

AMD Launches 3.0GHz Opteron Processors

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AMD is launching two additional dual-core processors for two-way, four-way and eight-ways systems, and touting new benchmark studies.

Advanced Micro Devices is rolling out some additions to its Opteron family of dual-core processors that will now run at a clock speed of 3.0GHz.

On April 4, AMD launched the Opteron 2222 SE model for two-way systems and the 8222 SE model for four- and eight-way servers. The two new models will both run at 3.0GHz and offer 2MB of Level 2 cache and the same integrated memory controller and HyperTransport technology (a high-speed chip-to-chip interconnect) as other processors in that series.

Pat Patla, director of AMD's Opteron marketing, said the Sunnyvale,

Calif., company has been shipping some of these faster-running chips to OEMs for the past few months and the processors will become widely available within two weeks.

Along with the additions to the Opteron lineup, AMD executives were touting the results of several new benchmark tests that, according to the company, show that these chips outperform Intel's Xeon processors.

As it had done in February, AMD used several benchmarks devised by SPEC (Standard Performance Evaluation Corporation) to compare the Opteron 2222 SE to the Intel Xeon 5160, a dual-core processor that runs at 3.0GHz and has 4MB of L2 cache and a 1333MHz front side bus.

The SPECint test compared the Opteron, running in a Tyan Thunder n4250QE motherboard with 8GB memory and 80GB SATA (Serial ATA) disk drive and using Novell's SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 9 SP3, with the Xeon, running in an FSC Primergy TX300 S3 with 16GB memory and a 73GB SAS disk drive and using Windows 2003 Server Enterprise Edition SP1. The Opteron outperformed the Xeon by a score of 56.6 to 55.2, according to the results provided by AMD.

"What our competition has been doing is trying to confuse the marketplace and this is a way to show that we still have the crown," Patla said.

A second test, the SPECfp, used similar configurations to the SPECint, only the Opteron was tested on a system using SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 9 SP3, while the Intel ran on a system using SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 10. In this test, the Opteron outscored the Xeon by a score of 52.1 to 45.1. A third test also showed AMD's product outpacing Intel's.

What this latest salvo also indicates is that the rivalry between AMD and

Intel shows no sign of letting up anytime soon.

According to a Jan. 31 report by Mercury Research, AMD added to its market share of the overall x86 space in 2006, with the majority of gains being from among its notebook and desktop products.

Although it lost market share to its smaller rival, Intel managed to gain back some of its server share. In the meantime, the Santa Clara, Calif., company has been pushing hard to promote its quad-core Xeon processors.

AMD, which has claimed all along that it owns a more elegant quad-core design, will release its quad-core Opteron, dubbed "Barcelona," later in 2007.

AMD's ongoing price war with Intel has also affected its bottom line. When it released its fourth quarter financial results on Jan. 23, the company watched its gross margins slip as sales of its server processors slowed.

In a April 4 research note to investors, Joe Osha, an analyst with Merrill Lynch, wrote that AMD needs to continue to press its advantage in the desktop space, especially since it announced that it would produce processors using a 65-nanometer manufacturing process.

"The quad-core server debate is beside the point," Osha wrote. "What AMD really needs is a competitive product in the performance desktop segment. We think that Athlon 64 X2 on the new process technology should meet the need, and we also think that AMD could be able to turn free cash flow positive by - the fourth quarter - of this year. We're more skeptical on AMD's prospects in mobile processors this year."

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