

TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

| | | Budget PCs | Processor type | RAM | Motherboard | Monitor | |
|----|--|---|---|--|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| | | | Processor speed | Hard disk capacity | USB ports | Dot pitch | |
| | | | | | | Maximum resolution@75Hz | |
| 1 |  | Systemax Inspire 3152 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 1 | • £1,199 ex VAT • 2-year onsite warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon 3000+ 2.17GHz (Barton core) | 1GB DDR RAM 160GB | MSI K7N2 5 | 19in CTX EX950F 0.25mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 130 | | | |
| 2 |  | Multivision Ionix 56ND 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 2 | • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz (Barton core) | 512MB DDR RAM 180GB | MSI K7N2 6 | 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 128 | | | |
| 3 |  | Evesham Axis 3000+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 3 | • £1,099 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz (Barton core) | 512MB DDR RAM 120GB | Leadtek K7NCR18D Pro 5 | 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 129 | | | |
| 4 |  | Multivision Ionix Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 4 | • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03 | AMD Athlon 2800+ 2.25GHz | 512MB DDR RAM 120GB | MSI K7N2-L 4 | 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 134 | | | |
| 5 |  | NetHighStreet Net PA999B 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 5 | • £999 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 1-year labour-only warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz (Barton core) | 512MB DDR RAM 160GB | MSI K7N2 6 | 17in flat-panel Samsung SyncMaster 172T 0.297mm 1,280x1,024 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 129 | | | |
| 6 |  | CCL Computers X-Force SA28 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 6 | • £999 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return, 2-year parts-and-labour warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz (Barton core) | 1GB DDR RAM 120GB | Asus A7N8X-D 6 | 15in flat-panel Iiyama ProLite E380S 0.297mm 1,024x768 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 128 | | | |
| 7 |  | Shepley XP3000 FX 5800 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 7 | • £1,099 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year labour-only warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz (Barton core) | 512MB DDR RAM 120GB | Gigabyte GA-7VAX 4 | 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 126 | | | |
| 8 |  | Atomic Computer Systems 2800 Pro 01772 257 257 www.atomic-computer-systems.co.uk LAST MONTH 8 | • £980 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 4-year labour-only warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz (Barton core) | 1GB DDR RAM 120GB | Chaintech CT-7NJL1 8 | 19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 1451 0.25mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 133 | | | |
| 9 |  | Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ Multidrive 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 9 | • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Apr 03 | AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz | 512MB DDR RAM 120GB | Asus A7N9Y 6 | 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 132 | | | |
| 10 |  | Ideal Computing Aptus L90 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 10 | • £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Aug 03 | AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz (Barton core) | 512MB DDR RAM 120GB | Asus A7N8X 6 | 17in flat-panel Iiyama ProLite E430S 0.297mm 1,280x1,024 |
| | | | WorldBench 4 | 120 | | | |



↑ By far the best value-for-money offering in the chart, Systemax's Inspire also boasts 1GB of RAM

Buying advice: Budget PCs

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 in which areas you need to spend money and in which 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.

AMD Athlon processors dominate the entire chart at the moment, with the top three entries featuring the 2.1GHz 3000+ chip with the Barton

core. If you prefer to take the Intel-branded route, then look for a Pentium 4 that runs at speeds of at least 2.4GHz. Bear in mind, too, that when AMD or Intel bring out a new chip the price of older models tends to come down, so keep an eye on the runners-up rather than the high-flyers.

The standard memory allotment in the Budget chart is now 512MB of DDR RAM, which should be enough to serve the needs of most PC users. Shop around, though, and you can even get 1GB for your money. Aim to get PC2700 or DDR333 RAM as this will give a faster performance than DDR266 RAM.

| 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 | | | |
| nVidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra 256MB | Creative Audigy2 7 x Videologic ZXR-750 yes | 8x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD/+RW) 52x/52x/24x | Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Power Director 2.1 | The 3152 impresses with its sizeable 160GB hard drive and 1GB of DDR RAM and the graphics card is the most powerful we've seen in any PC category. The sound card and speakers produce fantastic audio and the system is bundled with a six-in-one memory card reader. A worthy winner of our Best Buy. |
| ATI Radeon 9600 Pro 128MB | onboard 7 x Videologic ZXR-750 yes | 12x/4x/2x (DVD/+RW) 40x/16x/10x | Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002 | An attractive price tag, good looks, six-year warranty and a plethora of great features make the Multivision great value for money. Thanks to the 180GB Hitachi hard drive, there's plenty of storage space for files and applications and the Mitsubishi 930SB is still the best 19in CRT monitor money can buy. |
| ATI Radeon 9600 Pro 128MB | Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes | 8x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD/+RW) 52x/52x/24x | Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE | A Barton core 2.17GHz Athlon XP 3000+ chip is the powering force behind the Evesham, while its 120GB hard drive provides ample storage space. The graphics card and monitor aren't the latest models, but both produce good results. Included in the deal is a decent software bundle and three-year warranty. |
| ATI Radeon 9500 128MB | onboard 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes | 12x/4x/2x (DVD/+RW) 40x/16x/10x | Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite | The Ionix Ti performs on every front: it combines great features, an impressive specification list, value for money and is protected by the best warranty we've seen. While there are other chart entries that beat the Ionix Ti's graphics and sound systems, none is as well balanced as this brilliant machine. |
| MSI StarForce GeForce FX 5600 128MB | onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes | 8x/4x/2x (DVD/RW) 52x/52x/24x | Windows XP Home | This system looks good, performs well and has some great features. The chip and RAM push the system to a score 129 points in our WorldBench 4 tests. Aesthetically the flat-panel's design cannot be faulted but image quality is just adequate – the screen can't stretch beyond a resolution of 1,280x1,024. |
| XFX GeForce4 Ti 4200 128MB | onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes | 12x/4x/2.4x (DVD/+RW) 40x/16x/10x | Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Panda AntiVirus | The X-Force strikes a balance between performance, features and price that results in a reasonable sixth place. With 1GB of DDR RAM, the SA28 will handle just about anything you throw at it. The only real negative is picture quality – the Iiyama ProLite E380S flat-panel tops-out at a resolution of 1,024x768. |
| nVidia GeForce FX 5800 128MB | Creative SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes | 12x/4x/2x (DVD/RW) 52x/52x/24x | Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Norton AntiVirus | With its impressive chip, graphics card, image quality and audio, the XP3000 could easily have charted higher. Sadly, though, it's let down in certain areas. For example, the Shepley hosts a DVD-RW drive whereas much of the competition offer superior all-format drives. Still, a powerful machine at a fair price. |
| Sapphire Radeon 9500 128MB | onboard 5 x Nicole SD2500 yes | 16x (DVDROM) 48x/48x/16x | Windows XP Home, Open Office | Despite a great deal of promise, the 2800 Pro only manages eighth place. Its WorldBench 4 score is the second highest in the chart thanks partly to the Barton core Athlon XP 2800+ processor and 1GB of DDR RAM. In many other areas – for example, its monitor and graphics card – the Atomic falls short of its rivals. |
| ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB | onboard 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes | 8x/4x/2.4x (DVD/+RW) 32x/24x/10x | Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE | The Matrix is packed with some of the best specifications and features £999 can buy. It performed beautifully in our tests and landed the second best WorldBench score in the chart. The 935B monitor isn't as good as the 930SB but works well with the graphics card to produce a great image. |
| nVidia GeForce FX 5600 256MB | onboard 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes | 12x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD/+RW) 40x/16x/10x | Windows XP Home, Open Office | On paper the L90 looks as if it should have performed better than it did. Considering its chip, memory and hard drive, its WorldBench score is comparatively slow. The graphics card is the most outstanding feature but to get the best from it you'll need to invest in a decent 19in CRT monitor. |

While 80GB of storage should prove ample for the majority of PC users, most Budget systems will come with a hard drive of at least 120GB. Though you may never come close to filling it all, it is still desirable to have as much storage space as possible.

In terms of CD-RW drives, don't go for anything with less than 40/16/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities. When looking at screens, you should be able to get a decent 19in monitor for your money. Only be satisfied with a 17in model if it has very good specifications.

Either way, check that the screen can achieve an optimal resolution of 1,280x1,024 at 75Hz. Better still, for really sharp images look for 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. In terms of dot pitch, 0.25mm or lower is fine. Flat-panel displays will push the price of the Budget system up but these screens might still be worth looking at if desk space is at a premium.

In terms of dedicated graphics memory, look for a minimum of 128MB. Top-of-the-range cards include nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4800 and ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro. However, if you don't need

astoundingly fast frame rates all the time then the GeForce4 Ti 4600 and ATI Radeon 9500 Pro are still very capable graphics cards.

Finally, when it comes to audio, Creative's Audigy2 sound card is the best option although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still a dependable choice. Avoid onboard audio if at all possible, as its performance is never as impressive as that of a dedicated card. If creating good-quality surround sound is important to you then look for a speaker system with five satellites and a subwoofer.