

TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

		Budget PCs		Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor
				Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch
							Maximum resolution@75Hz
1	 Multivision Vision Pro Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.1GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek Winfast 2 127	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
2	 Evesham Axis 2400+MK 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,049 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Leadtek Winfast 4 126	17in flat-panel LG L1710B 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	
3	 CCL Home X-Force 812 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Epox 6 122	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 452 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
4	 Evesham Axis 2600+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz WorldBench 4	256MB DDR RAM 100GB	MSI MS-6712 6 122	19in LG Flatron F900P 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
5	 Shepley GA400 XP24 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £899 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte GA 7VA 6 119	19in AOC 9KLR+ 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
6	 Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7V-8X 4 128	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
7	 Ideal Aptus G30 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03 	Intel Pentium 4 2.6GHz WorldBench 4	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte G8PE667 6 121	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
8	 Multivision Vision KT 4 9700 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Sep 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI MS-6590 KT4 6 117	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
9	 Time Mercury 2800+ PQ 01282 777 555 www.time.computers.com NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,199 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.27GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI MS-6590 KT4 4 127	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
10	 NEC Powermate i-Select XL53 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 03 	Intel Pentium 4 3.06GHz WorldBench 4	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Intel 6 116	19in NEC FE991SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	



↑ With a powerful Athlon processor and a GeForce4 graphics card that supports the 8x AGP standard, the Multivision Vision Pro Ti is a worthy Best Buy

1 Multivision Vision Pro Ti
 Topping the Budget PCs table and winning this month's Best Buy award is the Vision Pro Ti. This Multivision system is powered by the Athlon XP 2700+ processor, one of the newest AMD chips, which helped it pull in an impressive WorldBench 4 score of 127.

Another brand-new component in the Vision Pro is the graphics card. The nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 is essentially a Ti 4600 card with 8x AGP (accelerated graphics port) support. This effectively means that the graphics bus (which transports

information to and from the card) has a bandwidth double that of the current 4x AGP standard used by the Ti 4600 range. This should lead to smoother and more realistic graphics.

The GeForce4 Ti 4800 card certainly has potential – in our graphics tests it achieved frame rates of 95.9fps (frames per second) running the Quake III Annihilator demo at a resolution of 1,024x768. Even when we upped the resolution to a more taxing 1,600x1,200 the frame rate still only dropped slightly to 89.1fps.



↑ If you're short of desk space then the Evesham Axis 2400+MK, with its slimline flat-panel, may be the answer

Graphics card maker Graphics chip Graphics card memory	Sound card Speakers Subwoofer	DVD drive speed CD-RW read/ write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software and extras
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE
Gainward nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 32x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0
ATI ATI Radeon 9000 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Sun Star Office
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home

Multivision also bundles a great monitor, which will make the most of the visuals. The Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 gives a brilliant image and also has a four-port USB hub and built-in speakers. Rounding off the Multivision's specifications is 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a hefty 120GB hard drive. With a warranty that gives you three years of onsite cover followed by three years of labour-only cover, it's easy to see why the Vision Pro Ti wins the Best Buy award this month.

2 Evesham Axis 2400+MK

Second place goes to Evesham with the Axis 2400+MK. As the name suggests, this system is built around an AMD Athlon XP 2400+ processor running at 2GHz. Though it's not one of the newest AMD chips it's still a very capable CPU, as the Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 126 attests.

By now 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM has become standard in this category, although the 80GB hard drive is smaller than many of the other



contenders' offerings. Having said that, you would have your work cut out filling up a hard drive of this size.

The graphics are handled ably by an ATI Radeon 9500 card. Although not of the standard of the 9700, it helped the Evesham achieve excellent frame rates when playing the Quake III Annihilator demo: 84.8fps (frames per second) at a resolution of 1,024x768. In terms of the display, Evesham has opted for LG's L1710B, an excellent 17in flat-panel. Not only does it perform well and free up some desk space, it looks good and adds a couple of extra USB ports to the mix too.

The audio is provided by the nForce2 motherboard and, while onboard sound is never going to be as good as having a standalone card, it still supports six channels and will certainly give the Creative Inspire 5300 speaker system something to shout about.

With a three-year warranty, the first two years of which are onsite, the Evesham system is a good buy, particularly if you want a decent flat-panel. However, the overall value of the Multivision system means that Evesham has to settle for second place.

3 CCL Computers Home X-Force 812

Nabbing the second Recommended award is the Home X-Force 812 from CCL. Good performance and a decent set of specifications help this system stand out from the other contenders, but its real boon is the CD-RW/DVD-RW combo drive.

The Pioneer DVR 105 offers even more backup options than a CD-RW drive – if you have large amounts of data to store then a DVD writer is a real bonus. That CCL has managed to include one in a system that costs less than £1,000 is pretty impressive.

The Athlon XP 2400+ processor combines with the Epox motherboard and nForce2 chipset





↑ The outstanding feature in the Home X-Force 812 is its bundled CD-/DVD-RW combo drive

to help the CCL gain a WorldBench 4 score of 122. The Iiyama Vision Master Pro 452 monitor lacks the USB ports and built-in speakers of its older brother, the Vision Master Pro 454, but still offers a high-quality image. The graphics card is a Gainward Ultra 650 XP Golden Sample with 128MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and this achieved impressive frame rates in our graphics tests.

The audio chip is onboard but it does offer good-quality six-channel sound so the Videologic ZXR 500 speakers aren't wasted. With six USB ports, two of which are front-mounted, and two FireWire ports you'll be able to connect as many peripherals as you want to the CCL.

The warranty isn't the best, however, with just one year of onsite cover followed by two years return-to-base cover. But for £999, the Home X-Force 812 represents very good value for money.

4 Evesham Axis 2600+

The Evesham Axis 2600+ was last month's Best Buy but gets pushed down to fourth place by the spate of new entries this month. However, this decent system still wins itself a Recommended award.



The Athlon XP 2600+ processor pushes the Evesham to a healthy WorldBench 4 score of 122, but we think this could have been even higher if it housed more than 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. Although, in the Axis' defence, the memory is the new, fast DDR400 as opposed to the DDR333 which is used by most of the other systems in the chart.

The monitor is LG's Flatron F900P which provides a top-notch image while adding four extra USB ports to the six on the tower unit. There's an Audigy sound card, but the graphics is handled by a GeForce4 Ti 4200 card with only 64MB of DDR RAM.

If you're a serious gamer, or use graphics-intensive applications, you'll probably want a card that's more capable than this.



5 Shepley GA400 XP24

Entering the chart at number five and narrowly missing out on a Recommended award in the process is Shepley with the GA400 XP24. If you're looking to buy a Budget system then this mid-placed PC is still worthy of consideration due to its good all-round specification and decent price. Overall, though, the package does have one or two shortcomings.

On the plus side, the GA400 XP24 houses 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 120GB hard drive, which will provide more than enough room for storage. Shepley has opted for an ATI Radeon 9000 graphics card – not the best Radeon on the market but still a capable model with 128MB of onboard DDR RAM. The Creative Audigy sound card forms a good partnership with the Videologic ZXR 500 speaker system and at the heart of the computer is an Athlon XP 2400+ processor.

The major failings of the Shepley, however, lie in its monitor and warranty. The AOC 9KLR+ monitor is a basic model to say the least, while the three-year warranty doesn't include any onsite cover whatsoever.



6 Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro

Dropping from second to sixth place is the Mesh Matrix XP 2400+, which still holds the record for the highest WorldBench 4 score in the Budget PC category. A 2GHz Athlon XP 2400+ processor powers this unit and, combined with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 120GB hard drive, this system certainly doesn't lack in terms of high-quality components.

The visuals are taken care of by an MSI GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card which is still a good model despite not being able to match the performance of the Radeon 9700 Pro cards. The Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920 monitor displays a high-quality image and offers a dot pitch of 0.24mm. Unfortunately, though, it doesn't feature any USB ports or built-in speakers. In terms of audio, the Creative Audigy sound card helps get the best out of the Creative Inspire 5300 speaker system.

The warranty is three years long but only provides return-to-base cover. This may not be the worst deal on offer in the Budget chart, but we'd prefer to see some sort of onsite cover.

7 Ideal Aptus G30

In seventh place this month is the Aptus G30 from Ideal Computing. One of the few systems in this chart to opt for an Intel chip, the 2.6GHz Pentium 4 spurred the Aptus on to achieve a WorldBench 4 score of 121. While this is not an outstanding performance, it's still a respectable score.

The Ideal Aptus' 80GB hard drive is still going to provide plenty of storage space, although it's smaller than many of the other contenders' hard drives. The 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, instead of the usual 512MB, is also slightly meagre. Indeed, only one other Budget system offers this amount.

The Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB is a good-quality monitor even if it lacks features and the Sapphire Radeon



9700 Atlantis Pro is an excellent graphics card that makes the most of the display. You will, however, have to make do with an onboard audio chip as there's no standalone sound card.

8 Multivision Vision KT 4 9700

The Multivision may drop from third to eighth place, but this is more a reflection of the quality of the new systems rather than the shortcomings of the KT 4 9700. An unconvincing



WorldBench 4 score of 117 doesn't compare favourably with the opposition, but the 9700 still has plenty to offer.

There's the generous 120GB IBM hard drive and the ATI Radeon 9700, currently one of the best graphics cards available on the market. The standalone Creative Audigy sound card is another bonus and this also provides you with a FireWire port. Another good point is the warranty: three years of onsite cover is backed up with three years labour only.

On the down side, the Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB monitor (which is also used in the seventh-placed Ideal Aptus G30) is a fairly basic model with few additional features.

9 Time Mercury 2800+ PQ

With the most powerful Athlon processor available, the 2.27GHz XP 2800+, it's not surprising that the Mercury 2800+ PQ achieved an impressive score of 127 in the WorldBench 4 tests. However, the Time system only manages ninth place in this month's Budget PC chart because it doesn't offer good value for money compared to the opposition – for £1,199 you'd expect more than just a three-year, return-to-base warranty.



There's a sizeable 120GB hard drive, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an excellent monitor in the shape of the LG Flatron 915FT Plus. You'll be

Buying advice



Buying a PC when you're on a budget is tough – the trick is to figure out precisely what you want to use the system for. This way, you know which areas you need to spend money on and in which areas you can compromise. For example, if you're a gamer you'll need a good graphics card and monitor. Alternatively, if you're into digital video editing then you'll want the biggest hard drive you can afford.

- **Processor** The Athlon 2400+ chip dominates this chart at the moment, but the 2600+, 2700+ and 2800+ chips crop up in one or two systems. If you want a Pentium 4, look for one that runs at speeds of at least 2.4GHz.

- **Memory** The standard memory allotment in the Budget chart is fast becoming 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, although 256MB of DDR RAM should serve the needs of most users. Aim to get PC2700 (DDR333) RAM as this will give better performance than PC2100 (DDR266) memory.

- **Storage** Most Budget systems will come with a 120GB hard drive, but 80GB should prove to be more than enough. In terms of CD-RWs, don't go for anything with less than 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities.

- **Monitor** Only be satisfied with a 17in monitor if it has very good specifications, as it's easy to get a decent 19in model at this price point. Either way, check that it can achieve an optimal resolution of 1,280x1,024 at 75Hz; for really sharp images look for 1,600x1,200. In terms of dot pitch, 0.25mm or lower is fine. Flat-panels will push the price of the system up but it might be worth it if space is at a premium.

- **Graphics** A 64MB budget graphics card will probably suffice but you can find the new 128MB cards being offered in this price range. The top-of-the-range models at the moment are nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 and ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro, but if you don't need the fastest frame rates a GeForce4 Ti 4200 or ATI Radeon 9000 Pro are still capable graphics cards.

- **Sound** Creative's Audigy card is the best option, although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still available. Speaker systems should have five satellites and a subwoofer.

pleased by this unit if you're a gamer as it comes with a gamepad and the visuals are handled competently by a Sapphire Radeon 9700 Atlantis Pro graphics card. On the down side the audio chip is onboard and, while it can still produce six-channel output, the quality can't compare with a standalone card.

10 NEC Powermate i-Select XL53 Bringing up the rear this month is the Powermate i-Select XL53 – a slow and pricey PC with a mere one-year warranty. The only Budget system powered by a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 processor, the

NEC performed surprisingly badly in WorldBench 4, scoring only 116. While it has a space-saving tower, the monitor is a 19in CRT (cathode ray tube) monster which seems to defeat the point. If NEC had opted for a flat-panel then the i-Select would be perfect if you're short on desk space. On the plus side, NEC has bundled an Epson C42 printer with the system.

