

TOP 10 POWER PCs

		Power PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	
						Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		Systemax Reliance 3017 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £1,249 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.41GHz	512MB DDR RAM 2 x 80GB	MSI MS-6398E 5	19in CTX PR960F 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		121		
2		Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2.8 PV10 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com LAST MONTH 2	• £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI MS-6398E 6	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		131		
3		Mesh Elite XP 2.8GHz 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 3	• £1,199 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Abit SR7-8X 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		126		
4		Carrera SSC Extreme 253a 0870 066 0682 www.carrera.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	• £1,285 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus P4T533 6	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		118		
5		NEC Powermate I-Select XL5 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk LAST MONTH 5	• £1,299 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte 5	19in NEC MultiSync HR19 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		120		
6		Cybyte XP2200RDG+ TV 0160 345 5554 www.cybyte.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £1,275 ex VAT • 2-year collect-and-return warranty • First review Nov 02	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI KT3 Ultra2 6	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		122		
7		Time Neptune 2200 PQ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com LAST MONTH 7	• £1,200 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI MS-6380E 4	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		120		
8		Evesham Evolution 2.8 9700 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 8	• £1,499 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus P4B533 6	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		125		
9		Best Price Poweroid.com 2200 0870 220 0444 www.poweroid.co.uk LAST MONTH 9	• £1,299 ex VAT • 2-year parts and labour, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 02	Intel Pentium 4 2.41GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus P4T533 6	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		119		
10		Wisdom Computers Ebony 2100 0870 050 2299 www.wisdom-computers.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 02	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI 6	19in AOC LM500 flat-panel 0.3mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		109		

Buying advice: power PCs

If you've got more than £1,200 to spend on a PC then you need to make sure you're getting the best possible value for your money. The PC market moves quickly and the components available to manufacturers are constantly improving, so be sure you know exactly what is currently on the market before you take the plunge and purchase a new system. Here's our guide to what you should be looking for.

In the last few months, Intel has put an end to AMD's recent dominance in the processor market with its new 2.4, 2.5

and 2.8GHz chips. However, all isn't lost for AMD – the Athlon XP 2200+ is still a good processor and offers performance very similar to the new Pentium 4s. More powerful AMD processors are emerging at the moment and these should make a mark in this category very soon.

To accompany a chip of this order, you should expect 512MB of RAM and make sure it is the quicker DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than SDRAM. Rambus is seldom used these days, although you will see it in some systems – performance-wise it isn't an awful lot different to DDR RAM though. You should look for DDR333

RAM too (the fastest version of DDR RAM), although DDR400 is becoming available at the moment and should prove to be a better bet in the future.

If you are going to use your Power PC for video editing and holding lots of footage then you'll need as much storage as you can muster. An 80GB hard drive is about the minimum size you can expect in this category – however, a system with two hard drives is preferable. Have backup covered with a 40-/32-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive.

At this price point you want to include a nice big 19in screen that offers a

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
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	The Reliance 3017 offers the best all-round package in the Power PC category. The 2.4GHz Pentium 4 chip and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM managed a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 121. The three-year onsite warranty is excellent and the relatively low price of £1,249 rounds off the package nicely.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002	The Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 2.8 PV10 is a whisker away from the top spot with its outstanding performance and reasonable price. Its WorldBench 4 score of 131 is not only the highest in the chart but the highest score we've seen. Although warranty covers you for three years, only the first is onsite – after that it is return-to-base.
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Elite XP 2.8GHz is a solid performer in every way, offering great components at a good price. Where the Elite really excelled was in the graphics tests. Overall, though, it's let down by the warranty. At £1,299 you would perhaps expect a more generous protection than collect and return.
Asus nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office	The Carrera's case certainly stands out from the average beige box, but as the monitor and keyboard lack the same trim it looks a bit mix-and-match. The warranty is generous – two-year onsite followed by three-year return-to-base cover. Add £149 to the reasonable basic price of £1,285 and you can have a DVD writer too.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 2 x Labtec LCS-2632 yes	16x 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002	Powered by one of Intel's newest processors, the Pentium 4 2.8GHz, the XL5 only achieved 120 in our WorldBench 4 tests. A real let-down is the sound system – the Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 sound card is not up to the standard of the Audigy and the Labtec speakers comprise a subwoofer and just two satellites.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home	Cybyte's XP2200RDG+ TV is the highest entry to boast an AMD processor rather than a Pentium chip. Its mid-table WorldBench 4 score shows that the 1.8GHz Athlon 2200+ TV can easily mix it with the latest Pentium 4 CPUs. The warranty isn't particularly generous though, only stretching to two years' return-to-base cover.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, multimedia bundle	The Athlon XP 2200+ chip that powers the Neptune is a full 1GHz slower in clock speed than the new Pentium 4. However, it scored a respectable score of 120 in our WorldBench 4 tests – on a par with the Pentium 4-powered NEC. In terms of warranty things aren't as rosy – you only get three years' return-to-base cover.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 48x/48x/12	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0	In terms of the WorldBench 4 performance, the Evesham scored 125 – this month's third-highest score. Where it falls down is in terms of cost – at £1,499 it's the priciest system here. Even the two years' onsite cover followed by three years' parts-and-labour can't make up for this.
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, StarOffice 5.2	One of only two systems in the chart to use Rambus memory, the Poweroid was disappointing in our WorldBench 4 tests and its 2.4GHz Pentium 4 only achieved 119. The warranty is the major flaw with this Best Price PC – although it lasts six years, there's no onsite cover.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5.1 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home	Opting for the slightly older Athlon XP 2100+ the Ebony 2100 lags behind in performance. It does come with a 15in flat-panel but the maximum resolution of 1,024x768 wastes the potential of the 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card. The warranty only lasts one year, but offers onsite cover.

resolution of 1,600x1,200 and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or less. Flat-panel monitors are becoming more common but can 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 and the ATI Radeon 9700 is just about top dog at the moment, though nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 also offers strong performance. Look for at least 64MB of RAM but 128MB is even better.

Audio performance may be just as important to you as graphics, so don't forget to be picky here as well. Some PCs

are still fitted with the SoundBlaster 5.1 Live, but the best bet is Creative's Audigy. Not only does it offer top-quality audio, it also has an extra FireWire port.

In terms of speakers, Creative's Inspire 5300 system and Videologic's ZXR-500s are both commonly used and there is little to choose between the two. You should be looking to get a subwoofer with five satellite speakers. The Creative Audigy 2 sound card can support seven channels so if you buy a system with this then you'll need a subwoofer and six satellites to use it to its full potential – the Creative Inspire 6700s are a good bet.



↑ The Recommended Hi-Grade uses one of the latest P4 chips to good effect, gaining it a WorldBench 4 score of 131