

## TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

		Budget PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	
						Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		<b>Multivision Vision Elite eX</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour 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
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>113</b>			
2		<b>Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System</b> 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	• £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
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>117</b>			
3		<b>Multivision Vision Elite 4200</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	MSI 4	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>119</b>			
4		<b>Carrera SSC Octan 2100a</b> 0871 222 3456 www.carrera.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	• £699 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	Asus A7V333 6	17in NEC FE770 0.25mm 1,024x768
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>117</b>			
5		<b>Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ SB</b> 0208 208 4744 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 5	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2.0GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>115</b>			
6		<b>Ideal Computing Aptsu L150</b> 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Chaintech Apogee 7VJL 6	17in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 413 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>115</b>			
7		<b>PC World Advent 3810 BTO</b> 0870 546 4464 www.pcworld.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Gigabyte GA7VRXP 8	17in Samsung SyncMaster 753 DFX 0.25mm 1,024x768
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>120</b>			
8		<b>Systemax Inspire 7327</b> 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2.0GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	MSI KT4VL 6	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>115</b>			
9		<b>NetHighStreet Net PA699</b> 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 9	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Asus A7V333 4	17in Hansol 710D 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>114</b>			
10		<b>Systemax Inspire 7152</b> 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return, 2-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	MSI MS 6380E 4	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			<b>WorldBench 4</b>	<b>119</b>			

## Buying advice: superbudget PCs

Despite Intel's recent assertiveness at the top end of the processor market, AMD dominates in this chart. At the moment, Athlons cost less than Pentium 4s, making it easier for suppliers to put together a keenly priced system.

Processor prices are in a continual state of depreciation, and currently the Athlon XP 2000+ and 2100+ are starting to be displaced by the newer 2200+ and 2400+ chips as they become viable options for Superbudget systems. However, the difference in performance

between these processors isn't that dramatic; indeed, the system that achieved the top WorldBench 4 score in this category uses the older 2000+. In Intel's range, look for at least a 2GHz Pentium 4, though it might be wiser to stick to AMD chips at this price point.

Unlike processors, RAM prices are starting to rise at the moment, so you may have to pay a little bit more for your memory. You should still aim for 256MB, though. It's also worth paying a little extra for the faster DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than SDRAM, as that way your memory will hold its value better in the

coming years. If your budget is extremely tight you may have to be willing to accept just 128MB of DDR RAM. This is not a grave problem, though, as you will be able to buy and install more easily enough.

In terms of storage space, gigabytes abound these days, so you can afford to demand no less than 40GB from your hard drive, with 60GB preferable. For fast file access, look for a motherboard that features an Ultra ATA-100 interface. A CD-RW drive is a must for the future – look for CD-R/rewrite performance of at least 10-speed.

	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	Comments
	Gainward nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Videologic Sonic eXplosion 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Despite only getting 113 in the WorldBench 4 tests, the Vision Elite eX's all-round specification equals any other system in this chart. Its real outstanding feature, though, is its generous warranty – three years of onsite cover followed by a further three years of labour-only cover is by far the best offer in this chart.
	ATI ATI Radeon 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home	Shepley's first foray into the Superbudget chart came close to snatching the top spot. Its WorldBench 4 score of 117 is impressive and the 19in monitor is the only one in the chart. The audio chip is onboard, but does support six channels so the Videologic ZXR-500 speakers aren't wasted.
	nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Vision Elite 4200 is another impressive combination of quality components and a generous warranty from Multivision. The specification gets a WorldBench 4 score of 119, the second speediest in the chart. The sound is disappointing but the graphics are strong and the warranty is very impressive.
	Asus nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Cyber Acoustics 5.1 yes	16x 40x/40x/10x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office	Whether or not its bold design takes your fancy, the Octan 2100a is a good system that deservedly takes fourth place. It is slightly let down by the average NEC FE770 monitor, but the warranty is good, offering two years of onsite and three further years of labour-only cover.
	ATI ATI Radeon 64MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Though it boasts the Athlon XP 2400+ processor, the Matrix doesn't set the world on fire, managing only 115 in WorldBench 4. With its Creative Audigy sound card, it is certainly a good system for creating or playing music. The warranty is a bit of a let-down though: although it is three years long it's only return-to-base.
	Chaintech nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	onboard 4 x Mercury Home Theatre yes	16x 48x/40x/16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office	The monitor is a strong point in this system – the Iiyama Vision Master Pro 413 is our current Best Buy 17in display. There's also 512MB of DDR (double data rate) memory and an 80GB hard drive. Sound is not quite as solid, and while the warranty lasts five years, you only get onsite cover for the first year.
	nVidia nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/32x/12x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0	The Advent achieved the highest Superbudget WorldBench 4 score in the chart: 120. However, gamers will certainly be disappointed with the graphics card and the monitor. The warranty is another area in which the Advent 3810 BTO falls down. Just one year of cover is inadequate, even if it is onsite.
	MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 5 x Creative FPS1600 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Surprisingly, the Athlon XP 2400+ processor, one of only two in this chart, failed to help the Inspire 7327 to anything like an outstanding WorldBench 4 score. What's more, its inclusion was at the cost of both sound and graphics. There is a large 80GB hard drive, though, and six USB ports for plugging in peripheral devices.
	MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 4 x Creative FPS1600 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The AMD Athlon XP 2000+ processor, 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and 60GB IBM hard drive combined to give the Net PA699 a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 114. The Hansol 710D monitor, however, doesn't live up to the strong graphics card, and the warranty is only a lack-lustre one-year onsite.
	Gainward nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Systemax Inspire scored a speedy 119 in our WorldBench 4 tests, due in no small part to the Athlon XP 2200+. However, the monitor and graphics card are basic to say the least and the onboard sound doesn't do justice to the Videologic speakers. Another disappointment is the warranty.

When choosing your monitor, bear in mind that it is the one part of your PC that you will be using continuously. You should be looking for a 17in screen and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or 0.24mm, although bear in mind that even screens with a higher dot pitch can produce good images. You may find one or two systems available in this category with a 19in monitor, but be wary – just because it's bigger doesn't necessarily mean that it will be better.

As long as your screen is decent, you can get good results from the graphics cards in this area of the market. nVidia's budget GeForce4 MX cards offer superb

frame rates for a reasonable outlay, but you may be able to find a system with a GeForce4 Ti 4200. If you want to opt for ATI over nVidia, aim to get the new Radeon 9000 Pro card.

A standalone sound card, like Creative's SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is a good choice, but integrated audio is getting better; Cmedia supports full 5.1 surround on some motherboards. However, if your audio chip does support six channels, then you'll need a 5.1 speaker system to get the best out of it.

↓ Multivision combines great specification with a good warranty to take Best Buy

