

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

		Superbudget PCs	Processor type Processor speed	RAM Hard disk capacity	Motherboard USB ports	Monitor Dot pitch Maximum resolution@75Hz
1		Mesh Matrix 2600+ RD95 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 1	• £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
			WorldBench 4		129	
2		Carrera Octan 2.8a 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	• £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
			WorldBench 4		124	
3		Multivision Ionix GX 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour only warranty • First review Jun 03 AMD Athlon XP 2500+ (Barton core) 1.84GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2 6	17in LG F700P 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		126	
4		CCL X-Force G2 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jun 03 AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI K7N2 6	15in CTX S500B flat-panel 0.297mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		124	
5		Time Neptune 2600+ PQ 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com LAST MONTH 5	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Apr 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	
6		Shepley SB P4-2.6TFT 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base labour only warranty • First review Jun 03 Intel Pentium 4 2.66GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA-8SG800 6	15in NEC LCD 1501 flat-panel 0.297mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		124	
7		JAL Virgo 2700 SB 01782 848 100 www.jal.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	• £699 ex VAT • 2-year onsite warranty • First review Jun 03 AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte GA7VAX 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		127	
8		Systemax Inspire 7407 0870 7297 364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	• £699 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jun 03 AMD Athlon XP 2500+ (Barton core) 1.84GHz	256MB DDR RAM 60GB	MSI KT4V 5	19in CTX EX950F 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		124	
9		Holly KA21V 01375 397 220 www.hollycomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 9	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Jun 03 AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Epok EP-8RDA+ 6	17in Phillips 107T 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		121	
10		Multivision Vision Pro LT 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour only warranty • First review Apr 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	



↑ With top-quality components and an unbeatable WorldBench score, the Mesh is our deserved Best Buy winner

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 Although AMD's Athlon chips have dominated this chart in the past,

Intel has cut the price of its older Pentium 4s so they are becoming more common in the Superbudget category. An Intel CPU is better for graphics and video work, but the Athlon is a much better all-rounder chip.

At the budget end of the scale expect speeds of at least 2GHz and 2.8GHz from an AMD and Intel chip respectively. AMD's Athlon XP 2700+ is the maximum in this price bracket, but also look out for CPUs that feature the Barton core such as the Athlon XP 2500+.

- Memory Most manufacturers will bundle 512MB of fast DDR RAM with 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
Connect 3D	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003 Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	Mesh has crammed top-quality components into the Matrix, making it faster than all the other contenders. It's ideal for upgrading and you can protect your drives and components thanks to a handy lock. The ATI Radeon 9500 Pro achieved 83.9fps when running our Quake III demo, so this is an ideal PC for gamers and intensive graphics users.
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	48x/48x/16x		
Leadtek	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, TV card	It's now possible to build a sub-£700 system around the powerful 2.8GHz P4 chip and Carrera hasn't made many compromises to achieve this price. There's no standalone sound card on the Octan, but the audio chip on the Asus motherboard supports six-channel sound so the Creative Inspire 5300 speaker system isn't wasted.
nVidia GeForce Ti 4800 128MB	5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	52x/52x/24x		
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home	The Ionix's Barton core chip powered the Multivision to an impressive WorldBench total. Image quality is decent, although we'd prefer the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB rather than the LG monitor. Audio is an onboard solution but the nForce2 chipset guarantees good sound quality, while the CD-RW drive offers impressive backup rates.
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	52x/52x/24x		
onboard	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	The X-Force G2 is the perfect home office system. CCL's stylish and fast system features a high-quality flat-panel display, the CTX S500B. The screen saves on desk space, while graphics and sound are handled by the onboard nForce2 chips. Six USB 2.0 ports and two FireWire ports mean you can connect a plethora of peripherals too.
nForce2 64MB	5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes	48x/48x/24x		
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, educational titles, MSI Bluetooth transceiver	The Neptune is powered by a 2.13GHz Athlon XP 2600+ and achieved a reasonable performance score. Thanks to the LG's dot pitch of 0.24mm, image quality is sharp too. A Bluetooth transceiver is bundled and there's also plenty of connectivity options. The Time's only letdown is its warranty, as there's no onsite cover.
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	48x/48x/16x		
ATI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Easy CD Creator	The good-looking Shepley is complimented by NEC's stylish 15in flat-panel display. The ATI Radeon 9500 Pro may not be a top-of-the-range graphics card but it's still a decent choice. Shepley's audio chip is onboard, but the speakers are Videologic's excellent ZXR 550 models which offer great audio reproduction.
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes	48x/48x/24x		
Hitech Exaliber	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003	Newcomer JAL's Virgo 2700 SB is a fast system. Gamers will appreciate the brilliant image quality, while the wireless keyboard and mouse stop you getting in a tangle. The major quibble we had was with the JAL's speaker system. Although there are five satellites and a subwoofer, the Nicole SD speakers are not of a high standard.
ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	5 x Nicole SD 2500 yes	52x/52x/24x		
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, 6-in-1 USB 2.0 memory card reader, Ability Office 2002	The only system to offer a 19in monitor, the Inspire is a great gaming PC if you're on a tight budget. Although there's a bundled six-in-one memory card reader Systemax hasn't provided any FireWire ports and the 60GB hard drive is the smallest here. The top seven entries also offer an extra 256MB of DDR RAM.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	4 x Creative Labs Inspire 4400 yes	48x/48x/16x		
Gainward	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home, Nero Burning ROM	The Holly KA21V uses an older Athlon chip, the XP 2100+. This is still a nifty processor, but it will date fast. Hardware components are good but can't match the standard of the opposition – the 64MB GeForce4 MX 440 graphics card isn't on a par with the 128MB GeForce4 or Radeon cards and the Philips monitor isn't a sought-after screen.
nVidia GeForce MX 440 64MB	5x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	52x/52x/24x		
MSI	onboard	16x	Windows XP Home Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Vision Pro LT doesn't represent such good value as the rest of the chart entries, but it's still a decent Superbudget PC. The all-round spec – an 80GB hard drive and 256MB of DDR RAM – is a bit on the miserly side. However, unless you need to run many apps at once or store lots of large files then this will be more than enough for you.
nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	48x/48x/24x		

Superbudget system. However, the price of memory has gone up recently so some makers might opt for 256MB and spend extra money on other components.

- Storage The minimum is 60GB, but go for as much storage as you can. Even though the average user will never fill 120GB it's better to have too much than too little. In terms of backup, a CD-RW drive is standard, but look for at least a 40/16-speed (write/rewrite) model.
- Monitor Flat-panels have appeared in the Superbudget category for the first time, but be wary of their quality. These

displays are great for saving space but the image output isn't as good as that of a CRT monitor. If you go for a bulkier CRT, look for a 17in screen and a dot pitch of 0.25mm or 0.24mm. If you're paying for a 19in screen then you may lose out in terms of image quality.

- Graphics card Both ATI and nVidia have recently released new cards, so the older Radeon and GeForce4 offerings will be more readily available in the sub-£700 category. The GeForce4 Ti 4800 offers spectacular frame rates, as do the Radeon 9500 cards, so look for one of

these if you're a keen gamer. In terms of graphics memory, 128MB is best but settling for 64MB is fine.

- Sound card Onboard audio is the order of the day in the Superbudget chart right now. Standalone cards are preferable if you're fussy about sound quality, but if you're not a keen audiophile then the onboard chips will suffice as they can usually handle six channels. This means that 5.1 speaker systems such as Creative's Inspire 5300 and Videologic's ZXR 500 models can be used to their full potential.