






TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

| Details                                                                                                                                                             | Last month's position | First reviewed | World-Bench 2000 | 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 | Refresh rate@max resolution | Graphics card                  | Graphics chip         | Graphics card memory | Sound card                           | Speakers                  | No of speakers/subwoofer | DVD -ROM speed     | CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate | Floppy disk drive | Office suite & other extras                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|-------|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <b>1</b> Hi-Grade Meridian N1400PV12<br>020 8532 6100<br>www.higrade.com          | 1                     | Dec 01         | 241              | £849           | 1-year onsite<br>2-year return to base  | AMD Athlon XP 1600+/<br>1.4GHz  | 256MB DDR RAM | UDMA 100/40GB        | Asus nForce    | Crush 12  | 56K   | 2                  | LG775FT Flatron            | 17in        | 0.24mm    | 1,024x768            | 1,024x768 @85Hz             | onboard                        | onboard               | 32MB                 | onboard 5.1 Dolby ProLogic           | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 40x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows 2000, SmartSuite Millennium                                 |
|  <b>2</b> Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280<br>0870 729 7364<br>www.systemaxpc.co.uk | 2                     | Dec 01         | 196              | £1,199         | 1-year onsite<br>2-year return to base  | AMD Athlon XP 1800+/<br>1.53GHz | 256MB DDR RAM | Western Digital/40GB | MSI K7T266     | Via KT266 | 56K   | 2                  | CTX PR960F                 | 19in        | 0.24mm    | 1,600x1,200          | 1,600x1,200 @85Hz           | Systemax GeForce3              | nVidia GeForce3       | 64MB                 | Creative Audigy 1394                 | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 32x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me XP, SmartSuite Millennium                                |
|  <b>3</b> NEC Powermate i-Select XL3 A1400<br>0870 010 6326<br>www.nec-online.com  | 3                     | Nov 01         | 189              | £1,199         | 3-year onsite                           | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/40GB          | Gigabyte GA7DX | AMD 760   | 56K   | 4 (2 on front)     | NEC VR19                   | 19in        | 0.26mm    | 1,600x1,200          | 1,600x1,200 @85Hz           | Leadtek Winfast GeForce3       | nVidia GeForce3       | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 1024 | Labtec LCS 2414           | 2/Y                      | 16x (2x recording) | 28x/8x/4x                     | Y                 | Windows 98, MS Works, Britannica, games, education/reference titles |
|  <b>4</b> Best Price Poweroid 2004<br>020 8904 3347<br>www.poweroid.com            | 4                     | Nov 01         | 188              | £1,199         | 5-year return to base                   | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB SDRAM   | Seagate x2/60GB      | EpoX EP-8KTA3  | Via KT133 | 56K   | 4 (2 on front)     | Iiyama VM Pro 411          | 17in TFT    | 0.25mm    | 1,280x1,024          | 1,280x1,024 @80Hz           | Leadtek Winfast GeForce3       | nVidia GeForce3       | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 40x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite                                        |
| <b>5</b> Mesh Matrix DDR 1400GT<br>020 8208 4702<br>www.meshcomputers.com                                                                                           | 5                     | Oct 01         | 184              | £849           | 1-year onsite<br>2-year return to base  | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Western Digital/40GB | Asus A7A266    | AMD 761   | 56K   | 4                  | Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 730 | 17in        | 0.25mm    | 1,600x1,200          | 1,600x1,200 @76Hz           | OEM GeForce2 MX                | nVidia GeForce2 MX    | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 40x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001                                     |
| <b>6</b> Panrix Magnum 1400PA<br>0113 244 4958<br>www.panrix.com                                                                                                    | 6                     | Nov 01         | 191              | £1,149         | 1-year onsite,<br>2-year return to base | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Fujitsu x2/40GB      | MSI K7T266     | Via KT266 | 56K   | 5 plus monitor hub | Iiyama VM Pro 451          | 19in        | 0.25mm    | 1,800x1,440          | 1,600x1,200 @90Hz           | Leadtek WinFast GeForce2 MX    | nVidia GeForce2 MX    | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 32x/12x/8x                    | Y                 | Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001                                     |
| <b>7</b> Evesham Axis 1.4 DVI<br>0870 728 7070<br>www.evesham.com                                                                                                   | 7                     | Nov 01         | 188              | £1,199         | 2-year onsite,<br>1-year return to base | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Maxtor x2/60GB       | MSI K7T266     | Via KT266 | 56K   | 4 (2 on front)     | Philips Brilliance 150P2E  | 15in        | 0.3mm     | 1,024x768            | 1,024x768 @75Hz             | Leadtek WinFast GeForce2 Ultra | nVidia GeForce2 Ultra | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 32x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me, StarOffice                                              |
| <b>8</b> Evesham Axis 1400 DGF<br>0870 728 7070<br>www.evesham.com                                                                                                  | 8                     | Sept 01        | 181              | £1,099         | 2-year onsite<br>1-year return to base  | AMD Athlon/1.4GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/40GB          | Asus A7M266    | AMD 761   | 56K   | 4                  | Samsung SyncMaster 570VTFT | 15in TFT    | 0.3mm     | 1,024x768            | 1,024x768 @85Hz             | WinFast GeForce3               | nVidia GeForce3       | 64MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Cambridge DTT2200         | 5/Y                      | 16x                | 32x/12x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me, Nero 5.0, StarOffice 5.2                                |
| <b>9</b> Multivision Vision Raid XS ME<br>0870 066 0882<br>www.multivision.co.uk                                                                                    | 9                     | Aug 01         | 179              | £849           | 1-year return to base,<br>4-year labour | AMD Athlon/1.2GHz               | 256MB SDRAM   | Seagate/40GB         | EpoX           | Via KT133 | 56K   | 4                  | LG Flatron 775FT           | 17in        | 0.24mm    | 1,600x1,200          | 1,600x1,200 @85Hz           | Videologic Vivid XS Kyro II    | PowerVR Kyro II       | 32MB                 | Videologic Sonic Fury                | Videologic DigiTheatre LC | 4/Y                      | 16x                | 40x/16x/10x                   | Y                 | Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite                                        |
| <b>10</b> PC World Advent 3931<br>08705 464 464<br>www.pcworld.co.uk                                                                                                | 10                    | Aug 01         | 178              | £1,020         | 1-year onsite,<br>2-year return to base | AMD Athlon/1.3GHz               | 256MB DDR RAM | Maxtor/40GB          | Gigabyte GA7DX | AMD 760   | 56K   | 2                  | Samsung 753 Dynafat        | 17in        | 0.24mm    | 1,024x768            | 1,024x768 @85Hz             | 3D Power GeForce2 MX           | nVidia GeForce2 MX    | 32MB                 | Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1  | Creative Labs FPS1000     | 4/Y                      | 16x                | 32x/8x/8x                     | Y                 | Windows Me, MS Works Suite, games bundle                            |

1 Hi-Grade Meridian N1400PV12

 Hi-Grade stays at the top of our Budget PC chart for another month. In the Meridian N1400PV12, Hi-Grade combines the Asus nForce motherboard, using nVidia's new nForce Crush chipset and onboard audio and graphics, with the Athlon XP 1600+ processor running at 1.4GHz, to create a new breed of PC.

While the price of the Meridian is well under £1,000, the performance blows away all our past Power PCs. With a

↓ The Best Buy Hi-Grade Meridian blows the competition away with its massive WorldBench score



→ The Systemax enters the chart at number two and features the impressive Athlon XP processor


WorldBench 2000 score of 241, it even snaps at the heels of the Athlon XP-based Power systems we tested last month.

You might expect graphics to be pretty good from nVidia (the makers of the GeForce3), and you'd be right. It can call upon up to 32MB of the 256MB of RAM on the Meridian, handle graphics up to a maximum resolution of 1,024x768 at 75Hz and support 128bit VGA with a 350MHz Ramdac. The Hi-Grade's audio is equally impressive with 5.1 Dolby Surround Sound onboard, backed up by Cambridge Soundworks 5.1 Dolby Prologic DTT2200 speakers and subwoofer. The rest of the package is just as good, with a 17in LG 775 Flatron screen, 16-speed DVD-ROM, 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW, 40GB hard drive, TV tuner card and wireless keyboard and mouse.

The nForce chipset lets Hi-Grade manufacture a great PC at a budget price, so you do have to ask: why pay more?



2 Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280

 Systemax has also opted to use the new Athlon XP in a budget PC, but unfortunately it's not backed by the nForce-based motherboard. So to include the same processor as a Power PC, the other system components have been downgraded to keep the price low.


For example, the Lifestyle comes with just 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, and the graphics are handled by a 64MB DDR GeForce3 card. Along with the Windows Me operating system (the other two Athlon XP machines use Windows 2000), this helps to explain the lower

WorldBench 2000 score of 196. However, it is still seven points higher than the third-placed NEC's result.

The Lifestyle is very much a consumer PC, and the extras you get reflect this. It comes with the Audigy sound card, which adds a FireWire port to your PC and provides superior audio effects for games. This is great as it comes with both a USB SideWinder gamepad and six games. It has a 19in CTX PR960F screen, making it one of only three entries in the Budget chart to offer this size of display.

If movies are more your thing there's a 16-speed DVD-ROM, and for backups there's a 32-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. Storage is handled by a 40GB hard drive. The PC has a three-year warranty (one-year onsite, two-year return-to-base).

3 NEC Powermate i-Select XL3 A1400

 The Powermate i-Select keeps its Recommended award under pressure from the Athlon XP systems. An immaculately conceived



↑ Losing its Best Buy award to the Hi-Grade, the NEC Powermate i-Select is still a powerful system

showstopper of a machine, the XL3 A1400 still knows exactly where to compromise and where to excel.

For a start, this Athlon-powered PC is pretty fast – it racked up a WorldBench 2000 score of 189. Alongside the AMD chip, the 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which is backed up by the sizeable 40GB hard drive, should keep even the most demanding users happy.


Indeed, you'll need that storage space because although bundled software is

often fairly thin on the ground in the Budget category, NEC treats buyers to an eclectic mixture of games, utilities, educational titles and reference tools – crowned by the inclusion of the comprehensive Britannica package.

The i-Select doesn't stint on innovation either, as it includes the Pioneer DVD-R/RW drive. DVD-R standards may still be up in the air but, when you can pack DVDs with up to 4.7GB of files, who's complaining? The supporting hardware is good too, and the 19in own-brand monitor provides a steady picture in spite of its 0.26mm dot pitch.

In terms of audio and graphics, the GeForce3 is the best graphics card on the market and performs well in the Powermate. The SoundBlaster Live 1024 and Labtec speaker system, on the other hand, make plenty of noise.

4 Best Price Poweroid 2004

 If chart placings were awarded on artistic merit alone, the Poweroid 2004 would have

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↑ The Recommended, hard-working Poweroid 2004 continues to fly the flag for Best Price

scored much more highly, as its futuristic metallic case is a conversation piece in its own right. The system's fourth-place finish is no poor reflection on the hardware inside, either.

The Poweroid 2004 opts for 256MB of standard SDRAM but, with the 1.4GHz AMD Athlon processor onboard, it provides as much speed as you could want. The WorldBench 2000 score of 188 is partly the result of the advanced hard drive setup. The Raid controller spreads the workload across two drives, so the 60GB storage space can be accessed in less time than a single drive.

The other specifications on the 2004 are excellent. The graphics card and monitor perform well together, and the sound system and DVD/CD-RW facilities are impressive.

Best Price has quickly established itself as an important player in the IT industry, and the Poweroid 2004 serves only to build on this outstanding reputation.



↑ The price-performance ratio of the Mesh Matrix DDR is good, and its audio setup is also impressive

5 Mesh Matrix DDR 1400GT

Generating incredible levels of performance for a shade under £1,000, the Mesh holds its place in the middle of the Budget PCs chart. While it no longer has any awards, its WorldBench 2000 score of 184 is still enough to keep within striking distance of all but the top performer, and it is only the graphics hardware that lets the side down – the GeForce2 MX fails to deliver the high frame rates of GeForce3 cards.

The sound system is a bonus – the Creative Live 5.1 and DTT2200 speakers combine beautifully.

Overall, then, Mesh has put together a powerful, well specified system with good all-round specifications for an impressive £849 price tag.

6 Panrix Magnum 1400PA

Proving that it isn't all about speed, the Panrix Magnum stays at number six this month, despite sprinting to one of the

higher WorldBench 2000 scores in the Budget PC category. It was perhaps the weaker graphics card that kept the Panrix from the top half of the chart.

On the up side, though, the Magnum's fast WorldBench 2000 score is a testament to the blending of the 1.4GHz Athlon chip and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, with over 40GB of Fujitsu hard drives. The sound system is first-class, and although the PC is a little cramped internally – a metal bar prevents



↑ The Panrix has one of the higher WorldBench scores, but its weak graphics setup lets it down

easy access to the components – this is more than compensated for by the surfeit of USB ports: four connectors are joined by a hub on the vibrant 19in Iiyama monitor. With its attractive price tag, only the hardened gamer would strike the Magnum 1400PA off their shopping list.

7 Evesham Axis 1.4 DVI

Evesham's Axis 1.4 DVI is a slimmed-down, souped-up version of its predecessor, the Axis 1400. Both pair

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↑ The Axis 1.4 DVI continues to stay ahead of its Evesham predecessor, the Axis 1400

a 1.4GHz Athlon processor with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, although the Axis 1.4 DVI adds to the mix with the Raid storage system used to such effect by the Best Price Poweroid 2004. The result is a fast WorldBench 2000 score of 188, as well as a massive 60GB of hard drive storage space.

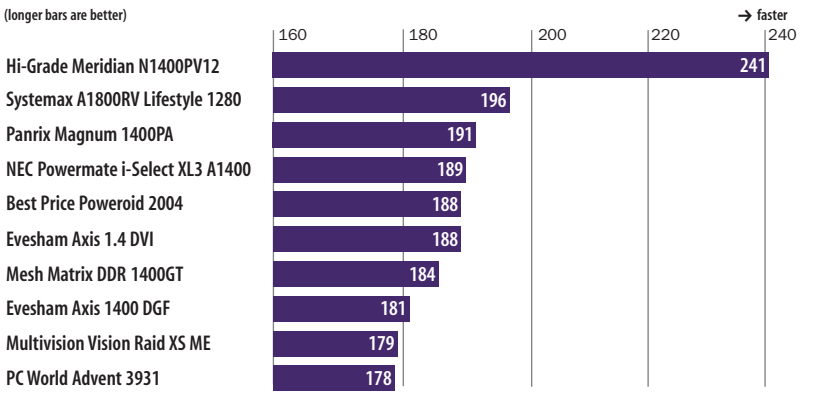
Both of the Evesham PCs come with a flat-panel, and the Axis 1.4 DVI's Philips 150P2E is another smooth performer. However, once again, the 15in flat-panel's maximum resolution of 1,024x768 may prevent users from getting the most out of the nVidia GeForce2 Ultra card, which is an excellent performer. The Axis' sound system is extremely good, and the tidy casing allows plenty of room for expansion.

Though the Evesham Axis 1.4 DVI falls short of the leaders of the pack, this ranks as yet another strong system from the company.



↑ The Evesham Axis 1400 DGF is a capable system, but it lacks the spark to keep it at the top of the chart

PC WorldBench 2000: Budget PCs



8 Evesham Axis 1400 DGF

A machine ahead of its time, the £1,099 Evesham Axis was the first Budget PC to mix an AMD Athlon 1.4GHz processor and 256MB of ultra-fast DDR (double data rate) memory. At the time, this combination proved devastatingly effect in our PC WorldBench 2000 tests and several months later, although it has been pushed down the chart, it is still an extremely competent performer.

The inclusion of a slimline 15in flat-panel shows forward thinking, although the low-resolution support could detract from the might of the 64MB GeForce3 card –



↑ The Multivision Vision Raid XS ME is a value-for-money, if somewhat average, system

normally an invaluable must-have for fervent gamers.

In general, the Axis 1400's list of specifications is impressive, even if the internal organisation underneath the lid isn't. With a slightly cheaper price tag, this respectable contender from Evesham would undoubtedly be able to attract more interest.

9 Multivision Vision Raid XS ME

The Multivision Vision Raid might lack the specifications of its superiors, but its 179 WorldBench 2000 score is strong. It uses the Kryo 3D graphics card and, despite its low price tag, has some surprising new technology – this was the first Budget PC, for instance, to use two hard disk drives. Still impressive, its sub-£900 price tag is its most striking feature.

10 PC World Advent 3931

In the middle of the Budget PCs price range, the Advent is finding it hard to compete with the latest 1.4GHz PCs. Its WorldBench 2000 score is acceptable in the light of the 1.3GHz processor, but its 3D performance isn't up to scratch. The Advent's specifications list reveals no obvious failings, but neither is there anything to shout about.

↓ The PC World Advent 3931 can't keep up with the 1.4GHz systems, as its low WorldBench proves



→ Turn to page 108 to see what's happening in the Top 10 Superbudget PC chart

Bundled speakers: what should you expect?

If there's one peripheral you'll always get on a new PC it's speakers. Even the cheapest systems come with some but, as you've no doubt guessed, quality varies considerably. Here's a brief rundown of what you should expect to get over each of our chart categories.

• Superbudget All low-end PCs will come with at least two speakers. This is enough to provide stereo support which is more than adequate for day-to-day business use but most desktop speakers are too tinny for playing music. It is possible to get a cheap PC including a subwoofer as well. For example,

our Best Buy, the Multivision Vision Elite XP LT, comes with five speakers and a subwoofer.

• Budget The number and quality of speakers goes up in this category. Cheap systems have own-brand labels but a Budget PC will come with trusted brand names like Creative. It's not unusual to find at least four speakers and a subwoofer in the bundle.

• Power A Power PC should come with the best audio setup money can buy. All the PCs in our chart come with five speakers and a subwoofer. Trusted brand names like Videologic and Creative combine speaker know-how with the best in sound cards – don't settle for anything less.