POWER PCs

Details	Last month's position	First reviewed	PC World-Bench 4	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Processor type/ speed	RAM	Hard disk/ capacity	Mother-board	Chipset	Modem	USB ports	Monitor	Screen size	Dot pitch	Max resolution @75Hz	Graphics card	Graphics chip	Graphics card memory	Sound card	Speakers	No of speakers/ subwoofer	DVD -ROM speed	CD-RW read/write/ rewrite rate	Operating system, software & other extras
1 Best Price Poweroid.com 2013 0870 220 0444 www.poweroid.co.uk	1	Aug 02	123	£1,209	1-year parts and labour, 4-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 2 x 60GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	12	LG Flatron 915FT Plus	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy Platinum	Creative Inspire 5.1	5/yes	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, StarOffice 5.2
2 Multivision Vision Titan 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk	2	Aug 02	120	£1,200	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 2 x 80GB	MSI KT3 Ultra ARU	Via KT333	56K	9	LG Flatron 915FT Plus	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite, games pack, digital gamepad
3 Evesham Axis 2100+ 0800 038 0800 www.evesham.com	3	Aug 02	119	£1,299	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/ 120GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	10	LG Flatron 915FT Plus	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Creative Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002
4 Carrera SSC Octan 2100r 0870 066 0682 www.carrera.co.uk	4	Aug 02	110	£1,299	2-year onsite, 3-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 2 x 80GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	6	2 x NEC 75F	17in	0.25mm	1,152x 870	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Creative Inspire 5.1	5/yes	16x	40x/32x/12x	Windows XP Professional
5 Cybyte XP2000RD+ 01603 455 554 www.cybyte.co.uk	5	Aug 02	124	£1,275	2-year collect and return	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/ 1.67GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/ 120GB	MSI KT3 Ultra ARA	Via KT333	56K	6	LG Flatron 915FT Plus	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Creative Inspire 5.1	5/yes	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home
6 Hi-Grade Meridian XP 2G PV05 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com	6	May 02	125	£1,339	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/ 1.67GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 80GB	MSI K7N420	nVidia nForce	56K	2	LG Flatron 915FT Plus	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	64MB	onboard nForce	Cambridge CSW4300	5/yes	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works
7 Mesh Matrix XP 2200+ Ti Pro 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	7	Sep 02	119	£1,499	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2200+/ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/ 120GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT2333	56K	6	NEC MultiSync LCD1700	17in flat-panel	0.26mm	1,600x 1,200	Leadtech WinFast A250 Ultra	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, games bundle
8 Systemax Inspire A2000BA 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	8	May 02	121	£1,049	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/ 1.67GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 120GB	MSI MS-6380LE	Via KT266A	56K	4	CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x 1,200	Gainward GeForce4 Ultra/750	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Audigy	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, games bundle
9 Atlas Meridian XP 2100 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com	9	Jun 02	128	£1,399	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/ 1.733GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 60GB	MSI 420D	nForce 420	56K	4	LG Flatron 915FT	19in	0.24mm	1,600x 1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4400	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4400	128MB	Creative Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/yes	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0
10 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2400 PA06 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com	10	Jun 02	119	£1,499	3-year onsite	Intel Pentium 4/ 2.4GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 60GB	MSI	Intel 845	56K	2	LG Flatron 775	17in	0.24mm	1,280x 1,024	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4400	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 440	128MB	Creative Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/yes	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002

1 Best Price Poweroid.com 2013

Entering our chart back in August 02, this Best Price system continues to offer a decent combination of performance, specifications and value for money, which is why the 2013 nabs the Best Buy award again this month. With a good-quality LG monitor, Logitech wireless peripherals and stylish blue case, the Poweroid is an attractive system. It isn't just about good looks, though, as the case also contains an extra fan to dissipate the heat generated by the powerful components.

Most of the Power contenders this month share the same basic specification and the 2013 was no exception. Its Athlon XP 2100+ processor, running at 1.73GHz, was complemented by 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which resulted in a mid-range WorldBench 4 score of 123. Rather than one 120GB hard drive, Best Price has opted for two 60GB Maxtor drives in a Raid 0 configuration, which offers speedier data delivery.

A top-of-the-range 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card is used in conjunction with LG's excellent 19in Flatron monitor, and the resulting frame rates are blisteringly fast. The Poweroid achieved a smooth and seamless 80fps (frames per second) at a resolution of 1,600x1,200. Creative's Audigy sound card and Inspire speakers ensure that audio quality is impressive – great news for anyone interested in making music on their PC. There's a generous 12 USB ports on the Best Price (including four with the faster 2.0 support), while the two FireWire ports make up for the slow CD-RW speeds and lack of documentation.

← Combining top-notch graphics, excellent audio and a low price tag, the Best Price remains our Best Buy

↑ If you need to store digital video and photos on your PC then the Recommended Vision Titan is the PC for you

2 Multivision Vision Titan

Multivision holds on to its Recommended award as the Vision Titan offers a good specification and value for money. Those looking for a well-protected investment will also be pleased to hear that this system comes with a three-year onsite warranty – one of the best offers in the chart.

Again, we see an Athlon XP 2100+ chip combined with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which means you won't be wanting for performance on this system.

Another addition is the KT333 chipset from Via, which provides a much improved memory controller. Bearing this in mind, the Titan's WorldBench 4 score of 120 should strictly speaking have been faster, however it's still reasonable. As with the Poweroid, the Titan houses two hard drives in a Raid 0 configuration for speed. Multivision has packed in two massive 80GB IBM hard disks – perfect for video editing and digital photography.

It's hard to fault the Titan's visual setup. LG's Flatron 915 Plus monitor, with a 0.24mm dot pitch and a top resolution of 1,600x1,200 at 85Hz, produces a clear sharp picture. Naturally, it helps that the graphics are powered by the ubiquitous GeForce4 Ti 4600 card. The Audigy sound card is another good addition, although the Videologic speakers don't have the power of Creative's Inspire 5300.

3 Evesham Axis 2100+

The Axis 2100+ may sit at number three, but it's still a great Power system with an impressive hardware line-up and is worthy of its Recommended award. With an Athlon XP 2100+ processor and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM the Evesham's specification follows the top two machines, but its WorldBench 4 score of 119 couldn't match those of the Poweroid and Vision Titan. This may be due to Evesham's 120GB hard drive – it's not Raid-configured, so even at 7,200rpm (revolutions per minute) it's slower. With a free upgrade to the 2200+ processor, which Evesham is offering for a limited time, this score should improve.

The visual setup is impressive thanks to the LG Flatron 915 Plus monitor and nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 card. It couldn't equal the Poweroid's frame rates, but it came a close second. With the excellent Audigy sound card and powerful Inspire 5300 speakers from Creative, the audio specification is the best on the market.

There's plenty of room to upgrade and 10 USB ports are on offer. If you own Creative's Jukebox 3.0, you can also use the FireWire port to upload MP3s and burn them on to disc using the 48-/40-/12-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive. The package is wrapped up with comprehensive documentation and Works Suite 2002.

↑ The combination of an Audigy sound card and Creative Inspire speakers means that the Axis' audio won't disappoint

4 Carrera SSC Octan 2100r

Carrera's comeback machine continues to hang on to its deserved Recommended award due to the Octan being packed with plenty of features and high-end specifications. The 2100r may not be the speediest PC in the chart, but it's an accomplished fourth-placed machine with a decent price tag.

Carrera's WorldBench score of 110 doesn't reflect the inclusion of an Athlon XP 2100+ processor, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and two generous

POWER PCs

see-through plastic panel and houses two huge fans, so heat dissipation won't be a problem. If you want the best in visual display then the Octan's low-quality monitors may disappoint. That said, they are more than adequate for use in the average work environment.

↑ You'll need plenty of free desk space to house the two 17in NEC monitors bundled with the Octan 2100r

80GB hard drives. There are also other redeeming features such as the Octan's excellent five-year warranty and the inclusion of Windows XP Professional.

A word of warning, though, you will need plenty of desk space to store this system. Not only is the 2100r generously bundled with two 17in NEC monitors, so you can have dual-screen setup, it also comes with a monster-sized case. The silver metallic-finish tower has an unusual

↑ Cybyte proves it's got staying power – it hangs on at number five with the speedy XP2000RD+

5 Cybyte XP2000RD+

We still view Cybyte as a relatively new manufacturer, but its first Power PC entrant, the XP2000RD+, is proving to have great staying power. This system is a good all-rounder that just misses out on a Recommended award.

Cybyte opted for a two-tone case with dark blue hue that avoids the trap of looking like an imitation Mac. Despite the XP2000RD+ using the slower Athlon XP 2000+ processor, clocked at 1.67GHz, with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the powerful system achieved an impressive WorldBench 4 score of 124, proving it's no slouch. Inside is a capacious 120GB hard drive, although there's no Raid configuration.

Audio is well catered for by the Audigy sound card and Inspire speakers, and the powerful GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card is backed up by the LG Flatron monitor. Thankfully, Cybyte has taken note of our comments regarding the unimpressive AOC display that was bundled with the system last month. On the down side, you're also not guaranteed much protection with a two-year return-to-base warranty, and there's little in the way of documentation or software.

Overall, the Cybyte XP2000RD+'s speedy performance and attractive design mean it hangs on to its mid-table position.

↑ The Hi-Grade Meridian offers a speedy performance, but its audio and graphics are below par

6 Hi-Grade Meridian XP 2G PV05

Having nestled happily in second place not five months ago, this Hi-Grade Meridian now struggles to hold on to sixth. Having said that, the Meridian XP's WorldBench score of 125 remains one of the fastest. Backing up the Hi-Grade's Athlon XP 2000+ processor is 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. The 80GB Maxtor hard drive offers ample storage – it may not be the largest disk in the chart, but it should still prove difficult to fill.

The Meridian uses the 19in LG Flatron 915FT monitor, but Hi-Grade's GeForce3 Ti 500 graphics card can't keep up with the frame rates of the GeForce4 range. The audio is also disappointing and the Creative Audigy sound card would have been preferable to the onboard nForce audio controller.

7 Mesh Matrix XP 2200+Ti Pro

Unlike the other Athlon 2200+ systems which ended up in the Budget PC chart, the Mesh's price puts it into the Power category. Unfortunately, the Matrix XP's

Standalone speaker options

I f you want full surround sound, then you're going to need a six-speaker setup (five satellites and a subwoofer), referred to as 5.1. Modern sound cards, such as Creative's Live 5.1 and the Audigy, can output all six channels from the card itself – simply connect the speakers up and you're ready to go.

The other option is an external 5.1 decoder. Videologic's DigiTheatre and Creative's Inspire 5700 both provide an external decoder that accepts a digital stream and does the necessary conversion to pump it out to the right speakers. However you will need an S/Pdif (Sony/Philips digital

interface) connection on your PC to make full use of this. If you've got a hardware DVD decoder card, then you've probably got this connection already.

If your sound card has digital-out, then some software DVD players will make use of this and output the digital stream. You can also connect an external decoder up to a standalone DVD player, as most provide the necessary digital output. If you're interested in good stereo rather than full surround, then Aego2 from Acoustic Energy is hard to beat. It's an expensive setup but, if you've got the money, you won't be disappointed.

↑ A 17in NEC flat-panel display is the reason for the Mesh Matrix XP's inflated price tag

PC WorldBench 4: Power PCs

(longer bars are better)   → faster

WorldBench 4	25	50	75	100	125	Score
Atlas Meridian XP 2100						128
Hi-Grade Meridian XP 2G PV05						125
Cybyte XP2000RD+						124
Best Price Poweroid.com 2013						123
Systemax Inspire A2000BA						121
Multivision Vision Titan						120
Evesham Axis 2100+						119
Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2400 PA06						119
Mesh Matrix XP 2200+ Ti Pro						119
Carrera SSC Octan 2100r						110

performance doesn't reflect this inflated price tag. PCs using the older Athlon XP 2100+ chip managed an average of about 122 in our WorldBench 4 tests, so the Ti Pro's score of 119 is disappointing. Its performance in our graphics test was only negligibly better than the NEC's Budget 2200+ offering and video encoding test results were also uninspiring. The 2200+ Ti Pro houses good-quality components and a generous three-year onsite warranty, but costs £1,499. The hefty price tag is largely due to the 17in NEC flat-panel display and the bundled 40-/24-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) Teac CD-RW drive.
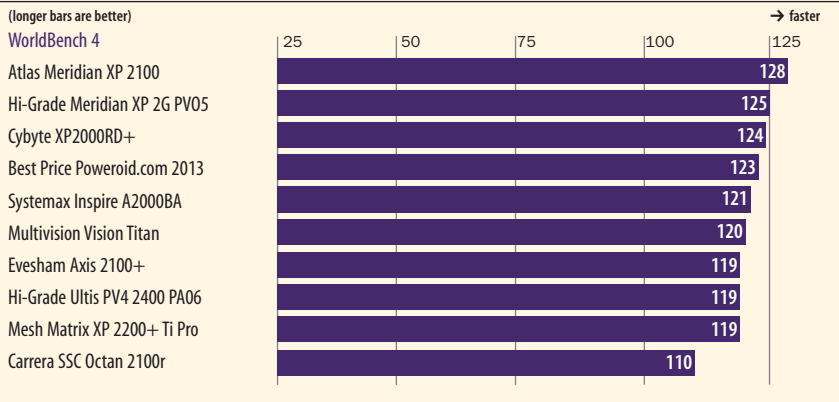
8 Systemax Inspire A2000BA

Another system starting to show its age is this ex-Recommended PC from Systemax. The Systemax Inspire employs the AMD Athlon XP 2000+ to assist its high score of 121 in WorldBench 4. Having said this, though, it is the only PC that's equipped with 256MB of DDR (double data rate)

↑ The Systemax Inspire is the only PC in the chart to offer 256MB of DDR RAM instead of 512MB

RAM, rather than the more generous 512MB. However, it does offer 120GB of storage space and a 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600 card. The 19in CTX monitor is a decent screen, while the Audigy sound card and Videologic speakers ensure the audio won't let you down. Carefully arranged internally, and equipped with USB and FireWire ports, there's also little to fault in the Systemax's presentation.

↑ The Atlas' components may be looking long in the tooth, but it still has an unbeatable WorldBench score

9 Atlas Meridian XP 2100

The once cutting-edge technologies found in the Meridian XP 2100 have now been superseded by better components, so Atlas remains in ninth place. That said, it's still an impressive model. The Athlon 2100+ processor, combined with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, helped it achieve an unbeaten WorldBench 4 score of 128.

Aiding this performance is the 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4400 graphics card. The 19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus screen is always recommended and the DTT2200 speakers are solid. Backup duties on the Atlas are satisfied by a 40-/32-/10-speed

(read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive and there's a 16-speed DVD-ROM. On top of all this, a three-year onsite warranty protects your investment.

10 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2400 PA06

Staying at number 10 is the Ultis from Hi-Grade, which was the first system we reviewed that used Intel's 2.4GHz chip. Equipped with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM the Ultis only managed a WorldBench 4 score of 119 – a full nine points short of the Atlas Meridian XP 2100. Both systems employ the same 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4400 card and, although it provides blistering frame rates, the Athlon still kept its edge over the Pentium 4 processor.

Sound comes from the Creative Audigy and DTT2200 speakers, and there's a TV card thrown in for good measure. On the optical front you'll find a 16-speed DVD-ROM and a 40-/32-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. In addition to a copy of Windows XP Home there's also Works Suite 2002. Overall, the Ultis is let down on performance and value for money.

↓ The Hi-Grade can't compete with the other entrants in terms of performance and value for money