



AUTOSIMSPORT

Volume 3 Number 6

Slidin the Sport into the Sim

MERCEDES W196 UNLEASHED

**BLIMEY!GAMES FIRST-LOOK
PLUS
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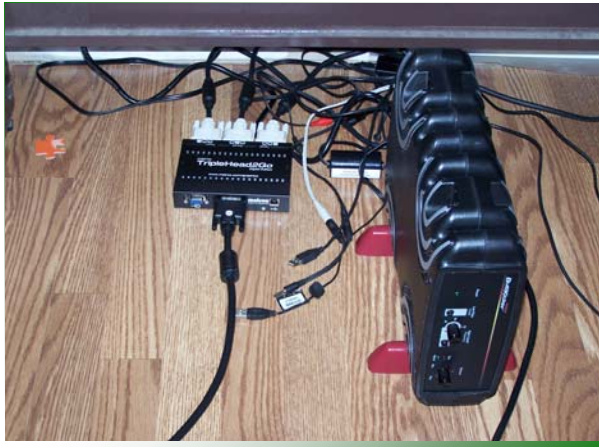
**LOU
MAGYAR'S
HARDWARE
REVIEW**

Matrox's Digital TripleHead2Go

Lou Magyar comes face-to-face(s) with the three-headed beast from Matrox and learns why three heads are better than one ...

LouMagyar





Matrox Graphics' parent company, [Matrox](#), has been in the high-end graphics business for over thirty years. The graphics division, meanwhile, has been developing their highly-regarded Graphics eXpansion Module (GXM) multi-display line of products for gamers, developers, and professionals alike, and their latest creation is the all-new Digital TripleHead2Go.

This compact unit retails for about \$330, and for the price, you get a Digital TripleHead2Go that will instantaneously turn your single video card analog, or digital output, into a triple-screen wide-resolution monitor. Why '2Go', you ask? The answer lies in the TH2G's ingenious design that requires no case intervention. It simply slips between your video card and your monitors, and its tiny size, along with its USB-power-supply, means you can bring it anywhere—making it perfect for gamers on-the-go.

The Matrox website notes that, 'Matrox GXM are a new line of patent-pending technology that allows users to add multi-display support to a system via external connectivity. GXM are easy-to-use, external, palm-sized boxes that connect to a notebook or desktop PC. Benefit from multi-display computing without having to open the PC chassis'.



Matrox provides a tool on their website that will test your system for compatibility. If you are thinking about getting a TH2G, you can go [here](#) to ascertain whether your system is up to the task before purchasing. It will check the graphics card you're using, the driver version installed on your system, and confirm if your particular configuration will work with TripleHead2Go.

Hookup is straightforward—so simple, in fact, that the included connection overview leaflet that explains it all is precisely one diagram long. The TH2G connects to either a VGA or DVI output from your video card using one of the two supplied dongles. Connection to the monitors is just as it would be if you were connecting a single monitor to your video card's digital output. The TH2G is sensibly labeled so you don't need to guess which monitor will appear where on your new wide-resolution display. The last thing to connect is the six-foot USB cable. This supplies the power to the TH2G. And that's all there is to the hardware connection.

Having said that, I must admit to having experienced a small glitch when I did my install ... see, I am a naysayer, and so, as always, just jumped straight in. The TH2G has an LED next to the USB power port. This LED is

used as a troubleshooting diagnostic tool. A black LED (no power) is pretty straight forward; either you have power, or you don't. Black, however—according to the troubleshooting section of the User Guide—says that it could also mean that, 'your Matrox product may not support the selected display mode', and guides you to 'see "Supported display modes", page 21' (of the User Guide).

A Red power LED indicator is also indicative of a problem. Red's telltale is, in addition to the aforementioned 'display mode', an issue that indicates, 'unsupported graphics hardware in your computer'; in other words, you need a new video card. In my case, I connected the hardware and booted-up the computer ... *before* installing the software, or reading the User Guide.

I was greeted by black monitor screens and a red power LED ... great, but not quite what I was after! So now what? I shut down, reverted back to the single monitor connected directly to the sound card, and opened the User Guide. There, I found the above information concerning the red LED, and thumbed to 'page 21' hoping to solve my problem.

Well, 'page 21' doesn't have any further troubleshooting information, only a list of supported display modes, and, to make matters worse, my monitor's resolution settings were already *in* one of the listed display modes.

Ghaaaaa!

Now what? I went back to the triple-head configuration, with the self-same results. I tried several different things before it finally dawned on me that my problem was none other than procedural. After about thirty minutes of scratching my head, I realized that, if I set my desktop to 640x480 VGA, the problems should resolve themselves. And, yep, I should'a been thinking about 'best practices', and done that in the first place; it would have saved me a ton of grief, and gotten me going a lot sooner.



With ecransbezel (above), without (below)



I spoke with Lisa at Matrox regarding the vagaries in the guide. Being a bit more technically oriented, I was able to resolve the issue, despite the lack of guidance in the User Guide. I suggested that something more detailed regarding the red LED should perhaps be discussed in the guide. Something as simple as 'set your resolution to 640x480 before you begin' in the instructions would go a long way to avoiding problems that are, shall we say, simply avoided. Adding that same line to the troubleshooting guide would also be a big help for end-users.

Okay, so I got the TH2G to work with the three Samsung monitors just fine after realizing the error of my ways. But, once bitten twice poisoned and all that, I decided to take a none-too-cursory spin through the instruction manual included on the install CD to see what I needed to do next.

Of course, I should probably have done that *before* I disconnected my existing monitor and replaced it with the TH2G and three nineteen inch LCDs! The three

monitors I used for this review were identical nineteen-inch Samsung SyncMaster 940B TFT-LCD Digital displays, with a resolution of 1280x1024. The TH2G triples the desktop width to 3840x1024, which is, conveniently, the maximum resolution capability of the TH2G ... nothing like a super-wide desktop!

The obvious choice for procedural nay-sayers would be to explore the driver CD. In addition to the .PDF manual, I found a couple of software applications that make the TH2G do what it does so well. Insert the CD, and the autorun feature brings up an install control panel, from which you can get up and running.

The first on the list to be installed is the PowerDesk SE application. This software is the 'driver' file, and includes tools to help with image quality adjustment, center pop-up control, window management, and the Matrox Bezel Management tool—among others. The PowerDesk SE detects all your connected monitors, along with their available resolutions, and allows you to configure the resolution of your entire desktop, thereby allowing you to make configuration changes to your display mode. It's all quite easy to follow and very intuitive once you get things going.

I jumped into the PowerDesk SE application and set about configuring my new über-wide desktop. The Bezel Management tool is a great little application: Simple in its effectiveness, this tool allows you to virtually remove the gap created by the bezels on your monitors for a seamlessly smooth look to your gaming desktop. The tool lets you shift the left and right monitor displays either left/right or up/down so that the gap created by the display bezels disappears. I put the left and right monitor bezels just behind the middle monitor bezels, effectively creating a single (rather than double) bezel between them. This made for less 'dead space' between the monitors since 'dead space' has the potential to make icons on your desktop disappear.

The other application on the install CD is the Matrox TripleHead2Go Surround Gaming Utility (SGU). The SGU is a tool to tweak your game desktops to match the resolution capabilities of the TH2G, and automatically detects the resolution capability of your video card. I started out with an ATI Radeon 9800 Pro that I *thought* was a pretty decent card ... unfortunately, it's only capable of a 1920x480 resolution with the TH2G. As it turns out, the X800 I purchase has the same limiting capability. Apparently older ATI cards suffer from dysfunctional attitudes—they neither work nor play well with others!

Despite the apparently low-res capabilities of both these cards, however, I can say with confidence that the triple monitor setup is a thing to behold. After a chat with Matrox, I found out that I would need something better than an X1000 to get higher resolution from my ATI cards.

My PC at work has a dual-head GeForce 6600GT. The TH2G says it can run at the full 3840x1024 with this card. Having something similar to the dual-head 6600GT intrigues me ... you can have your triple-headed beast on one port, and a regular desktop on the other, allowing you to monitor things like TeamSpeak while still having a full-screen gaming monitor! *Cool!*

I set about exploring the capabilities of the SGU. It will search for, and identify, all the games installed on your computer, but it didn't find a couple that I had ... one—*GPL*—was too old, and the other—*Medal of Honor, Pacific Assault*—was too new! Matrox says that they update the information for different games as they become available, and will perhaps release a version of the SGU that not only checks for games, but also auto-updates as well so you never need to go hunting for config. files. The reason why it searches for your games is because the SGU will, at your command, optimize each game it *does* find. What this does is create a unique .EXE, customized for the wide desktop, after which you use *that* icon to start your game or simulator.

Since *GPL* remains one of my favorites, I decided to spend some time into sorting out the problem. I had read that there were some .DLL edits to allow widescreen resolutions for *GPL*, and did what any red-blooded *GPL*er does—I started scouring the net to find some info'. I came across the [Today's Legends](#) site, which is chock-full of useful how-to things *GPL*-related. Today's Legends then pointed me to the definitive [SimHQ](#), which had a very detailed and simple to follow guide on getting *GPL* set up for widescreen. After a couple of minutes (most of which was downloading), I was off and racing *GPL* on a 1920x480 (limited by my video card and *GPL*'s DX7 architecture) monitor.

Bliss!

Getting *rFactor* up and running, on the other hand, couldn't have been easier. In fact, it was just a single click of the 'Optimize' button, then a click of the new desktop icon, and I was experiencing widescreen nirvana, *rFactor*-style. All the big simulators are there ... *Dirt Track Racing 2*, *F1 2002*, *GP4*, *GTL*, *GTR*, *GTR2*, *LFS2*, *MotoGP*, *Nascar Racing 2002*, and *2003 Season*, *Racer*, *rFactor* ... you name it, it's probably there, along with dozens of other FPS and RPG games too.

If you are looking for greater immersion along with a more realistic peripheral view, then I strongly recommend the Matrox TripleHead2Go. I saw absolutely no impact on frame rates—I thought that the expanded desktop might cause some FPS hits: The TH2G quite simply triples your video card's output to create a very widescreen desktop, without any performance loss. Matrox has done their homework with their GXM devices.

Gamers and people that actually work for a living alike can benefit from the extra-wide desktop created by the TripleHead2Go; highly recommended!

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