

Budget buys



Today it is possible to buy a full multimedia computer with a powerful Pentium processor for under £1,200.

We put a group of these relatively low-cost high-performance PCs through their paces



With Christmas looming, the pages of computer magazines are bulging with advertisements promoting low-cost PCs, and shop shelves across the country are positively bending under the strain of the many demonstration models they support.

This is hardly surprising: PCs now have mass-market appeal; they are, very much, a 'consumer' product. Since their popularity exploded, entry-level specifications have risen dramatically, but throughout the past few years prices have remained fairly static.

A couple of years ago, handing

over a teetering pile of 1,200 pound coins might have furnished you with a machine based on a mid-range 486 processor, but today a full multimedia PC fitted with a powerful Pentium processor is about the least you can expect for the same amount of cash.

We asked a number of PC suppliers to submit the best system they could for under £1,200 – including VAT. The only other stipulation we made was that the machines must come with a basic software bundle, including Windows 95.

And for those of you on an even tighter budget, we take a brief look at a few machines that come in at under the £1,000 mark (incl VAT).

Atlantic Plus 2

Atlantic Systems has been manufacturing and selling PCs since 1989. The company is based in Swansea and supplies its ready-made systems both off the page and through the Makro network of retail stores.

The Atlantic PC is housed – surprisingly in a marketplace awash with cheap, off-the-shelf components – in a customised mini-tower case, and it looks pretty stylish. The company's name is emblazoned across the casing's front in raised, inch-high lettering, so there's no way you'd mistake this for another manufacturer's system. There are the usual power toggle and reset buttons, as well as indicator lights for both the hard disk and power. At the top sits an eight-speed CD-ROM drive and below this is a floppy drive; the other two drive bays – one 3.5in and one 5.25in – are empty. The CD-ROM drive's disk tray has clips to hold inserted CD-ROMs in place, which means the Atlantic could be turned on its side and used as a desktop machine.

Inside the machine things are quite tidy: all connecting and bus cables – and there are plenty of



them – are neatly folded and secured with cable ties. Four 72-pin SIMM (single in-line memory module) sockets are present, and two of these are occupied by 8Mb SIMMs, meaning the machine has a total of 16Mb of RAM.

There are four PCI expansion slots, and four full-length ISAs – an ATI Mach64 graphics card occupies one PCI slot and, because of an additional game (joystick) port that sits in place of a blanking plate, the fitted 16-bit sound card effectively takes up two of the ISA slots.

Described diplomatically, the supplied keyboard – made by Mitsumi – is not good. The layout is fine and it has the useful extra Windows 95 keys, but in use the keys are spongy and unresponsive. The mouse isn't much better; it's an uncomfortably small, nondescript three-button device that works – and that's about all that can be said.

The ADI MicroScan 4D monitor held a good picture at a resolution of 800x600 and even at 1,024x768 the display was reasonable, but obviously a 15in tube is too small to be used in the long term at such a high resolution.

When we first powered up the Atlantic it failed the memory test, and subsequently crashed when loading Windows 95. We soon isolated an ill-fitted SIMM as the cause of the problem, but we ended up having to reinstall Windows before we could continue with our tests.

The Plus 2's comparatively poor performance is somewhat compensated for by the excellent monitor, large hard disk drive and a good selection of software.

○ £1,184.40
○ Atlantic: 01792 700002

Atlantic Plus 2

Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Tiny P133TP

Tiny Computers has, up until recently, been content to supply its range of low-cost PCs directly to customers via mail order, advertising its wares through numerous computer magazines, including *What PC?* Now, though, this Surrey-based sister company of Opus Technology has opened a chain of 12 retail shops, and more are scheduled to open in the next few months.

We were in for a bit of a shock with Tiny's PC. No sooner had we lifted the machine from its box than we found the eight-speed CD-ROM drive to be somewhat quicker than expected: it promptly dropped out of the front of the machine set on an earth-bound course. Fortunately, the VNU Labs' carpeted floor was kind and didn't damage the device, but we think the fact that something as basic as the CD-ROM's missing holding screws can be overlooked reflects badly on Tiny's quality/testing procedures. Apart from that failing – which has

knocked a point from our build quality rating – little about the rest of the P133TP's build can be criticised. It is a very solid machine, inside and out.

Inside, the cables are fastened together well but unfortunately the massed bulk of them manages to completely block access to the SIMM sockets. There is a bank of four sockets and the first two are fitted with 8Mb SIMMs, so the P133TP has 16Mb of RAM in total. At the heart of the motherboard sits

the processor, a Pentium 133MHz, and on top of this sits a heatsink-cum-fan device of intriguing design. A Cirrus Logic 5446 graphics card rises from one of the four PCI slots, and a 16-bit Pro 16 PnP sound card (Sound Blaster compatible) nestles nearby in an ISA slot, leaving two free.

The keyboard is about average with an acceptable response from the keys but the connecting cable, even though part-coiled, is frustratingly short. The bundled mouse is much better and fits the hand perfectly; in our view this comes second in comfort only to the Microsoft Mouse.

Images displayed on the unbranded 15in monitor are okay, but nothing more than that. At 640x480 we had no complaints, ►



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but at the more useful 800x600 resolution text appeared blurred, particularly near the screen's edges.

While we have our doubts about Tiny's testing procedures, the P133TP is an above average machine both in performance and specifications.

○ £1,173

○ Tiny Computers:
01293 821333

Tiny P133TP

Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dan dantium 133

Dan started its mail-order computer business in 1988. Over the past eight years its reputation for supplying high-quality PCs has grown, and it is now among the most respected of PC suppliers. Like many other companies in this test, Dan sells its wares over the phone, but it has an open showroom at its North West London headquarters.

The dantium 133 oozes quality. It's big, it's heavy and, internally at least, the design is near-flawless. Lifting the lid bears witness to one of the most sensible component layouts we've seen in a PC. Naturally, all cables are bound, but in such a way as not to block access to anything you're likely to want to get to, such as the four PCI slots, the three ISAs or the SIMM sockets. These sockets, a bank of four, contain 16Mb of RAM as standard in the form of two 8Mb 72-pin SIMMs. An ATI Mach64 graphics card sits in one of the PCI slots, and a Sound Blaster 16 fills an ISA slot.

The front of the machine sports the ubiquitous power and reset buttons as well as a seemingly redundant 'Turbo' button. There are apparently three drive bays free – one 3.5in and two 5.25in – but further investigation reveals a 1.2Gb hard disk hiding behind the solitary smaller bay. In a third 5.25in bay is a CD-ROM drive, made by Teac. This is an eight-speed model with a disk tray that shoots out at a satisfying speed, and it has a pair of holding clips so you could use the Dantium 133 as a tower system, if you so wished.

Dan has included a dull-looking pair of speakers which, although lacking controls for either bass or treble, have an impressive reproduction range. In fact, they're one of the best pairs of speakers in this test – only the Yamaha set, supplied with the Viglen and Tag machines, are better.



The keyboard's keys have a smooth depress-and-return action and this makes it very easy to use. There's plenty of length to the connecting cable too, so in moments of relaxation you can easily type with the keyboard in your lap.

To spoil a machine of this quality with a poor mouse would verge on the criminal. Dan is unlikely to receive a visit from the boys in blue though: this machine ships with the Microsoft Mouse.

At this price level you are unlikely to find a better machine. The Dan dantium 133 combines a quality build with a good specification list – and the software collection isn't bad either.

○ £1,200

○ Dan: 0181 830 1100

Dan dantium 133

Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Mesh Elite 133 Professional

Mesh is a veteran of the computer manufacturing industry. Approaching its tenth birthday, the company sells PCs direct to the public both through magazine adverts and its retail showroom at Staples Corner, North West London. For users who need a little more than an off-the-

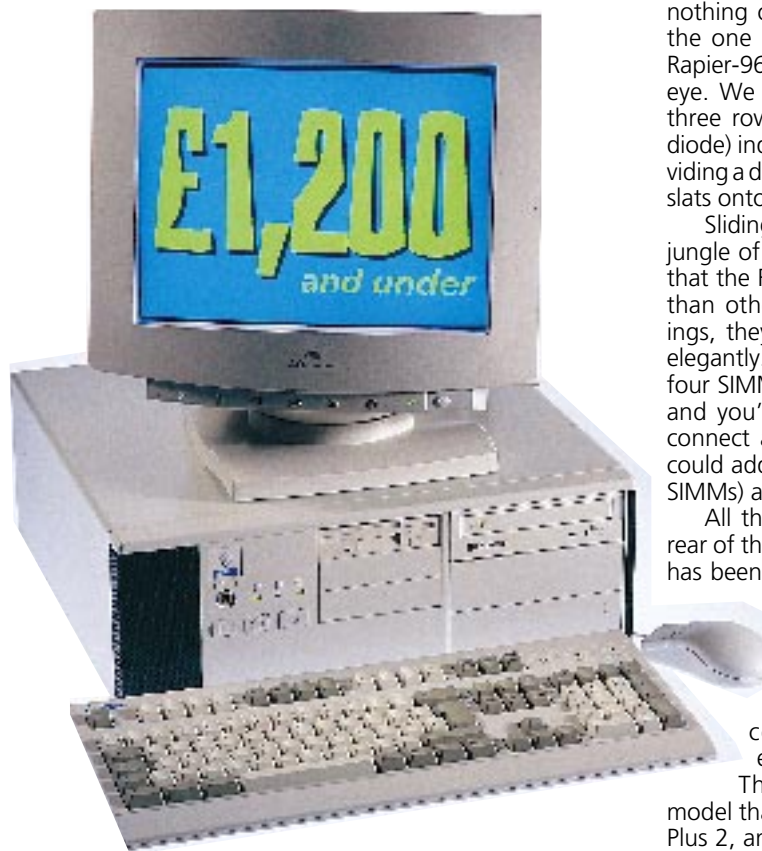
shelf system, Mesh can build a PC to any specification if given around five days' notice.

Viewed from the front, the Elite 133 looks a little unusual. To the left-hand side of the case is a black, wire mesh covering that looks a bit like a speaker, but it isn't. In fact, we're not quite sure exactly what purpose it serves, but it does make the Mesh look marginally more appealing than some of the other desktops we've seen. And with three drive bays free – one 3.5in and two 5.25in – there's plenty of room for expansion.

The motherboard in this machine is almost identical to that of Dan's offering. There are the same four PCI expansion slots accompanied by three full-length ISAs; and near the back right-hand side sit four SIMM sockets, two of which contain 8Mb SIMMs.

We were surprised to find that the company does not fit a sound card as standard in this system. This decision seems even stranger when considering some of the other hardware: the eight-speed CD-ROM drive and Mirage64 graphics card (which is, in fact, just a Mesh-badged ATI Mach64) lend themselves to multimedia applications – but without a sound card the usefulness of either is restricted.

With its dial controls and a comparatively curved screen, the ADI ProVista monitor has a quaintly old-fashioned look and feel about it. There wasn't anything old-fashioned about the quality of displayed images though – at 800x600, text was easy to read even at very low ►



nothing overtly remarkable about the one housing Express Micros' Rapier-96, but it is quite easy on the eye. We particularly like the way three rows of LED (light-emitting diode) indicators are shielded, providing a down-lit effect through the slats onto the casing.

Sliding off the cover presents a jungle of cables. That's not to say that the Rapier-96 has more wires than other manufacturers' offerings, they're just not routed very elegantly. This makes getting to the four SIMM sockets rather difficult, and you'd probably need to disconnect a few cables before you could add to the 16Mb (two 8Mb SIMMs) already fitted.

All the important ports at the rear of the PC are labelled, but this has been done quite sloppily. The labels for the parallel (printer) and 25-pin serial (COM) ports, for example, have been transposed – which could confuse inexperienced users.

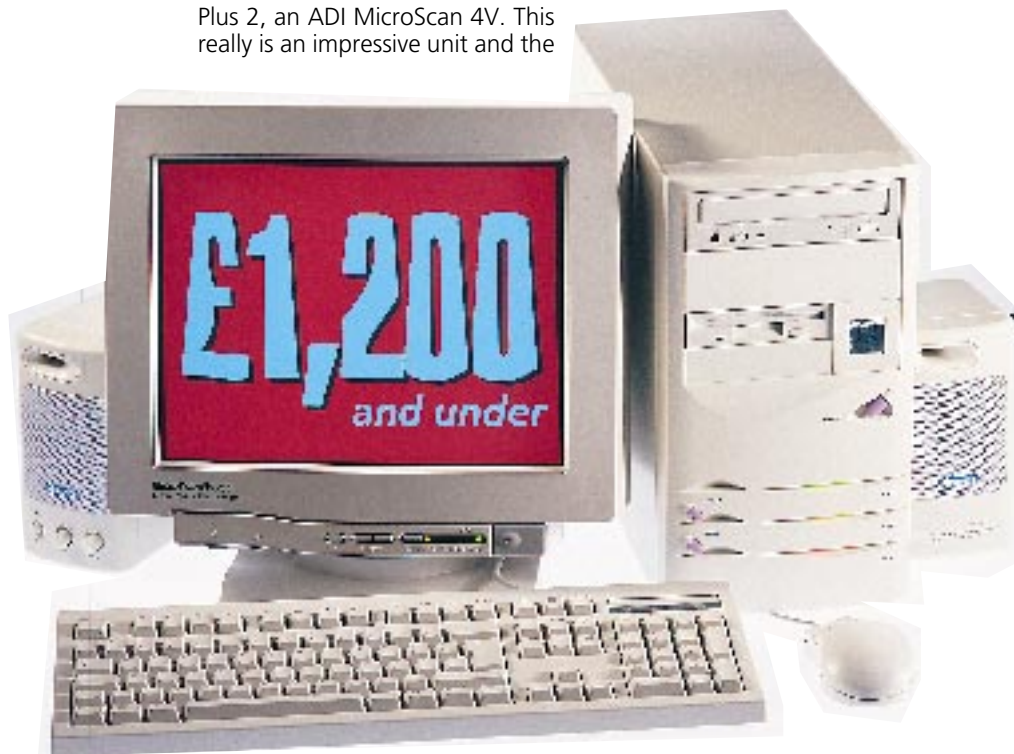
The monitor is the same model that came with the Atlantic Plus 2, an ADI MicroScan 4V. This really is an impressive unit and the

displayed images look very crisp indeed. All the screen attributes (horizontal and vertical positioning, trapezoidal and pincushion correction) can be altered by the use of three buttons and a set of strangely appealing amber-coloured LEDs. Supplying the images to this monitor is a Diamond Stealth 64 graphics card.

Express Micros was the only company to include a joystick as part of the package. In this case, it's the suitably menacing-looking 'Rocketfire'. It has numerous switches and slider controls, and more fire buttons than you could possibly manage – short of growing a few extra digits.

The Microsoft Mouse comes with this system, and the keyboard that Express Micros ships with it is very responsive.

With the exception of the monitor, the Rapier-96 133 is an unremarkable machine. Not bad at the price, but there are several better systems that represent better value for money.



Remember memory

The amount of memory (RAM) fitted as standard is an important issue when it comes buying a PC. Nowadays, 8Mb of RAM should be considered as the absolute minimum, although 16Mb is preferable, particularly if you intend to run more than one application at a time in Windows 95. With memory prices at an all-time low, opting for 8Mb over 16Mb in order to save a few pounds might prove to be a false economy.

The actual type of RAM you go for isn't quite so important, but EDO (Extended Data Out) RAM will offer around 10 percent performance increase over older types of RAM. All the machines in this group test come with EDO RAM as standard.

point sizes and colourful images were clear. Unfortunately, though, every time we flipped to and from a DOS window we had to twiddle the dials in order to get the displayed image back within the monitor's boundaries.

Supplying Microsoft's excellent ergonomic mouse is always a good way to curry favour; and the keyboard, too, is equally comfortable to use.

The Elite 133 Professional performed superbly during our tests and with Lotus SmartSuite 96 included in the box, it's highly appealing. Shame that Mesh doesn't include a sound card, though.

£1,173.83
Mesh: 0181 452 1111

Mesh Elite 133 Professional

Performance	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Express Micros Rapier-96 133

Express Micros is a small mail-order computer firm, based in South Yorkshire, that has been selling PCs for around five years. Customers wishing to try products before buying can visit the company's premises and see a selection of machines up and running.

As mini-tower cases go, there's

PCs costing £1,000 or less



Mesh Elite-120 Professional

Mesh's bargain-offer PC has a bulging specification list. For exactly £1,000 (including VAT) the company will kit you out with a 120MHz Pentium, 16Mb of EDO RAM, an eight-speed CD-ROM drive, a 2Mb Mirage64 video card and a 14in SVGA monitor. Also, along with the expected Windows 95, Mesh is currently offering the impressive SmartSuite 96 from Lotus as part of the bundle.

£1,000 (including VAT)
Mesh: 0181 452 1111



Mitac Multimedia PC

The Multimedia PC now ships with Mitac's new 'multimedia' monitor – basically, this is a monitor with a pair of stereo speakers bolted on to the side. The machine itself is based on a Pentium running at 100MHz and this is accompanied by 8Mb of RAM and a 1.2Gb hard disk. Mitac has put only a four-speed (4X) CD-ROM in this machine, but there is a Dataflex internal modem fitted.

£1,000 (including VAT)
Mitac: 01952 676676



Tiny T120TP

Tiny specialises in low-cost PCs and the T120TP is no exception. A 120MHz Pentium processor is fitted as standard into this entry-level multimedia machine. You also get 16Mb of RAM, an eight-speed CD-ROM drive and a 14in SVGA monitor.

Included in the box is a fairly predictable software bundle comprising Dangerous Creatures, the colossal Encarta 96, Works and Money, all from Microsoft.

£999 (including VAT)
Tiny: 01293 821333



PC Science Professional

This is fitted with a 120MHz Pentium processor, 16Mb of RAM, eight-speed CD-ROM drive and a 1.7Gb hard drive. The 14in monitor is driven by a 64-bit S3 Trio with 2Mb of RAM and built-in hardware MPEG.

PC Science Direct is offering a five-year warranty on all its systems. Add to this the Windows 95, Hutchinson's Multimedia Encyclopaedia and speaker bundle, and the price seems very reasonable indeed.

£996.40 (including VAT)
PC Science Direct: 01423 323386

£1,199.68
Express Micros:
01909 530242

Express Micros Rapier-96 133

Performance	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Viglen Contender P5/120

Like Mesh, Viglen has been selling PCs via the direct channel for nearly 10 years. Two years ago the company was acquired by Amstrad, but it remains an independent PC manufacturer. Viglen's machines do not appear in high street shops but, at



its manufacturing plant in Middlesex, potential customers can view and test machines at a showroom.

The Contender must rank as one of the most appealing desktop PCs. It is both slim and has a much smaller breadth than others. The sacrifice made for this compactness relates to expansion possibilities: the machine's only drive bays are already occupied, one with an eight-speed CD-ROM drive and the other, naturally enough, with a floppy drive.

To compound this, the Contender is only high enough to accommodate three spare expansion slots inside – one PCI, one ISA and a PCI/ISA combo. There is a second ISA slot, but this is fitted with a Sound Blaster 16-bit sound card; the graphics hardware, a Cirrus Logic 5446 chip, is incorporated into the motherboard. The rest of the internals are neat and tidy, and there's clear access to the four SIMM sockets, as long as you don't install a card in either the PCI or ISA slot. However, unless you outgrow the 1Gb hard disk, or rapidly decide that the 16Mb of RAM isn't sufficient, you're unlikely to need to upgrade for a while.

The system's keyboard is very heavy but is exceptionally sturdy with it. The underside is constructed from a rigid metal and the perfectly-spaced keys on the flip side have microswitches. To complement this superb keyboard, the Microsoft Mouse makes yet another welcome appearance.

So impressed were we with the ►

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bundled speakers that we feel we have to single them out for a special mention. Although less than 10in high, and boasting just 10W per channel, this pair of Yamaha speakers provide a bass-rich sound quality that surpasses most others in their class.

For a Pentium 120MHz machine, the Contender's performance is very good, but it lingers in the dust cloud left by most of the machines in this test.

○ £1,191.45

○ Viglen: 0181 758 7000

Viglen Contender P5/120

Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Evesham Vale Prima P133

Evesham Micros started off life selling Sinclair Spectrum computers from a tiny shop in, not surprisingly, the town of Evesham. From there the company has grown to be one of the larger UK-based mail-order PC suppliers and now runs a total of four retail shops. As well as the original in Evesham, the stores trade in Cambridge, Birmingham and Milton Keynes.

The Prima P133 is housed in a midi-tower case of a plain design. Below the eight-speed CD-ROM drive are two empty 5.25in drive bays and a 3.5in floppy drive. There is also a 'spare' 3.5in drive bay, but to use this you would have to remove a covering plate which holds indicator LEDs for the power and hard disk.

A smart-looking pair of speakers, made by Zydec, is included and

Speedy CD?

Like most everything in the PC marketplace, CD-ROM drives seem to be getting ever faster. At one time a double-speed (2x) CD-ROM drive was the minimum specification for a 'multimedia' PC.

In reality, however, true multimedia applications (which combine graphics, sound and video) place heavy demands on a CD-ROM drive and speed is of the

essence. Therefore a double-speed unit, which has a maximum data transfer rate of 300Kbps (kilobytes per second), simply cannot cope with today's multimedia-rich programs.

For this reason, whether you're buying a new PC or simply wanting to upgrade your existing machine, make sure the CD-ROM drive is at least a quad-speed (4x) device.

these perform very well considering their maximum output of 12W per channel. The speakers plug into a genuine Sound Blaster 16-bit sound card, which occupies one of the three ISA slots inside Evesham Vale's machine.

To get inside the Prima is as simple as removing a single screw and sliding off the machine's side panel. Within, all cables are tidily gathered and tied allowing easy access to the entire motherboard. A disappointing 8Mb of RAM is present; two 4Mb SIMMs make up this amount leaving two SIMM sockets free to take an upgrade. Above the Sound Blaster is a Diamond Stealth 3D graphics board, rooted in one of the four PCI slots. This card is able to provide resolutions of up to 1,600x1,200, with interlacing. At a refresh rate of 72Hz, the ViewSonic 14in monitor holds a good picture at 800x600. However, the edges of the screen curve noticeably, and the monitor lacks the

trapezoid and pincushion controls needed to correct this.

We'll give the mouse no further mention other than the fact that it's made by Microsoft. The keyboard is very light in weight and gives the impression of being cheap. It works well enough, but the keys are decidedly spongy.

The Prima is a superbly built machine and is supplied with an appealing software bundle. However, as a result of having just 8Mb of RAM its performance compares badly with the other Pentium 133MHz machines.

○ £1,197.33

○ Evesham: 01386 765500

Evesham Vale Prima P133

Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Olivetti M24 New

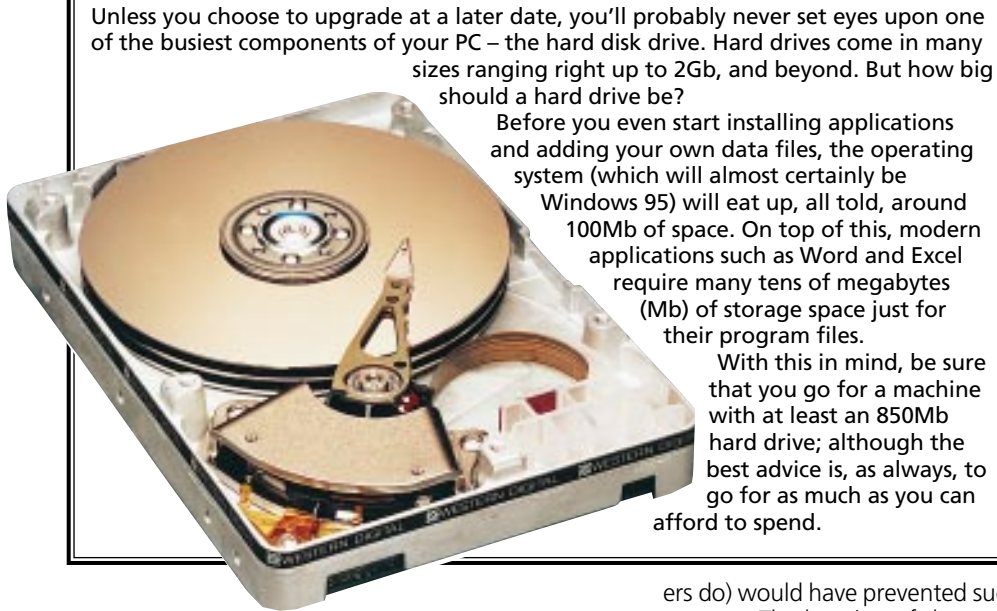
The Olivetti name can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when the Italian company began selling a range of office typewriters. Olivetti has been associated with desktop PCs since the pioneering days of the early 1980s, but recently the company separated its PC production activities into a new division, Olivetti Personal Computers.

Without a doubt the best feature of Olivetti's M24 lies with the case design. To get inside the machine you need do nothing more than twist a pair of semi-circular discs, situated on either side the case near the front. Naturally, in certain environments this might pose a security risk so it is fortunate that the case can be locked if needed. Unfortunately, though, the design of the case is the extent to which this PC can be extolled.

Olivetti has made some very strange choices for what is supposedly an entry-level machine. First off is the CD-ROM drive; or, more to the point, the absence of ►



Hard disks...



Unless you choose to upgrade at a later date, you'll probably never set eyes upon one of the busiest components of your PC – the hard disk drive. Hard drives come in many sizes ranging right up to 2Gb, and beyond. But how big should a hard drive be?

Before you even start installing applications and adding your own data files, the operating system (which will almost certainly be Windows 95) will eat up, all told, around 100Mb of space. On top of this, modern applications such as Word and Excel require many tens of megabytes (Mb) of storage space just for their program files.

With this in mind, be sure that you go for a machine with at least an 850Mb hard drive; although the best advice is, as always, to go for as much as you can afford to spend.

one. We accept that there are in fact some users for whom a CD-ROM is unnecessary, but these are few and far between. A vast majority of software can now be bought only in CD-ROM format, and therefore the omission of such a useful piece of PC equipment is a fundamental mistake.

With the cover off it doesn't take long to realise that the M24 is lacking in many other areas. Each of the four SIMM sockets is occupied by a 4Mb SIMM, giving total RAM of 16Mb. While this is sufficient for most needs, upgrading beyond this would mean discarding some of the SIMMs already present. Fitting two 8Mb SIMMs instead (as most other manufactur-

ers do) would have prevented such a waste. The location of the sockets has not been given much thought either. To fit and remove SIMMs requires either possession of an inhumanly flexible hand, or dismantling numerous parts of the machine's chassis.

Then there's the graphics hardware: a Trident chip integrated into the motherboard. Again, while this would probably rank as adequate for many purposes, by today's standards it is positively ancient. And by this point in our tests, it came as no surprise to find that Olivetti does not fit a sound card.

Neither the keyboard nor the mouse can be criticised – in fact, they're both quite outstanding – but these are ancillary peripherals connected to a machine that offers next to no appeal.

The M24 is well built and performs better than the average. However, in comparison to the competition, this machine is poor value for money and lacks many features.

○ £1,173.83
○ Olivetti: 0800 447799

Olivetti M24 New	
Performance	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★☆☆
Overall	★★★★★

Tag Entro

Perhaps one of the most successful marketing ideas of recent time has been the 'Intel Inside' sticker. This logo, stuck to the outside of a PC's case, indicates that an Intel processor is at the heart of the machine, and it has come to be recognised as an assurance that a machine is '100 percent PC compatible'. There are, however, processors from rival manufacturers that offer the same level of compatibility – and often at a lower price.

With this in mind, in a group test such as this where price was the main criterion, we were a little surprised that Tag was the only com-

Budget PCs compared									
Supplier	Atlantic Atlantic Plus 2	Dan Dantum 133	Evesham Vale Prima P133	Express Micros Rapier-P 133	Mesh Elite 133 Professional	Olivetti M24	Tag Entro	Tiny P133TP	Viglen Contender
Processor	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 133MHz	Cyrix 6x86 P120	Pentium 133MHz	Pentium 120MHz
Memory	16Mb	16Mb	8Mb	16Mb	16Mb	16Mb	16Mb	16Mb	16Mb EDO
Cache	256Kb	256Kb	256Kb	256Kb	512Kb	256Kb	512Kb	256Kb	256Kb
Hard disk	2Gb	1.2Gb	1Gb	1.6Gb	1.2Gb	1.2Gb	1.2Gb	1.6Gb	1Gb
Case	Mini-tower	Desktop	Midi-tower	Mini-tower	Desktop	Desktop	Midi-tower	Desktop	Desktop
Sound card	ESS AudioDrive 16-bit	Sound Blaster 16	Sound Blaster 16	ESS AudioDrive 16-bit	n/a	n/a	Sound Blaster 16	16-bit Pro PnP	Sound Blaster 16
Speakers included	●	●	●	●	n/a	n/a	●	●	●
Graphics	ATI Mach64 (2Mb)	ATI Mach64 (2Mb)	Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 (2Mb)	Diamond Stealth 64 (2Mb)	ATI Mirage64 (2Mb)	Trident 9680	ATI Mach64 (2Mb)	Cirrus Logic 5446 (1Mb)	Cirrus Logic 5446 (1Mb)
CD-ROM speed	8x	8x	8x	8x	8x	n/a	8x	8x	8x
Monitor	15in	14in	14in	15in	14in	14in	15in	15in	14in
Warranty	One-year return to base	One-year return to base	One-year on-site maintenance	One-year return to base	One-year return to base	One-year return to base	Two-year back to base	One-year return to base	One-year return to base

● = Yes

Software bundles: All machines have Windows 95 pre-installed. **Atlantic:** CorelDraw 4, Hutchinson's Multimedia Encyclopaedia 96, ClarisWorks 95, Anytime for Windows, Quicken 4, Slay, Rats. **Dan:** Microsoft's Encarta 96 and Works, and a games pack (Fifa Soccer, Bioforce, Hi-Octane, Magic Carpet, Theme Park). **Evesham:** Microsoft's Encarta 96, Works, Money, Fine Artist, Explorapedia, Dinosaurs and Golf. **Express:** Lotus SmartSuite 96, AudioRack32. **Mesh:** Lotus SmartSuite 96, Opera Imaginaire and VideoCD sampler. **Olivetti:** Microsoft Works 4.0. **Tag:** Microsoft Works and games pack (Assault Rigs, Mech Warrior 2, Actua Soccer). **Tiny:** Microsoft's Dangerous Creatures, Encarta 96, Works and Money. **Viglen:** Microsoft's Encarta 96, Money, Works, Wine Guide, Musical Instruments and Golf.

pany to submit a machine fitted with a non-Intel processor. The processor in question, a Cyrix 6x86-P150+, runs at 120MHz but, as our test results show, its performance managed to outstrip Intel-based 133MHz PCs.

Inside, the Entro looks just like any other PC. Indeed, apart from a telling message displayed during boot up, you would not know this machine was driven by a Cyrix processor. There are four PCI and four ISA slots, with a Sound Blaster 16-bit sound card and an ATI Mach64 graphics card occupying one of each type. Two 8Mb SIMMs are fitted into the bank of four sockets, although you have to dig your

way through a tangle of cables to see this.

Tag's chosen monitor manages a very high-quality display at resolutions up to 1,024x768, and at 800x600 text and graphics are razor sharp.

The keyboard is above average as is the mouse, a comfortable little device whose design is not too dissimilar from Microsoft's acclaimed product. The speakers are the same as those supplied with the Viglen – Yamaha YSTs – and the same high level of praise applies.

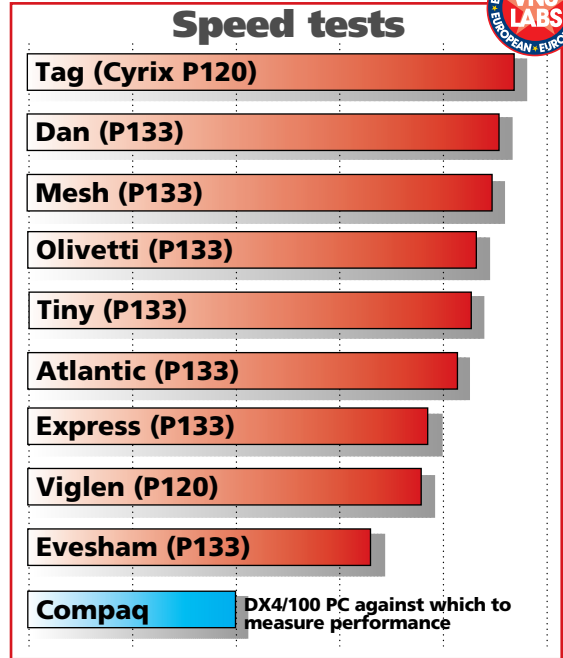
The Tag PC range has been on

sale for just over two years. The company trades mostly over the telephone, but Shasonic, a dealer on London's Tottenham Court Road, also stocks Tag machines.

It hasn't got an Intel inside, but Tag's Entro outperforms all the machines in the test that have.

○ £1,198.50
○ Tag: 0181 803 7770

Tag Entro	
Performance	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★



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



WHAT PC? BEST BUY

This month's Best Buy was a close-run contest between two machines. Tag's Cyrix-based Entro was the best performer, but the gap between it and Dan's Intel-based dantum is very small. Add to this the fact that Dan's machine has the edge both in terms of build quality and the bundled software, and we feel the award must go to the dantum.

RECOMMENDED WHAT PC?

For the reasons outlined above, the Tag Entro naturally takes the recommended slot. We'd also like to highlight Mesh's Elite 133 Professional as a top-notch performer.

Scott Colvey