

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

		Superbudget PCs	Processor type Processor speed	RAM Hard disk capacity	Motherboard USB ports	Monitor Dot pitch Maximum resolution@75Hz
1	 Time Neptune 2600+ PQ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4 Ultra 4	17in LG 795FT 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		123	
2	 Multivision Vision Pro LT 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4V 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		121	
3	 Mesh Matrix XP 2400RD Plus 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite parts and labour warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		120	
4	 NetHighStreet Net PA669 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	Intel Pentium 4 2.41GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA-8PE67 6	17in Samsung SyncMaster 753DFX 0.25mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		119	
5	 Atlas Meridian 2.4GHz 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com LAST MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA-7VA 6	17in CTX PR705F 0.24mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		120	
6	 sdIT sd heaton 2530PCA 08707 442 456 www.sdIT.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	Intel Pentium 4 2.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM 60GB	Asus P4S533-E 6	17in Iiyama Vision Master 1403 0.27mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		120	
7	 Multivision Vision Elite eX 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Jan 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 60GB	MSI KT3 Ultra 2 4	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		113	
8	 Ideal Computing Aptus L40V 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		115	
9	 Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour warranty • First review Jan 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT3 Ultra 2 6	19in Sampo AlphaScan 871 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		117	
10	 Systemax Inspire 7377 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 60GB	MSI KT4V-L 6	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		117	



↑ A great specification list combined with a lightning performance earn the Time Neptune our coveted Best Buy award

Buying advice: Superbudget PCs

With prices as low as £699 and intense competition between manufacturers, there's bound to be a Superbudget system that suits your needs. You may not be forking out a fortune but you still want the highest specification for your money.

- Processor Although AMD's Athlon XP chips have ruled the roost in the sub-£699 category for well over a year now, there are signs that Intel is beginning to wrest the initiative. Even 2.41 and 2.53GHz Pentium 4

chips are now low enough in price to be affordable and for graphics and video work they produce the best performance.

For general Windows use, however, you're still far more likely to see an AMD Athlon XP producing the goods – the 2400+ and 2600+ chips are excellent choices.

AMD continues to dominate for the time being as Athlons cost less than Pentium 4s, making it easier for suppliers to put together a keenly priced system.

- Memory RAM prices are starting to rise so you may pay more now, but a minimum of 256MB with 512MB is still the best

Graphics card maker	Sound card	DVD drive speed	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
Graphics chip	Speakers	CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate		
Graphics card memory	Subwoofer			
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Educational titles, MSI Bluetooth transceiving key	The Neptune's fantastic turn of pace is aided not just by AMD's excellent processor but also by the generous 512MB of DDR RAM. The resulting WorldBench 4 score of 123 is a new record at this price point. A brilliant all-round PC, the 2600+ PQ is the only Superbudget model that can be all things to all customers.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/16x		
128MB	yes			
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	While it can't match the power of the Best Buy Time, the Vision Pro LT offers a top-notch specification list. Achieving a score of 121 in our WorldBench 4 tests, the Vision Pro delivers both speed and plenty of high-end components. Multivision has also provided an astounding six-year warranty, three years of which are onsite cover.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/24x		
64MB	yes			
Sapphire	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Mesh takes full advantage of Mitsubishi's well-priced but beautifully conceived monitor. Video is given an extra burst of energy courtesy of the 64MB Radeon 9500 graphics card and, though the Mesh only offers middle-of-the-road 3D gaming facilities, its video encoding capabilities are not far behind those of the two Pentium 4 machines.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
MSI	Creative Audigy	16x	Windows XP Home, games pack	The NetHighStreet is the perfect purchase for audio enthusiasts on a tight budget. Gamers can revel in the high frame rates pumped out by the graphics subsystem, but the machine is let down by the monitor's lacklustre resolution support (1,024x768 at best) which prevents this PC from being an outstanding games engine.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0, TV tuner, webcam	Often the smallest differences can be the defining factors. In the case of the Atlas Meridian the distinction is in the extras. The PC is fairly standard but additional items such as TV tuners and webcams add a further dimension. Having said that, few users will want to view TV on a 17in PC screen and the webcam is a low-budget model.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 8x	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002 Suite	The sd heaton will appeal to users from all walks of life, particularly those with a graphics bent. This PC offers further confirmation that Intel Pentium 4 chips are the source of a hot graphics system, coming in fastest on video encoding. General performance was good as well. A solid start for sdIT with plenty to please graphics enthusiasts.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	2 x Nicole SD211	40x/40x/10x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	Videologic Sonic eXplosion	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Vision Elite's 17in Mitsubishi monitor is an excellent choice, while the PC's sound system is as impressive as any in the chart. The system's star feature, however, is a sweeping six-year warranty. At a lesser price the Multivision would have plenty going for it, but without such a cut the competition simply deliver more goods for the money.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/40x/12x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office	The Aptus' middle-of-the-road results in our video and 3D games tests are the only failings in a PC that otherwise matches the competition almost component for component. The capacious 80GB hard drive and crystal-clear monitor are features that have already drawn praise. Unfortunately the lack of pace makes it something of a misnomer.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5100	48x/48x/12x		
64MB	yes			
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home	Shepley's inferior processor and the slothful performance of its ATI graphics card (which finished last in both the video encoding and 3D games tests) are the main offenders in this PC, although the 19in Sampo monitor is another deficiency. This is a shame, since in most other respects the system can hold its own against the other entries.
ATI Radeon 9000 Pro	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/12x		
128MB	yes			
Sapphire	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home	Systemax's WorldBench 4 score of 117 is commendable from the 2200+ chip and 256MB of DDR RAM, while the 64MB Radeon 9500 video card generates attractive, if not particularly fast, graphics. The 17in CTX isn't equal to the likes of the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB but the sound and drive facilities generally come up to scratch.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			

Windows XP option. To keep up with the technology, and to make your PC less costly to upgrade, look for faster DDR RAM rather than SDRAM.

- Storage Gigabytes abound these days, so demand no less than 60GB with an 80GB hard disk preferable. In terms of backup, a CD-RW drive is a must for the future. Look for performance of at least 40/10-speed (write/rewrite) with 48/24-speed better still.
- Monitor Bear in mind that this is the one part of your PC that you'll be using continuously. Look for a 17in screen

and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or 0.24mm.

If you're paying for a 19in then you'll probably lose out in terms of image quality.

- Graphics card The fantastic graphics technology of last year is now widely available on sub-£699 PCs. Look for a GeForce4 Ti 4200 or an ATI Radeon 9500 for decent frame rates without exorbitant cost. You should now expect cards of at least this quality, so don't be fobbed off with the GeForce4 MX series or the Radeon 9000.

In terms of graphics memory, 128MB is best but you're more likely to have to

settle for 64MB. If you're offered a Ti 4600 or a Radeon 9700 accept it but make sure that your monitor can cope. Many Superbudget monitors only go up to a resolution of 1,024x768 and this won't help you get the highest image quality from your graphics card.

- Sound card A standalone card like Creative's Audigy is a good choice, but integrated audio is improving. Team it up with a strong set of speakers – for example, Creative's Inspire 5300 or Videologic's ZXR-500 – and few users will notice the difference.