

TOP 10 POWER PCs

		Power PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	
						Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		Mesh Matrix 3000+ Xtra 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com NEW	• £1,299 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB	Asus A7N8X 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	136			
2		Carrera SSC Focus Extreme 3.0PA 0870 066 0682 www.carrera.co.uk NEW	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 180GB	Asus A7N8X 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	132			
3		Mesh Matrix 3000+ RD98 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com NEW	• £1,299 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Jun 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 200GB	Asus A7N8X 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	133			
4		MicroLand Addons Power PC 0870 443 0399 www.microland.co.uk NEW	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base, 3-year labour-only warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	1GB DDR RAM 160GB	MSI K792 Delta 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	133			
5		Multivision Vision Ionix Wonder 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Apr 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	129			
6		Multivision Ionix 98 GX 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk NEW	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 180GB	MSI K792 6	19in LG Flatron F900P 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	130			
7		Time Mercury 3000+ PQ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com NEW	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB	MSI KT4 Ultra 5	19in LG Flatron F900P 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	131			
8		NethHighStreet Net PA1200T 0870 777 5252 www.nethhighstreet.com NEW	• £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return warranty • First review Jul 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz	1GB DDR RAM 160GB	Gigabyte GA-7VAXP Ultra 6	17in Samsung SM171S flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4	132			
9		Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ NDX 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 2	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Apr 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	1,024MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7N8X 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	130			
10		Evesham Axis 2700+ AE 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 3	• £1,249 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Apr 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek WinFast 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4	131			

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↑ The record-breaking Mesh Matrix 3000+ Xtra achieved the highest performance score in the chart

1 Mesh Matrix 3000+ Xtra

The Matrix slices through our Power PC records like a knife through butter, with its 136 points in WorldBench 4 comfortably beating the previous top score. Over half of the charted PCs at least match the Athlon XP 3000+ chip and 512MB of DDR333 RAM, but no other system provides a top-notch performance in so many areas.

The Radeon 9700 Pro continues to rack up high frame rates, but the 9800 Pro and GeForce FX chips have put a dent in its reputation. It's therefore surprising

to see the 9700 Pro-powered Matrix riding high in our graphics and video tests. Even more alluring is the fact that this is the All-In-Wonder version, so it adds advanced television and video recorder capabilities.

The 19in monitor is the polished Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB. This might not offer as sharp a picture as the Diamond Pro 930SB, but it's still one of the best screens available and its SuperBright function bumps up the brightness.

Armed with a range of digital and audio sockets, Creative's Audigy2 Platinum is combined with the Inspire 6700 (offering

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
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro All-In-Wonder 128MB	Creative Audigy2 Platinum 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	12x 40x/32x/10x (CD-RW), 4x/2.4x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003
Gainward nVidia GeForce FX 5800 Ultra 128MB	onboard nForce 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	16x 40x/16x/10x (CD-RW), 2.4x/2.4x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Carrera training CD, games bundle
ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	16x 48x/48x/24x (CD-RW), 4x/2x (DVD-RW), 2.4x/2.4x (DVD+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003
ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x (CD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Soldier of Fortune 2, Hitman 2, spare CD-Rs
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy2 Platinum 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	16x 32x/16x/8x (CD-RW), 4x/2x/1x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB	onboard nForce 4 x Creative 4400 yes	16x 40x/16x/10x (CD-RW), 4x/2x (DVD-RW), 4x/2.4x (DVD+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 32x/12x/8x (CD-RW), 2x/1x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Professional, StarOffice 5.2, flash memory reader, software bundle
Gigabyte ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 4 x Creative 4400 yes	16x 48x/48x/24x (CD-RW)	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice, games bundle
ATI ATI Radeon Pro 9700 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	n/a 32x/24x/10x (CD-RW) 8x/4x/2x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Works Suite 2003, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	16x 32x/8x/4x (CD-RW) 10x/2x/1x (DVD-RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002

six speakers and a subwoofer) to produce heart-stopping audio. Internally, the PC is well arranged and spacious, while six USB and two FireWire ports offer plenty of connectivity.

We were, however, disappointed with the bundled drives. The 160GB Maxtor hard disk is capacious and a quad-speed DVD-R is good, but the 12-speed DVD playback and 32/10-speed CD-R/RW facilities could be improved.

Despite this, though, with its list of top-of-the-range components, the Mesh is a Power PC that's hard to resist.

2 Carrera SSC Focus Extreme 3.0PA

While nothing could surpass the Matrix for raw Windows performance, the Carrera SSC's magic ingredient, nVidia's GeForce FX 5800 Ultra, makes this the speediest games PC in the chart.

Its graphics chip may be fast but, despite the best efforts of top card manufacturer Gainward, the excessive noise levels will put off any PC user who likes to work in a quiet room. Frame rates are very good, though – 96-97fps (frames per second) compare



↑ For gamers, the Recommended Carrera SSC Focus Extreme is an excellent choice

favourably with the Mesh's 92-93fps, while on video the Mesh is just two seconds faster. The Focus Extreme also fares well in standard Windows applications, coaxing a WorldBench score of 132 from its Athlon XP 3000+ processor and 512MB of DDR400 RAM.

The splendid Diamond Pro 930SB screen offers arguably the best text and image quality of any of the 19in models. The sound system is only a notch down on this standard. We would have preferred the Creative Audigy2 to the onboard nForce audio controller, but the Inspire 6700 speakers guarantee earth-shaking sound quality. The strong drive options include a huge 180GB IBM hard drive and a 2.4-speed NEC DVD-R/-RW burner, while the five-year warranty (three of those are onsite) offers peace of mind. A front-mounted FireWire port is included alongside the six USB connectors.

For general Windows use, the Mesh is the better, not to mention quieter, deal but for the fastest and smoothest of gaming experiences, the Focus Extreme 3.0PA is the true winner.

3 Mesh Matrix 3000+ RD98

Reviewed last month, the Matrix 3000+ RD98 captivated us with its white-hot features list. And it's only against the new-and-improved Best Buy Xtra that the RD98 looks slightly outclassed.

No company gets more out of the Athlon XP 3000+ and 512MB of DDR333 RAM than Mesh, and the RD98's WorldBench 4 score of 133 remains one of the highest in the chart. Hats off also go to the Creative Audigy2 and Inspire 6700 sound system, the virtually flawless 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB monitor and the first-class clutch of drives.

The latter includes not just a 200GB hard disk and 48/24-speed CD-R/RW facilities, but also a superb Sony DVD burner that offers





↑ The high-specced Mesh Matrix 3000+ RD98 features a Sony drive that supports DVD-RW and DVD+RW formats

support for both major standards. Whether DVD-RW or DVD+RW becomes the format formally adopted by PC users worldwide, the Sony drive will ensure Mesh customers aren't left out of the loop.

Aside from the slightly cramped internal organisation, the only problem with the RD98 is that it's been gazumped by the newer and superior Matrix 3000+ Xtra.

4 MicroLand Addons Power PC

Newcomer MicroLand is one of only two PC makers in the chart that hasn't bundled a DVD burner with its system. The upside is that the money saved by omitting this drive (probably in excess of £100) has been spent bolstering the rest of the PC.

There's a first-rate sound system (Creative's Audigy2 combined with the superb Inspire 6700 speakers); fantastic video courtesy of the ATI Radeon 9800 Pro (only the Mesh and Carrera PCs fared better in our graphics and video tests); and a healthy 1GB of DDR400 RAM.

The Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB is one of the better 19in monitors, while extras include a six-year warranty, bundled games package and clear documentation.



However good the MicroLand Addons is, we can't ignore the fact that the top three systems offer similar facilities with a DVD burner thrown into the bargain.

5 Multivision Vision Ionix Wonder Despite the odds, the three-month-old Ionix Wonder extends its tenure in the top half of the table, finishing ahead of a host of new PCs including Multivision's latest system.

Unlike most of its competitors, the Ionix has always been about more than raw speed. Only the ninth fastest PC, the Ionix is also middle of the pack in terms of graphics and video performance. Neither is the 120GB hard drive that generous, although it should be large enough for all but the most video-hungry users.

The handsome Multivision delivers where it matters, though, and the quad-speed DVD-R capabilities, smooth 19in Mitsubishi monitor and six-year warranty will have users voicing their approval.

The Vision scores top marks for its audio, pairing the Creative Inspire 6700 speaker kit with its Audigy2 Platinum sound card. There's a host of audio connectors and sockets plastered across the front of the PC, while its six USB 2.0 and five FireWire ports means that no rival PC offers more connectivity options.



6 Multivision Ionix 98 GX

The lengthy warranty has become a Multivision speciality, but the Ionix 98 GX trumps even its own impressive track record, claiming a whopping seven years support (three onsite and four return-to-base labour-only). In most other respects though, this PC marks a drop-off in form for the frequent chart-topping company.

The NEC DVD burner is a strong addition, combining high speeds with compatibility for both major standards – DVD-RW and DVD+RW. The 180GB IBM hard drive is also a bonus. But otherwise the Ionix flags and its WorldBench 4 and graphics performance are no more than adequate. The

19in LG Flatron F900P's soft image quality fails to measure up to the healthy resolution support.

We would also have preferred an improved sound system, although the onboard nForce audio controller and Creative 4400 speakers (containing four speakers and a subwoofer) generate palatable output. The case is attractive, but lift the lid and the large bar blocks easy access to the internal workings.

There's plenty of power under the Multivision's bonnet but look elsewhere and you'll find a better deal.

7 Time Mercury 3000+ PQ

When manufacturers are so closely matched, there are always going to be some PCs that, through no fault of their own, simply lack the chutzpah to force their way to the top of the charts. The Time Mercury is a capable PC, but you'll get more bang for your buck by looking elsewhere.

The 19in LG monitor lacks the gorgeous colour palette and sharp definition of the Mitsubishi screens. Time also fails to get the best out of the Athlon XP 3000+ processor, while the Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card produced some of the lowest frame rates in the chart.

A decent software bundle is generally a given with Time PCs, but this month's package of titles wasn't quite as outstanding as in previous months.

Nonetheless, the Time comes complete with most of the important components and features. Its range of ports and connectors include five USB ports (with another four on the monitor) and three FireWire connectors.

The addition of a flash memory drive is the Mercury's one standout accessory,

allowing users to read information from a variety of formats such as CompactFlash and Secure Digital.



8 NetHighStreet Net PA1200T

Like MicroLand's offering, NetHighStreet's latest system doesn't offer a DVD burner. But where MicroLand spent the extra money this saved wisely, NetHighStreet has blown much of its budget on a flat-panel display. The 17in Samsung SM171S is an attractive slimline screen but, even with the omission of a DVD burner, plenty of corners have been cut to accommodate it.

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Audio, for instance, is handled by the original Audigy card with a four-speaker and subwoofer 4400 system. The Radeon

card is the 9700 Pro rather than the faster 9800 Pro and, as such, the PA1200T produces some of the lowest frame rates in the chart. The slew of ports and connectors offer some compensation, but the warranty is disappointing.

Although performance is good, we would have expected a higher WorldBench score from the 1GB of DDR333 RAM and Raid interface.

9 Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ NDX

With seven new entries beating the Matrix's Athlon XP 2700+ chip, this Mesh entry is slowly being pushed out of the chart. It achieved 130 points in WorldBench 4 and its 1,024MB of DDR RAM played a major part in this.

The first thing you notice about the XP 2700+ NDX is the unusual case – mainly dark grey with a beige front – so it might not be everyone's cup of tea looks-wise.

The Audigy2 sound card and Creative's Inspire 6700 speaker system create great audio, however, and backup is covered thanks to a quad-speed DVD writer. The Radeon Pro 9700 and Mitsubishi Diamond



Pro 930SB handle graphics and it's all covered by a three-year onsite warranty.

Buying advice

- **Processor** After a brief resurgence of interest in Intel's processor family – in particular, the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 and the HT (hyperthreading) capabilities of the high-end 3.06GHz P4 – AMD has now resumed its near-total dominance of the Power PCs chart. The AMD Athlon 3000+ (with the Barton core) may run at just 2.17GHz, but its performance exceeds that generated by the fastest Intel chip.

- **Memory** Settle for no less than 512MB – some PCs are now coming with 1GB onboard. Ensure that you're getting the quicker DDR RAM, rather than SDRAM, and look for DDR333 or DDR400.

- **Storage** If you'll be using your PC for video editing then go for the most storage you can afford. Few, if any, Power PCs come with less than 100GB and for video enthusiasts 180GB or 200GB units can be specified at little extra cost. Have backup covered with at least a 40/32/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive, although if CD burning is likely to be a regular activity look for one of the higher-end 48/48/24 or 52/52/24-speed drives. DVD writers are becoming almost as common as CD-RW drives.

There are several competing DVD writing standards and to ensure your drive doesn't become redundant in the future look for one that supports both major formats – that is, DVD-RW and DVD+RW.

- **Monitor** Look for a 19in screen that offers a resolution of 1,600x1,200 and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or less. Flat-panel displays can vary wildly in quality – opt for a 17in or 18in screen that can support a resolution of 1,280x1,024.

- **Graphics card** The ATI Radeon 9700 and 9800 Pro cards are faring well at the moment. nVidia's GeForce FX5800 also offers excellent performance, but only if you don't mind the near-deafening noise of its cooling system. If you're after a gaming system, opt for no less than 128MB of dedicated RAM.

- **Sound card and speakers** Creative's Audigy2 offers top-quality audio and adds an extra FireWire port. This sound card can support seven channels, so you'll need a subwoofer and six satellites to use it to its full potential – Creative's Inspire 6700 setup is a great choice. Creative's Inspire 5300 and Videologic's ZXR-500 systems, offering a subwoofer with five satellite speakers, are often bundled with Power PCs.

**10** Evesham Axis 2700+ AE

The Axis' WorldBench 4 score of 131 and mid-table graphics frame rates prove that it can still turn heads, while the audio capabilities combine Creative's Audigy2 sound card with Inspire 6700 speakers. The Evesham is well connected as well, including four USB and four FireWire ports.

Though the Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB monitor isn't quite as good as the Diamond Pro 930SB, its image quality and resolution support are still hard to beat.

The Axis' only enemy is the passage of time – the Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card and Athlon XP 2700+ processor are

a notch down on most of the competition's components.

At £1,249, the Evesham Axis is

expensive for an admittedly dated PC, but with a price cut this would make a proud addition to any household. ■



Unsure of a technical term? Find out exactly what it means in our searchable Glossary which is on the cover disc