

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

		Superbudget PCs	Processor type Processor speed	RAM Hard disk capacity	Motherboard USB ports	Monitor Dot pitch Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		Multivision Vision Elite eX 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk NEW	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour 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		
2		Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk NEW	• £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		
3		Multivision Vision Elite 4200 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	MSI 4	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		119		
4		Carrera SSC Octan 2100a 0871 222 3456 www.carrera.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	• £699 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ 1.73GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	Asus A7V333 6	17in NEC FE770 0.25mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		117		
5		Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ SB 0208 208 4744 www.meshcomputers.com NEW	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2.0GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Asus A7V8X 6	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		115		
6		Ideal Computing Aptus L150 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Chaintech Apogee 7VJL 6	17in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 413 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		115		
7		PC World Advent 3810 BTO 0870 546 4464 www.pcworld.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Gigabyte GA7VRXP 8	17in Samsung SyncMaster 753 DFX 0.25mm 1,024x768
			WorldBench 4		120		
8		Systemax Inspire 7327 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk NEW	• £699 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2.0GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 80GB	MSI KT4VL 6	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		115		
9		NetHighStreet Net PA699 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 5	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2000+ 1.68GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	Asus A7V333 4	17in Hansol 710D 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		114		
10		Systemax Inspire 7152 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £699 ex VAT • 1-year collect-and-return, 2-year labour warranty • First review Oct 02	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	256MB DDR-RAM 60GB	MSI MS 6380E 4	17in CTX EX700F 0.25mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		119		



↑ Topping our chart this month is the Multivision Vision Elite eX which features an amazing six-year warranty

1 Multivision Vision Elite eX
Multivision takes the number one spot and the Best Buy award this month, coincidentally unseating another Multivision system from the zenith of the Superbudget chart. The Vision Elite eX is strong in every area component-wise and backed up by an excellent warranty, so is well deserving of the top place in this category. Although it is by no means the newest AMD processor available – the Californian company has been churning

out more chips than Harry Ramsden recently – the Athlon XP 2200+ is still one of the more recent additions to the Athlon XP range. However, the Multivision only managed to get 113 out of it in the WorldBench 4 tests, which despite not being a bad score isn't the greatest either.

Performance in the WorldBench 4 tests isn't everything, though – the all round specification of the Vision Elite eX is easily on a par with the other systems in this chart with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a



↑ The first PC from Shepley to grace our Test Centre's workbenches storms into second place this month

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
Gainward nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Videologic Sonic eXplosion 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
ATI ATI Radeon 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home,
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
Asus nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Cyber Acoustics 5.1 yes	16x 40x/40x/10x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office
ATI ATI Radeon 64MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
Chaintech nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	onboard 4 x Mercury Home Theatre yes	16x 48x/40x/16x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/32x/12x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 5 x Creative FPS1600 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	onboard 4 x Creative FPS1600 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
Gainward nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7

60GB IBM hard drive. Gainward's GeForce4 Ti 4200 is as good a graphics card as you'll find in any of the systems in this chart and helped the Multivision to a very healthy score of 67.6fps (frames per second) when running the Quake III Annihilator demo. The Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB is a very good monitor too, so if you want a good clear display for gaming or designing then this system fits the bill.

The real outstanding feature of the Vision Elite eX, though, is its generous warranty – three years of onsite cover followed by a further three years of

labour-only cover is by far the best offer in this chart, matched only by the other Multivision in third place. All in all a worthy winner of the Best Buy award.

2 Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System

Shepley's first foray into the Superbudget chart has been quite a sensation – not only has it earned itself an award, but it came close to snatching the top spot. Shepley doesn't actually give individual systems names as it builds to order, but for review



purposes we have called this the Shepley PC Advisor Superbudget Test System.

Shepley has opted to house one of the older Athlon XP processors – the 2100+ – in this unit. Although you'd expect this processor to be slower than the newer models, the Athlon XP 2100+, running at 1.73GHz, helps the Shepley system to a WorldBench 4 score of 117 – this easily holds its own against the other systems in the chart.

In terms of storage there's an 80GB Western Digital hard drive and you'll be hard pushed to fill up all that space – however, as applications get bigger and take up more space on the hard drive you'd be well advised to opt for as much storage space as your budget will allow.

There's also a 19in monitor with this system – a bonus no other manufacturer in this category includes. Although it doesn't have any extra features on it such as a USB hub or built-in speakers it does offer a good quality image and a dot pitch of 0.25mm. The 128MB ATI Radeon 9000 Pro graphics card does an admirable job with the graphics too, so gamers and people who like their visuals will be more than satisfied with this system. The audio chip is onboard, but does support six channels so the Videologic ZXR-500 speakers aren't wasted.

3 Multivision Vision Elite 4200

The Vision Elite 4200 slips down to third place but still holds on to a Recommended award this month due to its impressive combination of quality components and a generous warranty. Based around AMD's Athlon XP 2100+ processor, the Multivision comes with 256MB of DDR (double data rate)





↑ Sitting in third place, the Vision Elite 4200 offers superb graphics performance and a great monitor

RAM and an 80GB IBM hard drive. This specification results in a WorldBench 4 score of 119, making the Vision Elite the second speediest system in the chart.

Multivision has opted for a graphics card that is at the lower end of the GeForce4 Titanium family, but the Ti 4200 still offers excellent performance. While running the Quake III Annihilator demo at a resolution of 1,024x768, the 4200 achieved an astonishing 83fps (frames per second) – a rate not often seen in the Power category let alone the Superbudget chart.

The monitor is another of the Multivision's many strengths – the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB is currently our Recommended display in the 17in Monitor chart on page 268 and offers a clear, crisp screen whether or not the SuperBright function is enabled.

The down side for this system is the onboard audio chip which won't rival the quality of the newer card on the market. It is capable of supporting six channels, though, making the best of the Videologic ZXR 500 speaker system.

↓ While we praise Carrera for avoiding the beige-box look, the Octan's flimsy casing has us a little worried



Where this Multivision system really stands out is in terms of warranty – three years of onsite cover is good, but you'll also get a further three years of labour-only cover on top of that.

4 Carrera SSC Octan 2100a



The Octan 2100a's Athlon XP 2100+ processor helped it achieve a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 117. Offering 80GB of storage space and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM on top of that, the specification is more than adequate and keeps this system in the top four despite slipping two places this month.

PC manufacturers for the most part are very tentative about abandoning the beige box model when creating new systems, so it's nice to see Carrera pushing the boat out and trying to change our perception of the PC. However, the unusual design is not without its faults. The flap that opens to allow the CD-RW drive's tray to eject tends to get stuck and the lack of cover on the DVD drive is a constant reminder that this is, in fact, just a beige box with some coloured plastic panels screwed on.

Whether or not the design takes your fancy, the Octan 2100a is a good system that's slightly let down by the average NEC FE770 monitor. The warranty is good though, offering two years of onsite and three further years of labour-only cover.

5 Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ SB

Entering the chart just below the Recommended award

positions is the Mesh Matrix 2400+ SB. As the name suggests, this PC boasts the Athlon XP 2400+ processor – however, the Matrix doesn't set the world on fire, managing only 115 in WorldBench 4. It's certainly possible that adding another 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM to the 256MB already available would make a difference, but as Mesh aims to keep the price down its had to keep the specification fairly basic to fit the Athlon XP 2400+ in.

One of only two systems in this chart to offer the Creative Audigy sound card, the Mesh is certainly a good system for people



interested in creating or playing music. Of course, where there's an Audigy you'll find a FireWire port as well and with six USB 2.0 ports this system is certainly good if you've got a lot of peripherals to connect.

The warranty is a bit of a let down – although it is three years long it's only return-to-base cover, not onsite.

6 Ideal Computing Aptus L150

Using the Athlon XP 2000+, the oldest processor in the chart, the Aptus L150 managed a reasonable 115 in the WorldBench 4 tests.

One of only two systems in the chart to do offer 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the Aptus also has a generous 80GB hard drive, which will easily provide you with plenty of room to store your data.

The L150 houses a Chaintech GeForce4 MX 440 graphics card – a chip that doesn't quite come up to the standard of the GeForce4 Ti 4200. The monitor is a strong point in this system – the Iiyama Vision Master Pro 413 is our current Best Buy 17in CRT (cathode ray tube) display, thanks to its vibrant rendering of colour and precise text definition (see page 268).

Manufacturers have to cut corners in low-cost systems and Ideal Computing is no exception. It has opted for an onboard audio chip, while only offering the Mercury

Home Theatre speaker system with four satellites and a subwoofer. The warranty lasts five years, though, even if you do only get onsite cover for the first year.

7 PC World Advent 3810 BTO

The Advent achieved the highest Superbudget WorldBench 4 score in the chart, clocking up an impressive 120 points. However, performance isn't

everything and gamers will certainly be disappointed with the nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 – a poor substitute for the GeForce4



Titanium family of graphics cards. The monitor isn't the best either – the SyncMaster 753 DFX is only capable of a resolution of 1,024x768 at 75Hz.

The 3810 has a standalone Creative Labs SoundBlaster 5.1 sound card which the Videologic ZXR 500 speakers make full use of. For those of you who need to hook up peripherals to your PC, there are eight USB ports. In terms of software, Microsoft Works 6.0 is included. The warranty is another area in which the Advent 3810 BTO falls down – just one year of cover is inadequate, even if that cover is onsite.

8 Systemax Inspire 7327

Only managing to enter the chart in eighth place this month is the Systemax Inspire 7327. Surprisingly, the Athlon XP 2400+ processor – one of only two in this chart – failed to help the Inspire 7327 to anything

like an outstanding WorldBench 4 score. While 115 is five points shy of the top score achieved in this

category, it is still reasonably quick.

The CTX EX700F is a long way from being the best monitor available in this chart, but presumably Systemax has had to compromise to keep this system below £700 – Athlon XP 2400+ processors aren't cheap, so corners have to be cut in other areas. The audio chip is onboard as well, but Systemax has managed to include a decent graphics card – a GeForce4 Ti 4200 handles the visuals very well indeed.

There is a large 80GB hard drive, 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM with room to add another two memory modules and six USB ports for plugging in peripheral devices.

9 NetHighStreet Net PA699

Dropping right down to ninth place this month is NetHighStreet's Net PA699.

The AMD Athlon XP 2000+ processor, 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and 60GB IBM hard drive combined to give the Net PA699 a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 114. NetHighStreet has opted for an MS



Buying advice



• Processor **AMD dominates in this chart at the moment due to the fact that Athlons tend to cost less than Pentium 4s. The Athlon XP 2000+ and 2100+ are starting to be displaced by the newer 2200+ and 2400+ chips, but 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 2000+. In terms of Intel, look for at least a 2GHz Pentium 4, though it might be wiser to stick to AMD chips at this price point.**



• Memory **RAM prices are starting to rise, so you may pay more now, but still aim for 256MB. Pay a little extra now for the faster DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than SDRAM, and your memory will hold its value better in the coming years. If your budget is extremely tight you may have to be willing to accept just 128MB of DDR RAM, though you will be able to buy and install more easily enough.**



• Storage **Gigabytes abound these days, so demand no less than 40GB, with 60GB 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.**



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



• Graphics card **nVidia's budget GeForce4 MX cards offer 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 aim to get the new Radeon 9000 Pro card.**



• Sound card **A standalone 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.**

4200 graphics card – one of the better chips on offer in this category – but the Hansol 710D monitor doesn't really allow it to perform to its full potential and will certainly never win any prizes for its design. The onboard chip means that sound isn't the PA699's strong point and the Creative FPS1600 speakers only consist of a subwoofer and four satellites as opposed to the five offered by every other system but one in this category. In terms of cover, the warranty is only worth a lack-lustre one year of onsite protection.

10 Systemax Inspire 7152

The Systemax Inspire scored a speedy 119 in our WorldBench 4 tests. This is due in no small way to the Athlon XP 2200+. However, Systemax has compromised in other areas. The monitor and graphics card are basic to say the least and the onboard sound doesn't do justice to the Videologic speakers. Another disappointment is the warranty – one-year collect-and-return followed by two-year labour-only cover just isn't enough.

