

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

		Superbudget PCs	Processor type Processor speed	RAM Hard disk capacity	Motherboard USB ports	Monitor Dot pitch Maximum resolution@75Hz
1	 Time Neptune 2600+ PQ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4 Ultra 4	17in LG 795FT 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		123	
2	 Multivision Vision Pro LT 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4V 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		121	
3	 Mesh Matrix XP 2400RD Plus 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		120	
4	 NetHighStreet Net PA669 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	Intel Pentium 4 2.41GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA-8PE667 6	17in Samsung SyncMaster 753DFX 0.25mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		119	
5	 Atlas Meridian 2.4GHz 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com LAST MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA-7VA 6	17in CTX PR705F 0.24mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		120	
6	 sdIT sd heaton 2530PCA 08707 442 456 www.sdIT.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	Intel Pentium 4 2.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM 60GB	Asus P4S533-E 6	17in Iiyama Vision Master 1403 0.27mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		120	
7	 Multivision Vision Elite eX 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Jan 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 60GB	MSI KT3 Ultra 2 4	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		113	
8	 Ideal Computing Aptus L40V 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Spring 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		115	
9	 Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour warranty • First review Jan 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT3 Ultra 2 6	19in Sampo AlphaScan 871 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		117	
10	 Systemax Inspire 7377 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base labour-only warranty • First review Mar 03 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR RAM 60GB	MSI KT4V-L 6	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		117	



↑ A clear Best Buy, the Time Neptune combines a great specification with lightning speed in a very smart package

Buying advice: Superbudget PCs

Despite Intel's recent assertiveness at the top end of the processor market, AMD dominates in this chart at the moment. Athlons cost less than Pentium 4s, making it easier for suppliers to put together a keenly priced system.

Processor prices are in a continual state of depreciation and currently the Athlon XP 2000+ and 2100+ are starting to be displaced by the newer 2200+ and 2400+ chips as they become viable options for Superbudget systems. However, the difference in performance

between these processors isn't that dramatic. Indeed, the system that achieved the top WorldBench 4 score in this category uses the older 2000+. In Intel's range look for at least a 2GHz Pentium 4, although it might be wiser to stick to AMD chips at this price point.

Unlike processors, RAM prices are starting to rise at the moment, so you may have to pay a little bit extra for your memory. You should still aim for 256MB, though. It's also worth paying a more for the faster DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than SDRAM, as that way your memory will hold its value better in the

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			
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Educational titles, MSI Bluetooth tranceiving key	Producing a fantastic turn of pace, the Neptune is aided not just by the excellent processor but also by 512MB of DDR RAM and the resulting WorldBench 4 score of 123 is a new record at this price point. A brilliant all-round PC, this is the only Superbudget model that can be all things to all customers.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/16x		
128MB	yes			
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	While it can't match the power of the Best Buy Time the Multivision represents the best specification, bringing together many top-notch components. The Vision Pro delivers both speed, with a great WorldBench 4 score of 121, and first-class features. Multivision has also provided an astounding six-year warranty.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/24x		
64MB	yes			
Sapphire	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Mesh takes full advantage of Mitsubishi's well-priced but beautifully conceived monitor. Video is given an extra burst of energy courtesy of the 64MB Radeon 9500 graphics card and, though the Mesh is only middle of the road on 3D gaming, its video encoding capabilities are not far behind those of the two Pentium 4 machines.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
MSI	Creative Audigy	16x	Windows XP Home, games pack	The NetHighStreet is the perfect purchase for sound enthusiasts on a tight budget. Gamers can also revel in the high frame rates pumped out by the graphics subsystem, but the machine is let down by the monitor's lacklustre resolution support (1,024x768 at best) which prevents this PC from being an outstanding games engine.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0, TV tuner, webcam	Often the smallest differences can be the defining factors. In the case of the Atlas the distinction is in the extras. The PC is fairly standard but additional items such as TV tuners and webcams give dimension. Having said that, few users will really want to view TV on their PC and the webcam is a very low-budget model.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 8x	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002 Suite	This PC will appeal to users from all walks of life, particularly those with a graphics bent. It offers further confirmation that Intel Pentium 4 chips are the source of a hot graphics system, coming in fastest on video encoding. General performance was good as well. A solid start for sdt with plenty to please graphics enthusiasts.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	2 x Nicole SD211	40x/40x/10x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	Videologic Sonic eXplosion	16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The 17in Mitsubishi monitor is an excellent addition, while the sound system is as impressive as any in the Top 10. The PC's star feature, a sweeping six-year warranty, remains the best deal here. At a lesser price the Vision Elite would have plenty going for it, but without such a cut the other contenders simply deliver more goods for the money.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	48x/40x/12x		
64MB	yes			
Gainward	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office	The middle-of-the-road figures in our video and 3D games tests are the only failings in a PC that otherwise matches the competition almost component for component. The capacious 80GB hard drive and crystal-clear monitor are features that have already drawn praise. But the lack of pace makes the Ideal something of a misnomer.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	5 x Creative Inspire 5100	48x/48x/12x		
64MB	yes			
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home	The inferior 2100+ Athlon processor and slothful performance of the ATI graphics card (finishing last in both the video encoding and the 3D games tests) are the main downfall of the Shepley, although the 19in Sampo monitor is another deficiency. This is a shame, since in most other respects the PC can hold its own against other entries.
ATI Radeon 9000 Pro	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/12x		
128MB	yes			
Sapphire	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home	The WorldBench 4 score of 117 is commendable from the 2200+ chip and 256MB of DDR RAM, while the 64MB Radeon 9500 video card generates attractive, if not particularly fast, graphics. The 17in CTX isn't equal to the likes of the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB but the sound and drive facilities generally come up to scratch.
ATI Radeon 9500	5 x Videologic ZXR 500	48x/48x/16x		
64MB	yes			

coming years. If your budget is extremely tight you may have to accept just 128MB of DDR RAM. This shouldn't prove to be too big a problem, though, as you will be able to buy and install more memory easily enough.

In terms of storage space gigabytes abound these days, so you can afford to demand no less than 40GB from your hard drive with 60GB or 80GB preferable. For fast file access, look for a motherboard that features an Ultra ATA-100 interface. A CD-RW drive is a must for the future – look for CD-R/RW performance of at least 10-speed.

When choosing your monitor, bear in mind that it is the one part of your PC that you will be using continuously. You should be looking for a 17in screen and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or 0.24mm, although bear in mind that even screens with a higher dot pitch can produce good images. You may find one or two systems available in the Superbudget category with a 19in monitor, but be wary – just because it's bigger doesn't necessarily mean that it will be better.

As long as your screen is decent, you can get good results from the graphics cards in this area of the market. For

instance, nVidia's budget GeForce4 MX card offers superb frame rates for a reasonable outlay but you may be able to find a system with a GeForce4 Ti 4200. If you want to opt for ATI over nVidia then aim for the new Radeon 9000 Pro card.

A standalone sound card, like Creative's SoundBlaster Live 5.1, is a good choice but integrated audio is getting better; Cmedia supports full 5.1 surround on some motherboards. However, if your audio chip does support six channels, then you'll need a 5.1 speaker system to get the best out of it.