

Via touts low-cost chip

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With its C7 processor, Via Technologies hopes to eliminate its performance credibility gap and allow notebook makers to come out with light notebooks for under \$800.

The chip, which will be shown off next week in notebooks at the Computex trade show in Taipei, sports performance roughly in the same neighborhood as that for current notebook chips from Intel and Advanced Micro Devices, according to Via executives.

May, in fact, is a big month for processor launches. Intel on Wednesday released a new round of desktop chips while AMD is expected to unveil a desktop Athlon at Computex. Taiwanese contract manufacturers such as Quanta and Compaq also will likely show off notebooks at the show that later will be sold as Dell and HP notebooks around the world.

The Via chip, though, consumes a maximum of 20 watts of power at 2GHz--less than competing chips--and takes up only 30 square millimeters of space, a smaller size that cuts the price.

"You will see thin and light notebooks under \$800 and possibly lower than that," said Richard Brown, associate vice president of international marketing for Via.

Thin and light notebooks typically weigh 5 pounds or less and cost more than \$1,000, while bargain notebooks weigh about 8 pounds and can be had for as little as \$650 these days. Many of these larger notebooks, however, rarely leave home, according to PC marketing executives, and so weight has become an important factor in sales of many notebook models. The Pavilion dv1227us from HP, for instance, retails for \$1,199. Mostly, C7 notebooks will come from white-box manufacturers in emerging markets, but some models will likely sneak into the U.S. and Europe.

Taiwan-based Via won't upend the processor market any day soon. Although it's one of the world's primary PC chipset makers, the company's global market share in PC processors is just north of 1 percent, according Mercury Research. (The chipset shuttles data back and forth to the processor, the primary chip that performs calculations.)

Still, the C7 represents a turning point for the company. For years, Via's chips have lagged behind in performance, forcing the company to sell almost exclusively on price. (If Intel was the gorilla in the processor world, AMD was the chimp and Via was the monkey, Via CEO Wen Chi Chen once said in an interview.)

"The notebook market is growing, and the fastest growing segment is the value segment," McCarron added.

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