

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 Ionix Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £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
2	 Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ Multidrive 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £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
3	 Evesham Axis 2700+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,106 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek K7NCR18D-Pro 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 132
4	 Campus Eclipse 450GTX Pro System 0870 066 0711 www.campus-systems.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review May 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte 7VAXP 4	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 2,048x1,536	WorldBench 4 125
5	 Shepley B2700+ 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Epox 8RDA 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 125
6	 Systemax Inspire 7397 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £799 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2500+ 1.86GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4V-L 6	19in CTX EX950F 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 120
7	 Multivision Vision Pro Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek WinFast 6	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 2,048x1,536	WorldBench 4 127
8	 Evesham Axis 2400+ MK 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 2	<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	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Leadtek WinFast 6	17in flat-panel LG L1710B 0.26mm 1,280x1,024	WorldBench 4 126
9	 Cybyte Supro Gamer 01603 455 554 www.cybyte.com NEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,020 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Epox 8RDA 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 124
10	 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL53 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk UPDATED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,199 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 03 	Intel Pentium 4 3.06GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Intel 4	19in NEC VR19 0.26mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 121



↑ Combining an impressive specification list, value for money and a generous warranty, the speedy Multivision Ionix Ti deserves its Best Buy award

1 **Multivision Ionix Ti**
The all-new 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. All this adds up to the Multivision being a clear winner.

The system is housed in a black case and the matching peripherals give a great finish. This PC operates on a level beyond pure aesthetics, though. It's the first Budget entrant we've seen that carries AMD's new Athlon 2800+ chip with a clock

speed of 2.25GHz. It proved to be an excellent performer when combined with 512MB of DDR RAM and a 120GB hard drive – the resulting WorldBench score of 134 is the fastest in the chart. Internally, the case is large enough to accommodate upgrades. The righthand side panel – where the motherboard sits – can also be opened in order to access hard-to-reach places.

Backup comes in the shape of a DVD-RW drive. The device we tested wasn't an all-format model, but Multivision will start bundling this version in April so you won't end up with obsolete technology.

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 Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	8x/4x/2.4x (all-format) 32x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home
ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Big Fix, Ability Office 2003, Pinnacle Home Studio
ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes	16x 40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office
ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5.1 4 x Creative Inspire 4400 yes	16x 52x/52x/16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, Ability Office
ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Open Office
ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative SoundBlaster 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 32x/16x/8x	Windows XP Home Microsoft Works Suite 6.0

The 128MB ATI Radeon 9500 graphics card isn't the manufacturer's flagship model but it's more than adequate and is complemented beautifully by Mitsubishi's sharp and vibrant Diamond Pro 930SB monitor. The only letdown is the onboard sound solution, although you get 5.1 channel support pumping through Creative's Inspire 5300 speakers.

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.

2 Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ Multidrive

Despite being reviewed last issue, the Multidrive gains second place in our Budget chart. Mesh has decked out this PC with some of the best specifications and features £999 can buy.

At the heart of the Matrix is a 2.17GHz Athlon XP 2700+ processor and an nForce2-based motherboard, which performed beautifully in our tests. Twinned with 512MB of DDR RAM and a generous 120GB hard drive, it's little wonder the Matrix XP achieved a



↑ The Recommended Mesh Matrix Multidrive comes with our Best Buy DVD writer – Sony's all-format DRU-500A

WorldBench result of 132 – the second best score in the chart. If the 120GB drive isn't enough storage space then take advantage of the Matrix's DVD drive as it's the Best Buy model in our chart on page 235. Sony's all-format DRU-500A drive supports DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW and DVD+RW so you won't be left with obsolete technology.

Mesh always supplies a tidy, well-presented PC with ample documentation and this system is no exception. We were also impressed with the Matrix's internal layout: the hard drive sits sideways so its cables don't block access to other components.

The Multidrive offers a graphical treat. Mitsubishi's Diamond Plus 93SB isn't as good as its 930SB model but it complements ATI's flagship Radeon 9700 graphics card well. In our Quake III demo the Mesh achieved a blistering 91.1fps (frames per second) at 1,600x1,200 and chewed through video encoding in no time at all. The onboard audio solution offers 5.1 channel support but it's not on a par with the rest of the system even though the Inspire 5300 speakers pump out good sound.

3 Evesham Axis 2700+

Narrowly missing out on the number two spot is the Axis 2700+. Evesham has stuck with a simply designed case and peripherals, so if you're after a fancy finish then the Axis isn't for you. However, if you're after top-notch performance and the peace of mind provided by an excellent warranty then this is a system that delivers.

An Athlon 2700+ processor with a 120GB hard drive and 512MB of DDR RAM have proved very popular in this month's Budget chart – and the Axis 2700+ has them all. Its WorldBench score of 132 demonstrates that this PC is honed for churning through data at a rapid pace.

The graphics setup isn't top notch, comprising ATI's 128MB Radeon 9500 card



↑ The Evesham Axis 2700+ is the only PC in the chart to offer Creative's excellent Audigy2 sound card

and Mitsubishi's Diamond Plus 93SB monitor, but if you're not interested in getting blistering frame rates then it won't make much difference. The Axis' audio facilities are more impressive. This is the only Budget PC to offer Creative's sublime Audigy2 sound card and it's wonderfully complemented by 6.1 channel speakers.

Evesham has included two drives for backup and they don't come much better. There's LG's fast 52/52/24-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW and a 12/quad/dual-speed DVD-RW drive, so if you do invest in the Axis you'll have no excuse for not backing up your data. As always, Evesham has packed its system with good documentation and installation guides – ideal for the complete novice.

4 Campus Eclipse 450GTX Pro System

With great styling, decent specifications and an impressive three-year onsite warranty, the Campus Eclipse 450GTX grabs our final Recommended award. Again, we see the popular mix of a 120GB hard drive, 512MB of DDR RAM and AMD's Athlon 2700+ processor. This time, however, the Eclipse didn't make the most of its specifications. We are



nit-picking but the WorldBench score of 125 could have been a few points higher.

The Campus' graphics subsystem is the best money can buy. ATI's flagship 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro works a treat on the excellent Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454. This 19in monitor not only has a clear 0.24mm dot pitch and an impressive maximum resolution of 2,048x1,536 at a flicker-free 75Hz, but it also comes packed with some great extras – built-in stereo speakers and a four-port USB hub for connecting peripherals.

Campus sensibly added Videologic's brand-new ZXR 550 speakers. These well-styled models may be under £100 but they're the best budget 5.1 sound solution. It's a shame the PC maker couldn't stretch to a 5.1 PCI sound card as well.

There's no DVD writer and access to the internals is awkward for upgraders but the decent software bundle and fastest CD-RW drive on the market go some way to ensuring this is a great Budget PC.

5 Shepley B2700+ Shepley's B2700+ takes fifth place in our chart. The ever-popular combination of a

120GB hard drive with 512MB of DDR RAM and AMD's 2.17GHz Athlon 2700+ chip returned a WorldBench score of 125. Powerful enough for everyday applications but we've seen this specification achieve a higher score on competitors' PCs.

The excellent Diamond Pro 930SB monitor was twinned with ATI's Radeon 9500 Pro which doesn't have the power of the flagship 9700. That said, we were impressed with the frames-per-second rate achieved when running intensive graphics at 1,600x1,200. Another bonus is the Audigy sound card. It may not be an Audigy2, and the speakers are Videologic's ZXR 500 rather than its new 550 models, but the B2700+ beat most systems for audio clarity. It's just a shame that Shepley bundled one of the slower CD-RW drives and a five-year warranty that only includes one-year onsite cover.



6 Systemax Inspire 7397

Offering the cheapest machine in our chart, the Systemax might lack the impressive power of the competition but if you want to save your pennies then this could be the PC for you.

For a £799 PC, the Inspire 7397 has some great features – most notably AMD's new Barton core Athlon XP 2500+ running at 1.86GHz. While the system's WorldBench score of 120 is the lowest in the chart, the Inspire only has 256MB of DDR RAM and an 80GB hard drive.

The audio solution is also the weakest here with only 4.1 channel speakers and onboard 5.1 sound. Graphically it has a great card and the specifications on the monitor sound impressive but it's a rounded display with a shadow mask tube rather than the superior aperture grilles.

While the specifications aren't top notch you do get a fast CD-RW drive, Lotus SmartSuite, a warranty including two-year onsite cover and, ultimately, value for money.



7 Multivision Vision Pro Ti

Despite being a couple of months old, this ex-Best Buy is still a good Budget system. The Vision Pro Ti is powered by an Athlon XP 2700+ chip, which helped it pull in an impressive WorldBench 4 score of 127.

It's the only system to offer an nVidia graphics card – the GeForce4 Ti 4800 is essentially a Ti 4600 card with 8x AGP support. This should lead to smoother and more realistic graphics. In our graphics tests it achieved rates of 89.1fps (frames per second) while running the Quake III demo at a resolution of 1,600x1,200.

The Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 gives a brilliant image and also

has a four-port USB hub and built-in speakers.

The Pro Ti is showing its age, but it remains a good buy.



8 Evesham Axis 2400+ MK
Another system that loses out to the new contestants this month is the eighth-placed



Evesham Axis 2400+. As its name suggests, this system is built around an AMD Athlon XP 2400+ processor running at 2GHz. It may not be one of the latest AMD chips available but it's still a capable processor nonetheless. The 512MB of DDR RAM is standard, although the 80GB hard drive is smaller than many of the other contenders' offerings.

The graphics are handled ably by an ATI Radeon 9500. Although not up to the standard of the 9700, this card is backed up by the only flat-panel in the chart. The LG display performs well and frees up some desk space, plus it looks good and adds a couple of extra USB ports to the mix.

This Evesham system is a good buy, particularly if you want a decent flat-panel. However, there are now better machines in the Budget PC chart.

9 Cybyte Supro Gamer

The Supro Gamer has some great touches but this is not enough to secure it a higher chart position. Cybyte opted for AMD's older 2GHz Athlon 2400+ processor with 512MB of DDR RAM and an 80GB hard drive. This is still hard to fill even if you're storing high-resolution images and video-editing clips, but it's not on a par with most of the competitors' 120GB models.

Graphically the Supro can't be faulted. ATI's Radeon 9700 card and Mitsubishi's picture-perfect Diamond Pro 930SB are an excellent combination but the slower processor means it can't get past 79fps (frames per second) in our Quake III demo. The onboard sound, combined with Videologic's older ZXR 500 speakers, is average, but you get 5.1-channel support.

As one of the pricier systems in our chart we expected more from the Supro Gamer. It's also a shame that the three-year warranty doesn't include onsite support.



Buying advice



- Processors If you're spending upwards of £700 on a new PC it's unlikely that you'll be lumbered with a budget processor from Intel or AMD. Most manufacturers will push Athlons or, occasionally, Pentium 4s. It's the Athlon chip that seems to be doing a scorching trade in this price range because it's cheaper for manufacturers to buy and performs brilliantly despite having a lower clock speed.



- If you're aiming for the budget end of the scale expect speed of at least 2GHz from an AMD processor and 2.8GHz from an Intel chip. Pay more and you should get AMD's 2700+ or 2800+ processor running at 2.17GHz and 2.25GHz respectively. A Pentium 4 should be at least 3GHz if you spend over £1,000.



- Memory This month sees 512MB of DDR RAM as standard in the Budget chart – with one exception. However, 256MB of DDR RAM should service the needs of most users and can still be found on cheaper PCs such as Systemax's £799 entry.



- Storage An 80GB hard drive will suffice for most users but is now seen as below average. Most of our Budget PCs have a 120GB hard drive spinning at 7,200rpm (rotations per minute). Backup storage is provided by the now obligatory CD-RW drive though some vendors are bundling DVD writers. If you want a DVD writer try to buy an all-format drive so it can write all of the DVD standards – that is, DVD-R, +R, -RW and +RW.



- Monitor Be satisfied with a 19in monitor if it has good specifications – aperture grille tube, optimal resolution of 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz and a dot pitch lower than 0.25mm – or a 17in flat-panel display.



- Graphics card ATI is all the rage with barely an nVidia card in sight. Radeon cards should have 128MB of DDR RAM but the Radeon 9500 doesn't pack as much punch as the 9700 Pro.

- Sound card The Audigy2 is the best standalone audio option available on the market but Creative's card is rare at this price point. It's better to get a sound card but the onboard sound solutions are pretty impressive these days as long as they have 5.1-channel support.

10 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL53

The PowerMate i-Select sits in tenth place despite an updated specification due to a low features list, high price and its miserly one-year warranty. NEC's offering still has one or two strong points, though.

This is the only system to include a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 processor so users get the benefit of hyperthreading technology for true multitasking. It's not as quick as AMD's 2700+ chip, however, despite having 512MB of DDR RAM and a 120GB hard drive.

Aesthetically this is the plainest system in our chart. NEC's VR19 monitor lacks quality and doesn't do justice to the Radeon 9700

graphics card. That said, the XL53 achieved 91.6fps (frames per second) at 1,600x1,200 during our demanding Quake III tests. Creative's SoundBlaster 5.1 is old hat these days, but at least it's a sound card rather than an onboard solution, and the Inspire 5300 speakers are more than capable of providing good 5.1 channel sound.



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