

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

1		Superbudget PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	
			Processor speed	Hard disk/capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	
			WorldBench 4			Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		Mesh Matrix 2600+ SFX 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 1	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7N8X 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
2		Carrera SSC Octan 3000PA 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ (Barton core) 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Leadtek WinFast K7NCR18D Pro 2 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
3		Time Saturn 2600+ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com LAST MONTH 3	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2 3	19in LG Flatron F900P 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
4		NetHighStreet Net Elite 699 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 4	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return, 1-year labour only warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ (Barton core) 2.09GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2 4	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
5		Systemax Inspire 3162 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 5	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2 4	19in CTX EX951F 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
6		MicroLand Addons Superbudget PC 0870 443 0399 www.microland.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base, 3-year labour-only warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ (Barton core) 2.09GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB	Gigabyte GA7VAXP-A 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
7		Cybyte Primo XP2800 01603 455 554 www.cybyte.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year collect-and-return warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ (Barton core) 2.09GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	EpoX EP-8RDA+ 6	17in NEC MultiSync FE770 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
8		Mesh Matrix 2600+ RD95 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 8	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Jun 03	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7N8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
9		Carrera SSC Octan 2.8a 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk LAST MONTH 9	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jun 03	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus P4SX8 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
10		CCL Computers X-Force 97 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return, 2-year labour-only warranty • First review Sep 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	XFX NF2S ALH 4	17in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 413 0.25mm 1,600x1,200



↑ Thanks to an unbeatable combination of performance, features and build quality, the Mesh Matrix 2600+ hits the top spot again

Buying advice: Superbudget PCs

With prices as low as £699 and intense competition between manufacturers, there's bound to be a Superbudget PC that suits your needs. You may not be forking out a fortune but you still want the highest specification for your money. The price limit means that some compromises have to be made, but our chart will help you choose the most suitable system.

- Processor AMD Athlon XP chips dominate the Superbudget PC chart at the

moment, although within this price range you'll also be able to afford a Pentium 4 running at anything up to 2.8GHz. Intel chips are better for graphics and video work, while AMD CPUs are much better all-rounders. Look for nothing less than an Athlon XP 2400+ – some of the Barton core-based chips such as the XP 2800+ and XP 3000+ are also available.

- Memory Most manufacturers will give you 512MB of DDR RAM. But as the price of RAM has gone up recently some might opt for just 256MB, allowing them to spend a little extra on other components.

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 GeForce FX 5600 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, 32MB USB pen drive	The Matrix SFX offers an unbeatable combination of performance, features and build quality. It doesn't house the most powerful chip available, but it completes everyday tasks with ease. Another excellent inclusion is the graphics card and, combined with the Mitsubishi monitor, the Mesh whizzed through graphics tests at all resolutions.
nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5200 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	8x/4x/2.4x (DVD+RW) 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002,	The 2.17GHz Athlon XP 3000+ with a Barton core is the centrepiece of the Octan and contributes to this eye-catching PC's speedy performance. The DVD+RW drive means it's easy to back up large amounts of data. Graphics are also handled superbly – in our tests the SSC achieved high frame rates even at a resolution of 1,600x1,200.
ATI ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home	Despite its slow WorldBench 4 score, the Saturn still has plenty to offer. It comes with one of the best 19in monitors available on the market – the LG Flatron F900P, which also handily features a four-port USB hub. The onboard audio chip supports six channels and, thanks to the Videologic speakers, you'll be treated to great surround sound.
MSI StarForce nVidia GeForce FX 5600 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home	The speedy Net Elite 699 will be able to deal with any tasks you choose to throw its way. Gamers on a budget should definitely take a look at the NetHighStreet. During our tests the Elite's frame rates made impressive reading – running the Annihilator demo in Quake III at a resolution of 1,024x768 resulted in a rate of 96.9fps.
Connect 3D ATI Radeon 9600 Pro 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR-550 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	The Inspire 3162 is an all-rounder PC: it's not weak in any particular area but then it isn't outstanding either. Graphics is the Inspire 3162's strongest area. During our tests the Radeon 9600 Pro produced decent frame rates, while the 19in CTX monitor gives a clear and crisp image. Another bonus is the three-year onsite warranty.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Norton Internet Security Suite	The MicroLand boasts a generous 160GB hard drive and 2.09GHz Athlon XP 2800+ chip. Together this pushes the system's performance score to 126. The nForce2 chipset is the best onboard sound setup available and, combined with the Creative speakers, it does a good job of reproducing audio. It comes with a six-year warranty, too.
nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5600 256MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR-550 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice	The Primo XP2800 will attract gamers on a budget as it's the only system in the chart to offer a graphics card with 256MB of dedicated memory. It's just a shame that the monitor can't do the card justice. The 17in NEC MultiSync only stretches to a resolution of 1,280x1,024, which doesn't match other monitors in the chart.
Connect 3D ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	The Matrix 2600+ RD95 is starting to show its age. Though its specification is similar to that of other contenders in the chart, the graphics card and CD rewriter are older models and the monitor is only a 17in, although it does offer good image quality. On the plus side the RD95 is a fast performer and comes with decent software.
Leadtek nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, TV card	The Octan 2.8a is the only PC in our chart that uses an Intel processor yet scored the lowest WorldBench 4 result. Compared to the competition the Octan's 80GB hard drive is miserly, although most users will still find it difficult to fill. The warranty may be five years long but there are better deals available for the price.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR-500 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Panda AntiVirus Titanium	The X-Force 97 is one of the best looking systems in the chart. Its all-round specification isn't bad but the CCL doesn't offer as much for your money as the competition. The monitor might only measure 17in but it's still a decent display that generates clear images. What lets this system down, though, is the miserly one-year warranty.

- **Storage** The minimum you should look for in a Superbudget system is 80GB, but obviously purchase as much as you can. Even though the average user will never fill 120GB it's better to have too much storage space than too little. A CD-RW drive is pretty much standard on any PC you buy these days, but look for rates of at least 40/16-speed (write/rewrite). Some manufacturers are starting to offer DVD writers at this price point but this will only be useful if you need to back up large amounts of data.

- **Monitor** Although 17in CRT screens are most common in the Superbudget chart, some manufacturers offer a 19in display. Be wary of the quality of these larger monitors, though. Flat-panel displays offered at this price point might be good for saving space but don't expect a particularly high-quality model.
- **Graphics card** Both ATI and nVidia have new models entering the market, so the older Radeon and GeForce4 cards will be more readily available in the sub-£700 category. The GeForce4 Ti 4800 cards offer decent frame rates, as do the

- Radeon 9500 cards, but if you're a keen gamer then look for at least a GeForce FX or Radeon 9600. In terms of dedicated memory, the more you can get the better.
- **Sound card** Onboard audio is the order of the day in the Superbudget chart. Dedicated standalone cards are preferable if you're fussy about quality, but if you're not a keen audiophile then the onboard chips that handle six channels will suffice. This means that 5.1 speaker systems such as Creative's Inspire 5300 and Videologic's ZXR-500 can be used to their full potential.