

TOP 10 POWER PCs

		Power PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch
						Maximum resolution@75Hz
1	 Evesham Axis 2700+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,349 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Feb 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7N8X	19in LG F900P
			2.17GHz	120GB	8	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		129	1,600x1,200
2	 Best Price Poweroid 2201 0870 220 0444 www.poweroid.com LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,399 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Feb 03 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	MSI 845E Max2	19in CTX PR960F
			2.8GHz	2 x 80GB	4	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		117	1,600x1,200
3	 Systemax Inspire 7352 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,299 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Feb 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2600+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI MS-6712	19in CTX PR960F
			2.13GHz	120GB	6	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		118	1,600x1,200
4	 NetHighStreet Net AD 1200 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Feb 03 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte 8PE667	15in Samsung flat-panel
			2.53GHz	120GB	6	0.3mm
			WorldBench 4		116	1,024x768
5	 Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ PPC 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,299 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Feb 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7N8X	17in NEC flat-panel
			2.17GHz	120GB	6	0.26mm
			WorldBench 4		127	1,280x1,024
6	 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 3GHz HT 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com LAST MONTH 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,701 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Feb 03 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte P4 Titan	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920
			3.06GHz	160GB	4	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		124	1,600x1,200
7	 Dell Dimension 4550 0870 152 4689 www.dell.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,649 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Feb 03 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Intel	17in Dell 1702 flat-panel
			2.8GHz	120GB	6	0.264mm
			WorldBench 4		127	1,280x1,024
8	 Systemax Reliance 3017 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,249 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 02 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	MSI MS-6398E	19in CTX PR960F
			2.41GHz	2 x 80GB	5	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		121	1,600x1,200
9	 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2.8 PV10 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com LAST MONTH 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	MSI MS-6566E	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus
			2.8GHz	80GB	6	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4		131	1,600x1,200
10	 PC World Advent 3828 BTO 0870 546 4464 www.pcworld.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,449 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Feb 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7N8X	19in Philips 109B4
			2.17GHz	80GB	4	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4		121	1,600x1,200

Buying advice: Power PCs

AMD and Intel have both recently brought out a succession of new chips at ever faster speeds. The 3.06GHz Pentium 4 is the latest offering from Intel, but the HT (hyperthreading) technology it uses won't be worth having until software is designed to work with it. The sixth-placed Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 is the only system in the chart to use this chip and, with scant software to support HT, it actually performed better with the feature turned off.

Bearing this in mind, you may be better off choosing a 2.5, 2.6 or 2.8GHz P4

chip. AMD recently bolstered its range with the Athlon XP 2700+ and 2800+, but anything over an XP 2200+ is fine in the Power PC category. The advantage of the fast pace of these chip upgrades is that 'older' processors drop in price as they are superseded by faster models, yet they still produce good performance.

Expect 512MB of memory in a Power system and remember to make sure it is the faster DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than SDRAM. Rambus is seldom used these days, although you will see it in some systems. Remember also to look for DDR333 RAM (the fastest version

of DDR memory), although DDR400 is slowly entering the Power PC market and it should prove to be an even better bet in the future.

In terms of storage, an 80GB hard drive is about the minimum size you should expect in the Power PC category, though many systems have much more than this. For speedy access to your information, a system with two hard drives is preferable. Have backup covered with a 40-/32-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive. DVD rewriters are becoming available, too, but this is likely to push up the overall cost of the system.

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
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 32x/12x/8x	Windows XP Ability Office 2002	Evesham takes the Best Buy with a combination of performance, quality components and a decent warranty – all at a reasonable price. Its WorldBench 4 score was only two points short of the current record and its graphics were equally fast. There's a DVD-RW to make backing up easy and even the onboard sound is good.
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 2 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 32x/12x/10x	Windows XP Home, Star Office 5.2	The Poweroid's 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor only achieved a WorldBench 4 score of 117 – that's 12 points behind the Best Buy Axis. Had it scored higher it might have grabbed first place. However, there's an excellent Audigy sound card, a DVD+RW drive and two capacious 80GB hard drives so it's a system to consider.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	16x 40x/40x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Systemax combines ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card with the 19in CTX PR960F to produce a gaming and graphics dream. If you're looking to use your PC to create a home cinema then you'll be pleased with the audio setup. These impressive specifications and good price win it a deserved Recommended award.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice	The NetHighStreet may be an attractive system but its processor is slightly old and slow, which shows in its WorldBench 4 score of 116. But with a strong component line-up, including a space-saving flat-panel and a decent price, it's a good deal and takes the last Recommended award.
Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Combined with an Asus motherboard and nVidia chipset, the Mesh Matrix's Athlon XP 2700+ chip achieved a strong WorldBench 4 score of 127. The 17in NEC 1700V flat-panel is an impressive display but doesn't make the best use of the graphics card so hardcore gamers might be better off considering another system.
Gigabyte ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 32x/12x/10x	Windows XP Home Microsoft Works Suite	The only PC in the chart to sport Intel's latest processor, the 3.06GHz P4, the Hi-Grade still didn't manage to set WorldBench 4 on fire. It scored 124, but only when the HT (hyperthreading) technology was turned off. It has a strong specification, though, including a 2.4-speed write/rewrite DVD+RW drive.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Turtle Beach Santa Cruz 5 x Atlec Lansing ADA 995 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite	If the Power PC chart was judged on looks alone the Dell Dimension 4550 would certainly have been a runaway winner. Performance-wise it's not too bad either. However, at a sizeable £1,649 and with a mere one-year return-to-base warranty, it's far from the best deal available.
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	16x 40x/40x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	This system was a Best Buy in the past, due to a combination of the generous amount of storage space – two 80GB hard drives – a three-year onsite warranty and one of the best monitors in the chart, the CTX PR960F. All this is priced at £1,249 ex VAT, which represents good value for money.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	While the Hi-Grade is the fastest in the chart with a WorldBench 4 score of 131 and one of the cheapest at £1,200, it can't quite compete in terms of all-round specification. The hard drive isn't as generous as some of the other contenders' disks, and though the warranty is three years long, only the first year is onsite cover.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite	With a WorldBench 4 score of 121, this system is fairly speedy and the results of the graphics and video encoding tests were reasonable as well. However, the 80GB hard disk is small compared to drives in other chart systems, the monitor isn't that good and the one-year onsite warranty seems mean.

At this price point you should 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 are becoming more and more common, so this could be an option if you're short on desk space. Be warned, though, as models inevitably vary in quality – look for one that can support a resolution of at least 1,280x1,024.

To keep your monitor on its toes you want an agile graphics card to go with it and the ATI Radeon 9700 is just about the top card of choice at the moment, though nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 also

offers strong performance. Look for at least 64MB of RAM, with 128MB preferable.

Depending on what you use your PC for audio performance may be just as important to you as graphics, so don't forget to be choosy here as well. Some PCs are still fitted with the SoundBlaster 5.1 Live, but the best bet for decent surround sound is Creative's Audigy. The Audigy 2 is just becoming available and will handle DVD audio as well as CD sound.

↓ The Best Buy Evesham Axis 2700+ offers a lightning fast WorldBench 4 score, great specification and generous warranty

