to an incredible $600 to rid itself of inventory, and then poof, it was gone.

These two cards, along with the "luxury" Titan models, hold the record as the most expensive reference-design video cards ever introduced. We expect that the next generation of video cards should reach at least the 8x Speed Rating, if not higher, at much lower cost, both in terms of dollars and power use.

Radeon HD 7990 6GB GDDR5

Released: Apr. 2013
Intro Price: $1,000
P/P Rating: 0.80

OK, you've made it through the rankings, but we're not done yet. Prepare yourself for an onslaught of data, in the form of our historical video card Cost Curves. Just about every card listed in this article is plotted on this graph, based on its *release date and original retail price*. We add in the curves to connect cards of the same Speed Rating, so you can see how prices change over time at a given performance level.



So there you have it - historical price curves starting in October 2007, projected out to December 2014. Unfortunately we don't have enough information to plot a meaningful curve at the 8x Speed Rating, given that the only two cards released at that level both cost $1,000 at release. Furthermore, with only one card, the GTX 780 Ti, occupying the 7x Speed Rating, we have no curve at all. And the curve for the 6x Speed Rating is unfortunately *clearly* erroneous, as a result of two bad data points: the extremely over-priced GTX Titan, and the extremely under-priced R9 290. It's funny - AMD is none too predictable when it comes to pricing. Sometimes it way overshoots, as it did with the HD 7950 and HD 7990, which were way above the cost curves for their classes, and sometimes it undershoots, as it did with the R9 290. But the true value in analyzing historical cost curves is that they actually do a fairly good job of helping predict future prices. Consider, for instance, that within weeks of its introduction, the R9 290 was selling for at least $50-$100 over its retail price. This is a sign that the market truly will correct prices to bring them in line with historical trends and consumer preferences.

Therefore, we still have faith in the curves shown for the lower speed classes, and we're going to make a prediction for 2014: by the end of the year, we'll have new video cards based on new 20-nanometer technology that will bring the price of 5x Speed down to $250, the price of 4x Speed down to $180, and the price of 3x Speed down to $120. We'll also make an educated guess that 6x Speed will return to $400, where the R9 290 once resided, and that 7x Speed will drop down to $550. As for the halo products that finally bring us 8x and 9x Speed? We'll call it at $800 and $1000, respectively. Come back later this year to find out if we were right!

The Full Table of Graphics Cards - 2007-2014

This wouldn't be a proper video card ranking if we didn't at least give you an indication of where nearly every desktop card manufacturered since 2007 falls within our Speed Rating classification system. So, feast your eyes on the full Video Card Rankings, with Nvidia cards in green, and AMD cards in red, organized roughly by release date within each category:

1x Speed	GeForce 8800GT/9800GT Radeon HD 4830 Radeon HD 6670 GDDR5 GeForce GT 640 DDR3
>1x	HD 4850, 8800GTS, 9800GTX, 9800GTX+, HD 4770, GTS 250, HD 5750/6750, R7 250
1.5x Speed	GeForce GTX 260 Radeon HD 4870 Radeon HD 5770/6770 Radeon HD 7750 GeForce GTX 650
>1.5x	GTX 260 Core 216, HD 4870 1GB, GTX 280, GTX 275, HD 4890, GTS 450, GTX 550 Ti, HD 7770, R7 250X
2x Speed	GeForce GTX 285 GeForce GTX 460 Radeon HD 6850 GeForce GTX 650 Ti
>2x	HD 4870 X2, GTX 295, HD 5850, HD 5870, GTX 470, GTX 465, HD 6870, HD 6950, GTX 560, GTX 560 Ti, GTX 560 Ti 448 Core, HD 7790, R7 260, R7 260X, GTX 750, GTX 750 Ti
3x Speed	GeForce GTX 480 Radeon HD 6970 GeForce GTX 570 Radeon HD 7850 GeForce GTX 650 Ti Boost Radeon R7 265
>3x	GTX 580, HD 7870, HD 7870 XT, GTX 660, R9 270, R9 270X
4x Speed	Radeon HD 5970 Radeon HD 7950 GeForce GTX 660 Ti Radeon HD 7950 Boost/R9 280 GeForce GTX 760
>4x	HD 7970, GTX 670, GTX 680
5x Speed	Radeon HD 6990 GeForce GTX 590 Radeon HD 7970 GHz Ed. GeForce GTX 770 Radeon R9 280X
>5x	None
6x Speed	GeForce GTX Titan GeForce GTX 780 Radeon R9 290X Radeon R9 290
>6x	None
7x Speed	GeForce GTX 780 Ti GeForce GTX Titan Black
>7x	None
8x Speed	GeForce GTX 690 Radeon HD 7990

As a brave soldier once said, "now you know, and knowing is half the battle." May your next video card purchase be a very informed decision!

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