Send in the clones

Believe it or not, Intel isn't the only maker of PC processors. It has rivals which produce cheaper, and sometimes faster, chips. We take a look at eight machines which don't have 'Intel Inside'

If you want to buy a new PC, you probably think you have to have 'Intel Inside'. Intel's marketing campaign has been an enormous success and the company has a massive share of the PC processor market. However, Intel isn't the only manufacturer of PC processors.

Look carefully at the adverts in a magazine like *What PC?* and you'll see a couple of other names mentioned. AMD and Cyrix also make PC processors but their names seldom feature as heavily as Intel's in magazine advertisements. Is that because they're not as good? Far from it.

If a manufacturer meets certain conditions, Intel will pay a large portion of its advertising costs – hence the abundant use of 'Intel Inside' logos in advertisements. But many manufacturers also offer AMD and Cyrix processors as an alternative, and these chips have some important advantages.

The first advantage of going the non-Intel route is price. AMD and Cyrix processors are cheaper than the equivalent Intel model. AMD's K6 233, for example, retails for £175, whereas the equivalent Intel PII 233 costs £240. AMD also recently pledged to undercut Intel's prices by at least 25 percent. The other advantage is often performance – AMD and Cyrix processors can be as fast, if not faster, than the equivalent Intel chips.

This month, we put some non-Intel PCs to the test. We've scrutinised eight PCs, some of which have AMD processors and some which run on Cyrix processors, with a price limit of £1,100. As you will see, you don't always need Intel Inside.

Dan Dantum 233K6/15S

We review Dan Technology's machines regularly and are usually very happy with them. However, the last time we looked at a Dan Dantum, we commented that it wasn't up to the company's usual high standards and hoped that we wouldn't be disappointed again.

Unfortunately, the Dan Dantum 233K6/15S bears all the tell-tale signs of having been put together in a hurry. The plastic cage inside the case that houses a cooling fan was loose and the fan itself held in place by its power cable alone. The power cable to the CD-ROM drive was also poorly connected. The drive was working on delivery but a knock to the PC's case could easily have dislodged it and left a drive that, from the outside, would have stopped working for no reason. Finally, the poor positioning of the sound card meant that the audio cable from the CD-ROM drive blocked the lowest ISA expansion slot. None of these problems are particularly serious but neither are they unavoidable. They are a shame because Dan has chosen a high-quality set of components and, despite the fact that build quality is lacking, the Dantum 233K6 is a reasonably fast PC. It scored well in our tests and the ATI XPERT@Work graphics card is a good 3D model that's ideal for games and multimedia software.

Games will sound good too – the Dantum has an AWE64 sound card and a pair of fair, though ugly, speakers. The monitor won't show them off to best advantage though. It's a 15in screen from CTX that has been re-badged with the Dan logo. To be fair, the monitor is a solid workhorse but image quality is little better than average.

Realistically, the Dantum K6 is never going to be stretched, at least not if you restrict yourself to the software bundled by Dan. You'll be fine if you want to do your home accounts or type a couple of letters (Quicken and Works are supplied) but we were disappointed not to see at least one title that would show off the speed of the PC. A game or multimedia disc with decent graphics would have been good and there's little excuse for Works being supplied without its original CD-ROM.

As long as your Dantum 233K6/15S has been rather better put together than the one we saw, it would make a good, solid, basic PC. But if you want software, you'll be disappointed by the bundle supplied.
- £1,099 (inc VAT)
- Dan Technology: 0181 830 1100

Dan Dantum 233K6/15S					
Build quality	★	★	☆	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	☆	☆
Performance	★	★	★	★	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	☆	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

EveshamVale Prestige K6 233 Media 98

As well as building PCs, Evesham Micros also supports a thriving mail-order business supplying peripherals and software. Recently, the company has started advertising Pentium II systems for less than £1,000 which, on closer inspection, turn out to lack home-use essentials such as a CD-ROM drive. The opposite is true of the Vale Prestige.

Think of a component you'd want for home use and the chances are it has been shoe-horned into this PC. Not only does it have a TV tuner card, a modem and a sound card, the Prestige K6 also has a joystick and 64Mb of RAM, which should make it suitable for even the most memory-hungry applications.

What's more, there's a software bundle that will let you take advantage of some of the machine's capabilities. It consists of 10 Microsoft titles including Works and is similar to that supplied by Mertec (see page 90). So you can be productive as soon as you get your machine running, or simply have a game of Golf to relax after the stress of buying a PC.

Unfortunately, once you've set up the Vale, you're likely to need to relax, especially if you've never set up a PC before. The supplied keyboard won't fit in the socket and Evesham has supplied a Mitsumi serial mouse. This is fine, but the socket labelled 'mouse' will accept only a round PS/2 connector. It was reminiscent of setting up a PC five years ago, before companies realised that ease of use was at least as important as performance.

Inside the Prestige K6, things will be fine until you want to upgrade it. All the power cables are tightly squeezed into plastic conduits and the free memory slots (only for SIMMs, so if you want to add more of the faster SDRAM, you'll have to junk one or both of the DIMMs already fitted) are hidden behind the drive cage. The processor is in the way as well. Its oversize heatsink and fan prevent you from adding full-length expansion cards, so it's as well that these are rarely seen nowadays.

The case is square and ugly, with a big grey power button that will help confirm your worst fears about the aesthetics of having a PC in your living room. Admittedly, this is offset slightly by the Shinho monitor whose curves are reasonably attractive; fortunately, it also produces a decent picture to match its looks.
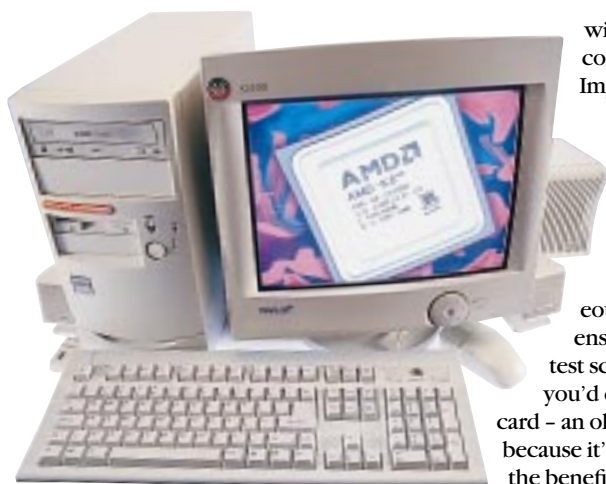
The Prestige K6 233 isn't quite a Vale of tears but you'd be forgiven for thinking so on first opening the box. It's well featured but our preferences would lie elsewhere.
- £1,099 (inc VAT)
- Evesham Micros: 01386 765500

EveshamVale Prestige K6 233 Media 98					
Build quality	★	★	☆	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

Impact Multimedia Home

W e first reviewed a PC from Midland Equipment Brokers, the builder and seller of Impact Systems PCs, last month.

The overwhelming impression we get of Impact PCs is that they are average. They have decent enough components and are built with a fair degree of care but the machines lack anything special to lift them above the others in this test. This doesn't necessarily mean there's anything wrong with them, just that there's no compelling reason to buy an Impact rather than anything else.

The Multimedia Home's specifications could have come from almost any PC here: AMD K6 CPU, 32Mb of RAM and a 3.2Gb hard disk. If you're interested in games, it has an Orchid Righteous 3D accelerator which ensures that this PC's graphics test score is much higher than you'd expect from its main graphics card – an older ATI Rage II. However, because it's a supplementary card, to get the benefits of the Righteous, you have to connect it to the ATI card with a VGA pass-through cable. This is supplied but there's no Impact documentation to tell you what you have to do with it; the only information is buried in the manual for the Righteous card itself.

No games were supplied to show off the Righteous 3D card, only a copy of Microsoft Office Professional. While this is of great value, we think the Small Business Edition, which includes Publisher and AutoRoute Express, offers more to home users.

The Creative Labs speakers feature a powerful subwoofer and two tiny speakers. Unfortunately, they sounded appalling at anything like the output volumes of which they're capable.

We were also disappointed with the MAG Innovision monitor. It was poorly set up when it arrived, but a tweak of the easy-to-use rotary control soon sorted that out. However, we couldn't do anything about the awful picture quality. We'll put this down to getting a poor model, since we were quite happy with the MAG monitor we looked at last month.

The best thing about this PC is the copy of MS Office that comes with it – and that's not the best choice for home users. Overall, it's a fairly average machine.

● £1,056.33 (inc VAT)
● Midland Equipment Brokers:
   0800 833157

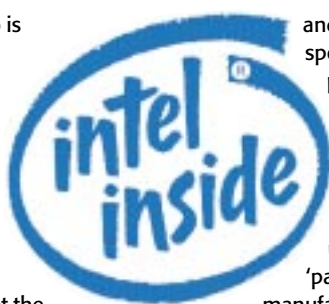| Impact Multimedia Home				
Build quality	★	★	★	☆ ☆
Features	★	★	★	★ ☆
Performance	★	★	★	☆ ☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★ ☆
Overall	★	★	★	★ ★

Does non-Intel mean non-Intel compatible?

T he 'Intel Inside' logo is everywhere – in magazines, on television and on the front of four out of every five PCs sold. With this amount of market presence, you'd be forgiven for thinking that an Intel processor is essential if you want to get the most out of your PC.

Intel has a vast share of the PC market and this means that most software is developed on computers that have an Intel processor. So if you buy a PC that doesn't have an Intel processor, does it mean you won't be able to run certain programs?

Unfortunately, yes. While it is in the best interests of AMD and Cyrix to make their processors as compatible as possible (otherwise they aren't going to sell many of them), there are subtle differences in their processors that can lead to compatibility problems.

The main problem area is games. Programmers use every trick in the book to get the best performance from a PC and their games often rely on specific features of a processor. If a game looks for something specific to an Intel processor and doesn't find it, it won't work. Fortunately, such problems are rare and can usually be fixed with a 'patch' from the software manufacturer. Cyrix, for example, has a list of software patches available online at www.cyrix.com.
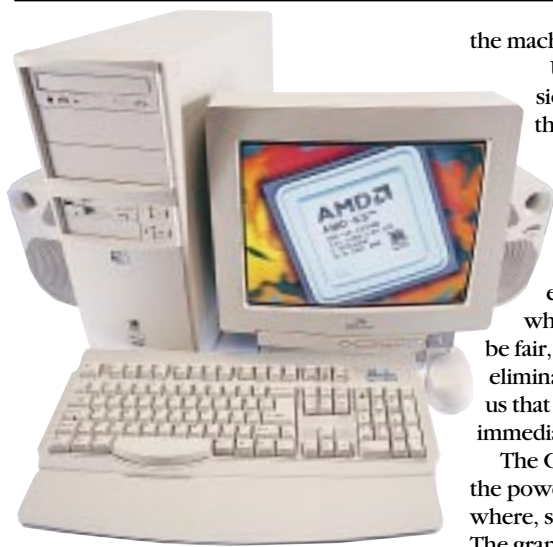
Compatibility aside, non-Intel processors can also have other problems. Cyrix processors, for example, are particularly slow at mathematical operations with floating point numbers. Apart from making lengthy financial calculations slower, this lack of speed can have an impact on programs that use 3D graphics. In other words, if you're a Quake II fan, an AMD processor will give you better performance.

Even some recent games releases, such as G-Police, require a patch to work properly with Cyrix chips.

Mertec Cresta AGP

Swansea-based Mertec Computers has been around since 1980 and has a good reputation.

Looking at its Cresta on paper, our hopes began to rise. The PC has a good, although not outstanding, specification – a 233MHz K6 processor, 32Mb of RAM and a 3Gb hard disk. Even better, it was fitted with an AGP graphics card – a version of the same ATI XPERT card used by most of the machines in this group test.

Unfortunately, this good impression was spoiled as we unpacked the system. The keyboard had the wrong type of plug for the socket and Mertec hadn't supplied an adaptor. Things got worse when we switched on the PC. A machine that is dead on arrival is every buyer's nightmare and this is what happened with the Cresta. To be fair, DOA machines are impossible to eliminate completely and Mertec assured us that such a PC would be replaced immediately, without quibble.

The Cresta beeped when we turned on the power, indicating a spark of life somewhere, so we investigated inside the case. The graphics card had popped out of its slot slightly and this faulty connection was preventing the PC from booting up. Such connection problems are partly due to the design of AGP cards. The connector is a long way down the motherboard, so when the card is screwed down tightly, even a tiny amount of flex in the motherboard can break the connection.

Once the card was unscrewed and refitted, the Cresta worked without much trouble – but Mertec needs to look at how its PCs are put together.

Overall performance is adequate for normal use but it shows how quickly PCs are changing that the Cresta was almost the slowest PC of the group test. Many PCs now come with 64Mb of RAM with 32Mb fast becoming the minimum.

Graphics performance was also below par. This is unfortunate, because the software bundle – 10 Microsoft titles, including Works and Encarta 98, plus Corel Draw 4 – is clearly aimed at families.

The Cresta AGP is a reasonable PC, even though the poorly fitted graphics card gave it an inauspicious start. Graphics performance is a little lacking but the software bundle is good.

- £1,099 (inc VAT)
- Mertec (London sales office): 0181 667 0990

Mertec Cresta AGP					
Build quality	★	★	☆	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	☆
Performance	★	★	☆	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	☆	☆
Overall	★	★	★	☆	☆

Mesh Elite Connect 266XM

Mesh Computers, like Dan, is a regular provider of review machines to *What PC?*. It has set a hard act to follow recently, with two Best Buy awards in the past four months for its Pegasus PII machine. Could the Elite live up to our expectations?

First impressions were good. Mesh has fitted the Elite with the 266MHz version of Cyrix's 6x86MX processor, the fastest non-Intel mainstream PC chip. This is the first PC we've seen that uses this chip, and it's also one of the first to go on sale in the UK.

The Elite uses Mesh's mini-tower case, which benefits from a plain but reasonably stylish front, and it is extremely solid. Inside, the layout is exceptionally clean – in fact the Connect 266XM is one of the neatest PCs we've seen and it has plenty of room inside.

Although expansion would be simple with the Elite, it's unlikely that you'll want to expand too quickly. Even at this price, it comes with a 4.3Gb hard disk – plenty of space for more software – and 64Mb of RAM. It's not so long since this amount of RAM was rare even in servers, so it should keep even the most demanding home or small business user satisfied well into the future.

There's plenty of power here, too. AMD and Cyrix are marketing their latest processors as rivals to the Pentium II and this machine's BAPCo score of 283 (see page 101) wouldn't disgrace a PII-266 system – if you could find one for this price.

Where the Cyrix chip falls down is in floating point maths and it simply isn't as quick as Intel processors. While you might not be worried by this, floating point calculations are vital to many programs, particularly games and anything else that uses 3D graphics.

Accordingly, the Elite's Final Reality score (our graphics test) isn't as high as you'd perhaps expect – about 80 percent of that achieved by Mesh's similarly specified Pegasus last month.

This PC will run games satisfactorily, but if you're serious about either games or multimedia titles, you'll want a new set of speakers. Those supplied are adequate but limit rather than complement the AWE64 sound card.

The Elite is fast and extremely solidly built. We'd be wary of buying it specifically for games but as an all-round machine, you won't be disappointed.

- £1,099.98 (inc VAT)
- Mesh: 0181 452 1111

Mesh Elite Connect 266XM					
Build quality	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	☆
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

MJN 200M-2 Special

MJN is part of the Granville Technology group of companies, which also includes Time and Colossus, so you'd expect it to be able to use its bulk-buying power to make sure you get top value for money from its systems.

Spec-wise, the 200M-2 has 64Mb of RAM and while this doesn't make it stand out in present company, it does go a long way to making up for the fact that it's fitted with the slowest processor in this group test. The machine also comes with a video-conferencing camera, which it's certainly powerful enough to make use of. As you'd expect, the 200M-2 has a modem and there's also a TV tuner which enables you to capture video to the roomy 4.3Gb hard disk.

With all those features and a sound card inside the squat case, the 200M-2 is rather crowded, particularly given its untidy cabling. In fact, it's so crowded that the memory slots disappear behind the power supply. So if you want to upgrade, you'll need to perform some complicated surgery.

In terms of space it's probably a good thing that the 200M-2's graphics are integrated into the motherboard. However, the downside of this is that the machine uses the older ATI Rage II+ graphics chipset. And our figures show the MJN PC to be graphically the slowest machine of the bunch.

When you take a closer look at this PC it becomes obvious where corners have been cut. EDO RAM has been fitted, because SIMMs are still significantly cheaper than the better-performing SDRAM DIMMs. The mouse is a Logitech model, which is good enough but not as comfortable as the Microsoft Mouse supplied with most of the machines in this group test.

In addition, MJN has not included a backup CD-ROM of SmartSuite 97. There's a utility to enable you to back up the software onto lots of floppy disks, but in a group test where one of the machines has been supplied with the much more expensive MS Office Professional and the original CD, we don't think such penny-pinching is acceptable.

The 200M-2 is fine for most purposes but it is the slowest PC tested here by a significant margin. Better specified systems are available elsewhere for the same price.

- £1,098.63 (inc VAT)
- MJN Technology: 01282 777555

MJN 200M-2 Special					
Build quality	★	★	★	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	☆	☆	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

So what's so good about Intel anyway?

With a staggering 80 percent of the market for PC processors, Intel must be doing something right. Quite simply, it got there first, with processors that were reliable and available in volume. Add to this the fact that IBM chose an Intel processor to power the first PC and you have a formula for success.

Since then, the company has been the biggest player in the market and stays on top by being the biggest. It was Intel which introduced first the 486 and then the Pentium processor. More recently, the development of MMX technology has pushed AMD to produce the K6 and Cyrix the 6x86MX; now Intel is trying to drive all new computer systems towards using the Pentium II.

Nonetheless, processor developments by Intel's rivals have leapfrogged the chip giant at several key stages. Intel was first to market with the Pentium MMX but this was soon followed by the AMD K6 and the Cyrix 6x86MX — both of which offer better performance and lower prices.

Intel pulled ahead again with the Pentium II, but although this is more powerful than the Pentium MMX, its performance advantage over other manufacturers appears to rest on the fact that it runs at faster clock speeds. You can buy a 333MHz Pentium II, while the fastest Cyrix chip (seen here in the Mesh Elite Connect 266XM) runs at 266MHz and AMD has postponed the release of its 300MHz K6.

The only other main difference is that the Pentium II uses motherboards with a proprietary Slot One system, which Intel claims is faster than the Socket 7 design used by other processors. However, the company has yet to give us a clear explanation as to exactly how and why this is the case, and our tests don't show any great advantage.

Admittedly, Slot One will soon use a bus (interface) speed of 100MHz rather than the current 66MHz, but Cyrix and AMD are working on taking Socket 7 to 100MHz, too.

Intel's promotion of the Pentium II is set to get even more aggressive this year with the release of a cheaper version of the chip, codenamed Covington (see News for more details).

If this is quickly adopted as the new entry-level standard, Cyrix and AMD may well find it difficult to compete.

Paragon Home Office 233

Paragon Computers is yet another small company based in north London's Silicon Alley and its PCs make regular trips down to *What PC?*'s Soho labs. Last month, it made a determined effort to win us over with a machine that was the fastest we've ever tested, while this month it seemed to be tempt-

ing us into giving a sixth star for value.

The Home Office 233 is £100 more than our price limit. This would usually mean instant exclusion from the test, but we made an exception for this system because it comes with a Canon BJC-250 printer. The printer isn't great but it's sufficient for home use.

Paragon has also installed the driver and supplied a printer cable, so you'll be ready to go as soon as it's out of its box.

The Home Office 233 has a massive 6.4Gb hard disk, 64Mb of RAM and a 17in monitor, as well as an AMD K6 processor. The software bundle is sparse but you do get a copy of SmartSuite 97 with its original CD-ROM – MJN take note!

In terms of performance, the Home Office 233 lives up to its paper specification, with a BAPCo result that fails to gain second place by the smallest of margins. Graphics performance is adequate but not stunning, thanks to the ATI 3D Charger graphics card. Nonetheless, you won't be disappointed by the display it puts on in conjunction with its big monitor.

Unfortunately, we got a surprise when it came to opening up the Home Office 233. The case is stylish, with a curved front and a groove that conceals the power and hard disk LEDs. Sadly, the case was also badly distorted and it was held in place by only two screws – hardly something that conveys professional service.

Inside the machine, things are cramped but reasonably tidy. Poor design strikes again though – the memory is hard to get at and the processor blocks the fitting of full-length expansion cards. *The Paragon Home Office 233's only fault is its build quality. But assuming that the damaged case was a one-off, this machine offers good performance and some of the best value for money we have ever seen.*
- £1,199 (inc VAT)
- Paragon Computers: 0181 478 8700

Paragon Home Office 233					
Build quality	★	★	☆	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

Synteq PS-233M

Synteq has been around for about 18 months but it was only recently that we first saw one of its PCs. The company made an impressive debut, winning our Best Buy award with its first entrant and falling just short of a Recommended with its second.

Looking at the specifications of the PS-233M, it seemed as though this impressive record was set to continue. It's one of three machines in this test to be fitted with the

Cyrix 6x86MX processor and as you'd guess from its name, Synteq has chosen the 233MHz variant. This is combined with 64Mb of RAM, plus a 3.2Gb hard disk.

Even better is the 17in ADi Microscan 5P monitor included in the price. It produces a very acceptable picture and it's also quite stylish, matching well with the PS-233M's gently curved case front. Computers may not be intended as ornaments but there's no reason for them to be ugly.

The rest of the components are well chosen. The graphics card is an ATI XPERT@Work and there's a modem to get you onto the Internet. The sound setup is exclusively Yamaha, with a pair of good-looking speakers connected to a card that stands out from the run of AWE64s.

It's obvious that this PC is well put together. When you open the case you find a neat interior, although this effect is achieved partly by the fact that the cables are bundled tightly together with zip ties, so you'll need to separate them if you want to add more devices internally.

Build quality is further reflected in the

PS-233M's performance. This is the second fastest machine tested, beaten only by the faster-engined Mesh. Graphics performance isn't the best, but this reflects the Cyrix processor's relative weakness at the type of maths used by 3D graphics.

Overall, we were happy that the PS-233M lived up to the same standards as the other Synteq PCs we've reviewed. If we have to moan about anything, it's the Keytronics keyboard. Even though keyboards are a highly personal choice, we don't think its squashy action and poor feel will be appreciated by anyone. *Any PC that includes a 17in monitor for this price will find favour with us. You pay for this with a meagre software bundle – only SmartSuite 97 is supplied – but the PS-233M is still a fine machine.*
- £1,098.63 (inc VAT)
- Synteq: 0181 537 0037

Synteq PS-233M					
Build quality	★	★	★	★	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Alternatives

There's no shortage of manufacturers prepared to put systems together to meet our price limit here should none of the PCs in this roundup take your fancy. Among them, Carrera and Dotlink caught our eye. They both run mail-order businesses from London, with Carrera also having a shop on Tottenham Court Road, where you can go to try out its systems.

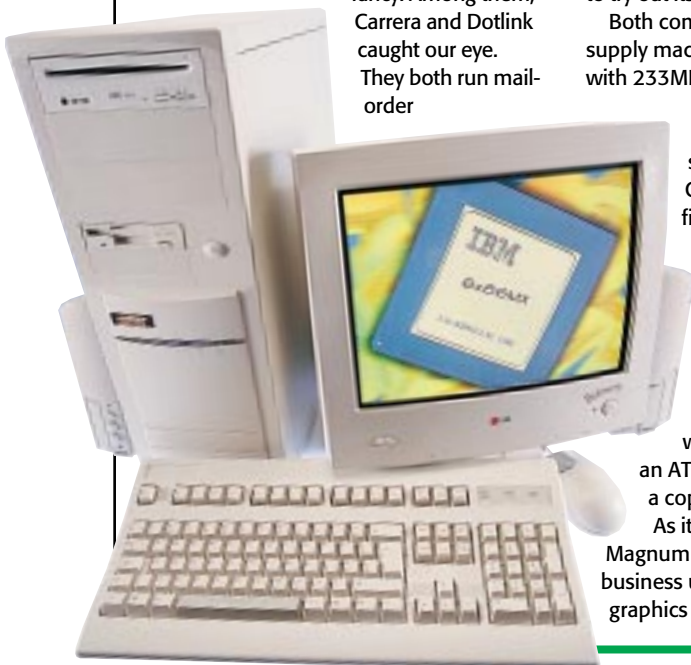Both companies supply machines fitted with 233MHz IBM 6x86MX processors – the same chip as the Cyrix processor fitted to other units in this group test. Both PCs have 64Mb of RAM but the Carrera has a slightly bigger 4.3Gb hard disk and it is aimed more at home users. The Carrera also comes with a wavetable sound card, an ATI XPERT@Work AGP board and a copy of Lotus SmartSuite.

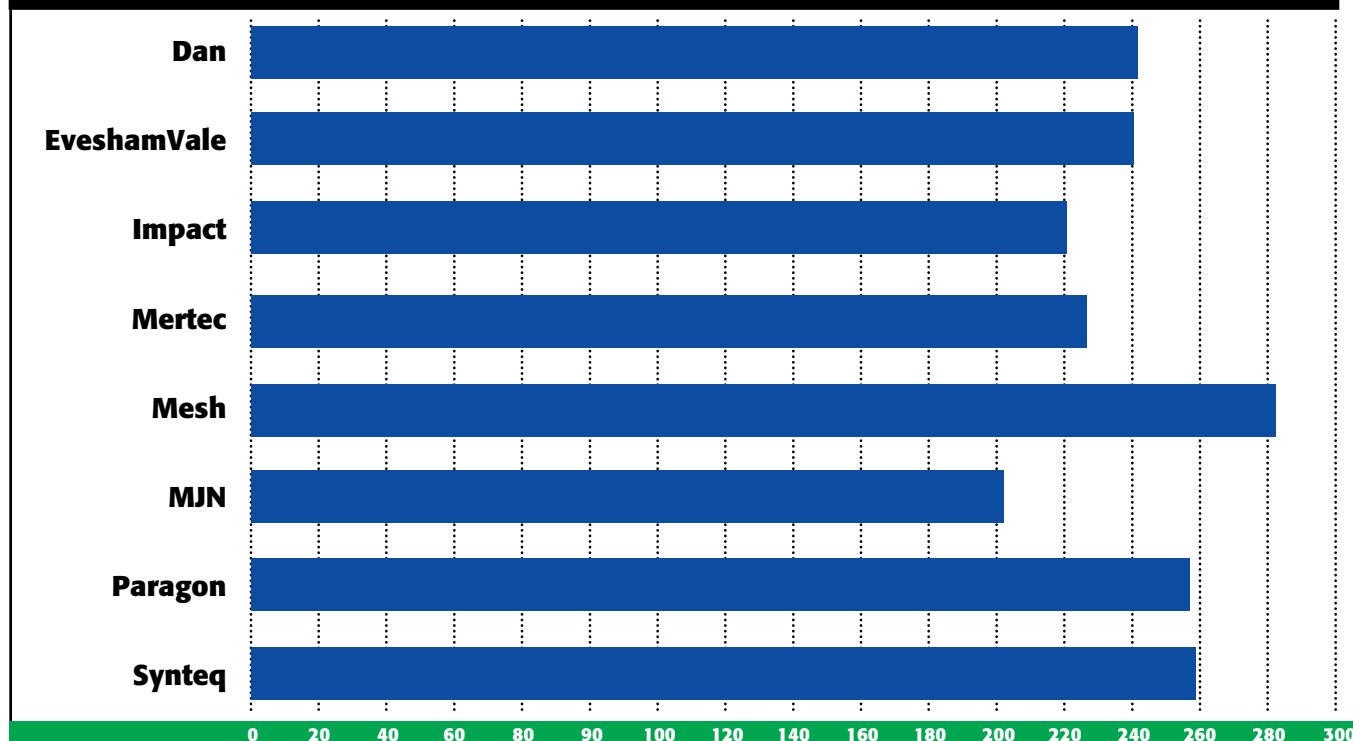As its name suggests, the Dotlink Magnum Office 233 is aimed more at business users. It supplies sound and graphics through lower-specification – although still respectable – cards, but the trade-off is that it includes both a modem and a copy of Microsoft Office Professional 97. Both systems at – £1098.63 each – cost a fraction under the limit we set for the main group test

● Carrera: 0171 830 0486
● Dotlink: 0181 902 5802

Non-Intel PCs BAPCo test

System	Score
Dan	240
EveshamVale	238
Impact	220
Mertec	226
Mesh	280
MJN	202
Paragon	256
Synteq	258

Scale: 0 20 40 60 80 90 100 120 140 160 180 200 220 240 260 280 300

NOTES: BAPCo benchmarks from which this chart was generated were performed in the *What PC?* VNU Labs. In all tests, a longer bar indicates a better system performance.

Performance is affected by a number of factors, including processor, memory, graphics hardware and hard disk, but, as a yardstick, a PC fitted with a Pentium 166MHz MMX and 32Mb of memory comes in at around 165, while a top-of-the-range 266MHz Pentium II machine with 64Mb of memory might score up to 300.

Non-Intel PCs compared

Manufacturer	Dan	Evesham Micros	Impact	Mertec	Mesh	MJN	Paragon	Synteq
Product								
Model name	Dantum 233 K6/15S	EveshamVale Prestige K6 233 Media 98	Multimedia Home	Cresta AGP	Elite Connect 266XM	200M-2 Special	Home Office 233	PS-233M
Price (inc VAT)	£1,099	£1,099	£1,056.33	£1,099	£1,099.98	£1,098.63	£1,199	£1,098.63
Contact	0181 830 1100	01386 765500	0800 833157	0181 667 0990	0181 452 1111	01282 777555	0181 478 8700	0181 537 0037
Features								
Processor type	AMD K6	AMD K6	AMD K6	AMD K6	Cyrix 6x86MX	Cyrix 6x86MX	AMD K6	Cyrix 6x86MX
Processor speed	233	233	233	233	266	200	233	233
Memory	32Mb SDRAM	64Mb SDRAM	32Mb SDRAM	32Mb SDRAM	64Mb SDRAM	64Mb EDO RAM	64Mb SDRAM	64Mb SDRAM
Hard disk	2.5Gb	3.2Gb	3.2Gb	3.2Gb	4.3Gb	4.3Gb	6.4Gb	3.2Gb
CD-ROM	24x	24x	24x	24x	32x	24x	24x	24x
Sound card	AWE64	SB16	AWE64	AWE64	AWE64	Creative	onboard	Yamaha Y32
Speakers	Yamada	Zy-Fi	Creative	Enact	unbranded	unbranded	unbranded	Yamaha YST M7
Graphics card	ATI XPERT@Work	ATI All-in-Wonder	ATI Rage II+	ATI XPERT@Work	ATI XPERT@Play	ATI Rage II+	ATI 3D Charger	ATI XPERT@Work
Graphics type	PCI	PCI	PCI	AGP	PCI	onboard	PCI	PCI
VRAM	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb	4Mb
USB	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●
Monitor	CTX 15in	Shinho 15in	Mag 15in	ADi 15in	Taxan 15in	CTX 15in	17in	ADi 17in
Modem	56Kbits/s	56Kbits/s	33.6Kbits/s	56Kbits/s	56Kbits/s	56Kbits/s	56Kbits/s	33.6Kbits/s
Mouse	MS I/Mouse	Mitsumi	unbranded	MS Mouse	MS I/Mouse	Logitech	Mitsumi	MS I/Mouse
Software	MS Works Quicken	MS Works, Encarta 98, 8 other titles	MS Office Professional	Corel Draw, MS Works, Encarta 98, 8 other titles	Lotus SmartSuite 97	Lotus SmartSuite 97, 5 games	Lotus SmartSuite 97	Lotus Smartsuite 97
Other		Joystick	Orchid Righteous 3D accelerator			Video-conferencing camera, joystick	Canon BJC-250 printer	
Warranty	1yr-RTB	2yr-OS	1yr-OS	5yr-RTB	1yr-C&R	1yr-RTB	5yr-RTB	3yr- RTB
Ratings								
Star rating	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
FR Mark	2.42	2.26	2.30	2.08	2.40	1.55	2.26	2.12
BAPCo	242	240	220	225	283	202	257	258

Notes:
○ No ● Yes

MS Mouse = Microsoft Mouse
MS I/Mouse = Microsoft IntelliMouse
C&R = Collect and return
RTB = Return to Base
OS = Onsite

★ = Poor   ★★ = Below average
★★★ = Average   ★★★★ = Good   ★★★★★ = Excellent

Although ever so slightly behind the Mesh Elite in the performance stakes, the Synteq PS-233M more than makes up for this with its 17in monitor. It's well specified too, with a whopping 64Mb of RAM and spacious 3.2Gb hard drive. Add to this a modem and good sound with a decent pair of speakers and you end up with this month's *What PC?* Best Buy.

The Mesh Elite is just ahead of the Synteq PS-233M in terms of performance but the smaller 15in monitor puts it in second place. It's still a great machine though and offers blistering performance and great value

for money.
The Paragon Home Office 233 is also worthy of merit. It, too, comes with a 17in monitor and an impressively high specification. Sadly, build quality problems put it out of the running for the Best Buy, despite the fact that a printer is also thrown in.
John Sabine