

NETWORKING

Netgear Nighthawk

The future of Wi-Fi has arrived

PRICE \$259
www.netgear.com.au



If nothing else, this next-gen router wins the award for coolest networking product name. It's obviously targeted at gamers, but anybody who needs extremely fast Wi-Fi connectivity will find the performance on offer here highly desirable.

As far as routers go, this is one slab of a product. It's easily the biggest router we've seen, and that doesn't include the bulky power pack which will struggle to plug into most powerboards.

There's good reason for the extra-large dimensions though, as the Nighthawk packs some seriously fast hardware inside. A dual core 1GHz processor does all of the thinking, and is paired with 256MB of DDR memory. Another 128GB of flash memory is included for storage.

Three chunky antennas extend from the rear, while a dozen LEDs on the front light up like a Christmas tree to indicate activity and diagnostics.

A single front-facing USB 3.0 port facilitates the connection of an external drive, which can then be configured as a Network Attached Storage (NAS) device, offering shared folders to your entire network.

Another USB 2.0 port on the rear is perfect for installing a centralised printer. Five Gigabit Ethernet ports also adorn the rear, but one is set aside for WAN. As usual, there's no integrated ADSL2+ modem inside, which is a real shame considering the domination of

ADSL down under.

Setting up the Nighthawk couldn't be simpler, with the router preconfigured with the username and password printed on a label on the bottom of the device.

Logging into it for the first time reveals a relatively intuitive interface, with a wealth of advanced options tucked away from beginners. Gamers will be very interested in the Quality of Service feature, which allows the allocation of bandwidth to each device on the network.

This is quite a common feature, but the Nighthawk allows the distribution of both upstream and downstream bandwidth, which is the first time we've seen this.

Free software is included to set up an FTP server, as well as the ReadyShare Vault software suite for backing up Windows PCs across the network. Both are easy enough for intermediate users.

Being a dual band router, it pumps out 1.3Gbps on the 5GHz band for 802.11ac devices. At the same time it provides a slower 600Mbps network on the 2.4GHz band, compatible with older 802.11n devices, so can't provide the quoted 1900Mbps to a single device.

This is true of all dual band routers, but is something to be aware of. We tested both networks, and found this to be one of the fastest Wi-Fi routers to ever hit our lab.

In the same room, it managed to hit 410Mbps to an 802.11ac device, which dropped down to 275Mbps two rooms away.

It's a long way off the advertised speed, but that's true of all Wi-Fi, and is easily fast enough to stream HD video to multiple devices without any performance concerns.

Its 802.11n performance was also admirable, maxing out at 174Mbps at close range, only dropping slightly to 169Mbps at longer range, likely due to the beamforming technology employed within.

Now that 802.11ac is here to stay, we're slowly starting to see more devices make use of it. If you've got a few of these knocking about and are tired of the sluggish performance of your 802.11n Wi-Fi router, the Nighthawk will deliver one of the fastest home wireless networks around. **BENNETT RING**

- Seriously fast
- Packed with features
- Easy to setup

- Huge
- Expensive

VERDICT Blazing WiFi, if you've got the devices to make the most of it

