## BUDGET 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 Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk | 1 | Sep 02 | 118 | £999 | 3-year onsite, 3-year labour | AMD Athlon XP 2100+/1.73GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | IBM/80GB | MSI 6380E | Via KT3 Ultra | 56K | 5 | | liyama Vision Master Pro 454 | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | 128MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 48x/48x/12x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite, multimedia bundle |
| 2 Evesham Axis 2200+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com | 2 | Sep 02 | 120 | £999 | 2-year onsite, 1-year return to base | AMD Athlon XP 2200+/1.8GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/80GB | Asus A7V333 | Via KT333 | 56K | 6 | | Samsung SyncMaster 957 DF | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | Leadtek WinFast A250 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | 64MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Creative Labs Inspire 5300 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/32x/10x | Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0, Roxio Easy CD Creator, games bundle |
| 3 Mesh Matrix 2200+ RD Pro 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com | NEW | Oct 02 | 123 | £899 | 3-year collect and return | AMD Athlon XP 2200+/1.8GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/80GB | Asus A7V333 | Via KT333 | 56K | 2 | | Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | ATI Radeon 9000 Pro | ATI Radeon 9000 Pro | 64MB | Creative SB Audigy | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 48x/40x/12x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite |
| 4 Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com | 4 | Jun 02 | 118 | £849 | 3-year onsite | AMD Athlon XP 2000+/1.68GHz | 256MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/80GB | Asus A7 A266-E | M1647 | 56K | 4 | | Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | ATI Radeon 8500 LE | ATI Radeon 8500 LE | 64MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Creative Labs Inspire 5300 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite |
| 5 Systemax Inspire 7122 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk | 5 | Sep 02 | 121 | £999 | 1-year onsite, 2-year return to base | AMD Athlon XP 2200+/1.8GHz | 256MB DDR RAM | IBM/80GB | MSI 6380E | Via KT3 Ultra | 56K | 6 | | CTX EX950F | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | GeForce4 Ultra 650 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | 64MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite, CD/DVD bundle |
| 6 PC World Advent 3813 BTO 01442 355 802 www.pcworld.co.uk | NEW | Oct 02 | 119 | £999 | 1-year onsite | AMD Athlon XP 2200+/1.8GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/80GB | Gigabyte GA7VRXE+ | Via KT333 | 56K | 2 | | Samsung SyncMaster 957 DF | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | ATI Radeon 9000 Pro | ATI Radeon 9000 Pro | 64MB | Creative SB Audigy | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/32x/12x | Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002 |
| 7 Multivision Vision Pro 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk | 6 | Jun 02 | 120 | £999 | 2-year onsite | AMD Athlon XP 2000+/1.68GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | Seagate/60GB | MSI 6390 LE2 | Via KT266A | 56K | 4 | | Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 | 19in | 0.25mm | 1,600x1,200 | ATI Radeon 8500 LE | ATI Radeon 8500 LE | 64MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite |
| 8 Systemax Reliance P2260E 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk | 7 | Jul 02 | 116 | £949 | 1-year onsite, 2-year return to base | Intel Pentium 4/2.2GHz | 256MB DDR RAM | IBM/80GB | Intel 845E | MSI MS-6566E | 56K | 4 | | CTX PR705F | 17in | 0.24mm | 1,600x1,200 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 | 64MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Videologic ZXR 500 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite |
| 9 Best Price Poweroid 2100 0870 220 0444 www.poweroid.co.uk | 8 | Jun 02 | 116 | £899 | 1-year parts and labour, 4-year labour | AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/80GB | Soyo K7 Dragon Plus | Via KT266A | 56K | 8 | | liyama LS902 | 19in | 0.26mm | 1,600x1,200 | ATI Radeon 8500 DV | ATI Radeon 8500 | 64MB | Creative Labs 8738 Integrated | Cambridge DTT2200 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, remote control, sim card reader |
| 10 Time Mercury 2200+ PQ 0870 830 3116 www.timecomputers.com | 9 | Sep 02 | 122 | £1,199 | 3-year return to base | AMD Athlon XP 2200+/1.8GHz | 512MB DDR RAM | 2 x Seagate/80GB | Gigabyte GA7VRXP | Via 8233A(CE) | 56K | 4 | | Samsung Samtron 71s | 17in flat-panel | 0.26mm | 1,280x1,024 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 | nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 | 128MB | Creative Labs Audigy 1394 | Creative Labs Inspire 5300 | 5/yes | 16x | 40x/32x/10x | Windows XP Home, Star Office, GT XP |

## 1 Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti

Multivision hangs on to its Best Buy award with the Vision Elite 4 Ti. Rather than opt for AMD's 2200+ Athlon XP chip, Multivision has opted for its predecessor, the 2100+. Despite not offering the speediest performance in the chart, its WorldBench score of 118 is respectable and, in everyday use, it's unlikely you'll notice the difference. Combine this with its strong all-round package and warranty and you can see why the Elite takes the top spot.

↓ The Multivision's outstanding specifications keep it at number one for a second month



Both 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and 80GB hard drive have become standard offerings in the Budget chart, so it comes as no surprise that Multivision has opted for this spec.

The Ti's display setup is good – liyama's Vision Master Pro 454, with its built-in speakers, performs well and adds an extra two USB ports to the five that are on the tower. The 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4200 graphics card, which can easily cope with graphics-intensive applications, is combined with the now almost standard Creative Audigy sound card and a set of Videologic ZXR 500 surround speakers. If you're after an entertainment system then the Multivision Vision Elite is an ideal choice.

Giving this Best Buy system the edge is a 48-/48-/12-speed (read/write/rewrite) Teac CD-RW drive, a speedier model than the competitors have to offer. The warranty runs to a comprehensive three years onsite followed by a further three years labour only. Multivision also scores highly on the software front – as well as Lotus SmartSuite, its generous multimedia bundle will keep you amused for days.

## 2 Evesham Axis 2200+

Evesham opted for AMD's fastest processor yet – the Athlon XP 2200+ – but the Axis still remains at number two this month. The 2200+, running at 1.8GHz, uses a 0.13 micron production process rather than the 0.18 micron design of previous AMD chips. The smaller the core the less power it needs, allowing it to run faster without generating as much heat. This should translate to better system performance, but the difference between the 2100+ and the 2200+ turns out to be negligible.

The Evesham Axis' WorldBench 4 score of 120 makes for decent performance, but it's certainly not streets ahead of other systems in this category which use slower processors. The performance in our graphics tests was strong again, producing frame rates a little higher than the Best Buy Multivision, though there was very little to choose between the two systems in the video encoding tests.

There's plenty of room inside the Axis, providing good upgradeability, and you don't even need a screwdriver to take the



↑ With decent performance and great value for money, the Evesham is a deserved second place

case off. Even more conveniently, there are six USB ports – two of which are front-mounted – so you can easily plug and unplug devices without have to delve round the back of the PC.

The Evesham's monitor is a Samsung SyncMaster 957 DF, which is a decent display for a Budget system, while the warranty is good although not the strongest in the chart with two-year onsite and one-year return-to-base cover. At just under £1,000 the Evesham Axis offers good value for money and deserves its Recommended award.

## 3 Mesh Matrix 2200+ RD Pro

NEW

Even with the latest AMD Athlon and Intel Pentium 4 chips hitting the streets, high WorldBench scores have been hard to find. Notching up a healthy 123, the Mesh Matrix shows a clean pair of heels to the rest of the competition. This is partly due to the Athlon XP 2200+ processor, although the 512MB of fast PC2100 DDR (double data rate) RAM helps as well. There's no shortage of storage space, and the poised Maxtor hard drive offers a plentiful 80GB.

The 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 is an excellent monitor that has stood the test of time. Its 0.25mm dot pitch, vivid colour scheme and sharp picture allows it to make full use of the Mesh's video card. Unsurprisingly, the ATI Radeon 9000 Pro gets a better airing on the Matrix, and its video tests are amazing, making this the best Budget PC for video encoding. Games performance, on the other hand, is disappointing, with higher resolutions proving too much.

The sound system is more impressive, and Creative's popular Audigy card is lent



↑ Our highest new entry is the Mesh Matrix 2200+ RD Pro, which achieves the fastest WorldBench score

resonance by Videologic's ZXR 500 speaker system. CD drives tend to be much of a muchness these days, but the Teac CD-RW has fared well in our CD burner top five, and its 40-/12-speed CD-R/RW facilities result in a smooth performance that make it almost as fast as anything on the market.

The Mesh's software bundle (Windows XP Home and Lotus SmartSuite) isn't the most expansive, but the solid internal arrangement and adequate three-year collect-and-return warranty are pleasing.

## BUDGET PCs

### 4 Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC

With a further £50 slashed from the Matrix XP 2000+ BPC's price tag, Mesh comfortably retains its Recommended award for a fifth successive month. The Athlon XP 2000+, running at 1.68GHz, is now AMD's third-fastest processor and is twinned here with a sizeable 80GB hard drive. Unfortunately, the system only includes 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM; with another 256MB the WorldBench 4 score of 118 could have been higher.

As an entertainment PC the Matrix won't let you down. It might not have a 128MB GeForce4 graphics card like the Best Buy Multivision but on a price-to-performance ratio ATI's 64MB Radeon LE is an easy winner, providing great visuals. It's twinned with the Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 – currently the best monitor in the chart. Together they produce high frame rates and a beautifully crisp picture, which will be perfect for graphics-intensive applications.

↓ Sticking at fourth place this month, the Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC is a great entertainment system

↑ The Systemax Inspire performed well in our tests, exploiting its components well

### 5 Systemax Inspire 7122

Systemax sits at number five this month, just missing out on an award in the process. The Inspire 7122 might not offer a top-notch spec, but it features the brand-new AMD Athlon XP 2200+ chip, which afforded it a WorldBench 4 score of 121 – respectable, considering it only houses 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM.

The 80GB hard drive provides ample storage space and, even though the GeForce4 Ti 4200 graphics chip only has 64MB of RAM, it performed well in our tests. The 19in CTX EX950F is always a good choice, so the 7122 will be well received by gamers and users of graphics-intensive applications. The warranty is a reasonable one-year onsite and two-year return-to-base, and there's a generous software bundle including Lotus Smartsuite.

It's likely that with another 256MB of memory the Inspire 7122 would have performed better and gained a higher chart placing.

### 6 PC World Advent 3813 BTO

PC World treads much of the same ground as the new Mesh, only with less flair. Take the performance: the Advent's WorldBench score of 119 is disappointing for a machine with a strong base system – one that uses the same AMD Athlon 2200+ chip as the Mesh, and teams it with the same 80GB hard drive and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. Somehow, though, the Advent fails to shine in the speed tests.

The 19in Samsung SyncMaster 957DF is a competent monitor, although we wouldn't place it on a par with the CTX and Mitsubishi models. As with the Mesh, the ATI Radeon 9000 Pro is better at encoding video than games and, overall, you sacrifice that extra bit of video speed with the Advent. We can't fault the audio, though, and the Advent gets great voice from the Creative Audigy/Videologic ZXR 500 partnership. The 32-/12-speed CD-R/RW and 16-speed DVD drives are solid rather than stunning examples of their kind.

**NEW**

↑ The Advent features the same processor and hard drive as the number three Mesh but isn't as speedy

## Bundled speakers: what should you expect?

If there's one peripheral you'll always get with a new PC it's speakers. Even the cheapest systems come with some, but quality varies considerably. Here's a brief rundown of what you should expect over each of our chart categories.

• Power A Power PC should come with the best audio setup around. All the speakers in our Power chart comprise five speakers and a subwoofer – be sure to check the quality of the bundled sound card, though. The Creative Labs' Audigy 1394 is currently the card of the moment, but Creative Labs' SoundBlaster Live 5.1 and Videologic's Sonic Fury are also very capable cards.

• Budget The number and quality of speakers in this category is generally above that in the Superbudget category. Own-brand speaker systems are becoming more rare, but you still may find some. Four speakers and a subwoofer is the least you should expect from a system in this range. Indeed, many Budget PCs will be bundled with five speakers and a subwoofer.

• Superbudget All low-end PCs will come with at least two speakers. This is enough to provide stereo support for day-to-day business use but most are too tinny for playing music. These days, you can often expect to get a subwoofer as well, as you can see from our Top 10 chart.

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↑ The Vision Pro was one of the best Budget PCs of its time, and is still holding on to its mid-table position

## PC WorldBench 4: Budget PCs

(longer bars are better)   → faster

| | 25 | 50 | 75 | 100 | 125 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mesh Matrix 2200+ RD Pro | | | | | 123 |
| Time Mercury 2200+ PQ | | | | | 122 |
| Systemax Inspire 7122 | | | | | 121 |
| Evesham Axis 2200+ | | | | | 120 |
| Multivision Vision Pro | | | | | 120 |
| PC World Advent 3813 BTO | | | | | 119 |
| Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC | | | | | 118 |
| Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti | | | | | 118 |
| Systemax Reliance P2260E | | | | | 116 |
| Best Price Poweroid 2100 | | | | | 116 |

### 7 Multivision Vision Pro

Pushed down from second to sixth place last month and dropping another spot to seventh this month, the Multivision still has plenty of impressive features to keep it in the Top 10. Apart from the attractive Logitech keyboard and mouse, the Vision Pro is a plain-looking system, but it proved to be one of the best Budget PCs in its time.
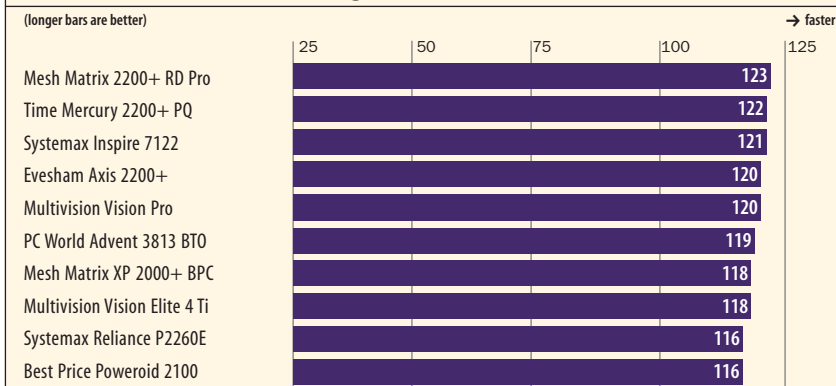
Multivision opted for 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM to go with the 1.68GHz Athlon XP 2000+ chip, and the Vision Pro's WorldBench 4 score of 120 reflects this spec. The 60GB hard drive is barely average these days but, even so, it should still prove near-impossible to fill.

With a 64MB Radeon LE graphics card from ATI and Mitsubishi's 19in Diamond Plus 92 monitor, the visual setup is superb and renders impressively sharp results. Likewise, the Videologic speakers are on a par with the popular Cambridge DTT2200s, and the Audigy sound card gives you the benefit not only of good audio, but also a FireWire port.

↑ The Systemax's Pentium 4 chip holds up well in a chart full of Athlons, with an unbeatable graphics setup

### 8 Systemax Reliance P2260E

The only Budget PC to boast an Intel processor, the Reliance's WorldBench 4 score of 116 makes it the slowest system in the chart, so if a speedy performance is paramount then this isn't the PC for you. The Pentium 4 does have an edge over the AMD processors in terms of graphics, however, and the P2260E has nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4200 card, which performed strongly in our games tests.

Balanced throughout, there's little evidence of cost-cutting in the £949 Systemax Reliance. The IBM hard drive offers 80GB of storage space and the P2260E's sound system pairs Creative Labs Audigy with Videologic speakers.

↑ Best Price's Poweroid 2100 gets good results from its 1.6GHz chip, and has a five-year warranty

### 9 Best Price Poweroid 2100

The Best Price still ranks above Time's system which boasts a 2200+ processor. The Poweroid 2100 houses an Athlon XP 1900+ processor, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an 80GB hard drive. ATI's 64MB Radeon 8500 DV graphics card offers TV functionality, but you need to use the bundled adapter to hook up the monitor as it only features a DVI (digital visual interface) port. The monitor isn't the greatest either with a dot pitch of 0.26mm.

There are four USB ports on the front of the Poweroid, plus two at the back. With another two on the keyboard you can connect peripherals to your heart's content.

The warranty covers you for a full five years, but you will only get onsite cover for the first year – the remainder only covers you for labour cost.

### 10 Time Mercury 2200+ PQ

We didn't expect systems powered by AMD's Athlon XP 2200+ to feature in the bottom half of the chart, but this Time system only manages tenth place. The Mercury houses good-quality components including two 80GB hard drives. The WorldBench 4 score of 122 makes for an extremely speedy PC, but its inflated price of £1,199 prevents it from moving further up the chart.

↑ Though it is speedy and good-looking, the Time Mercury's high price tag lets it down