

Top 10 Superbudget PCs

PC ADVISOR BEST BUY	Superbudget PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	Graphics card maker	Sound card	DVD drive speed	Operating system, software and extras	
		Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	Graphics chip	Speakers	CD-RW drive speed		
1	Microland Tech AD 103.01 0870 443 0399 www.microland.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte GA-7VT600	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB	ATI	onboard Realtek	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003
			2.25GHz	120GB Ultra ATA	6	0.24mm	ATI Radeon 9600	5 x Creative Inspire P580	(DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	
WorldBench 4				124						
2	Multivision Ionix 56 XT 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2700+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K7N2	17in ViewSonic G70FMB	nVidia	onboard nForce2	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004
			2.17GHz	120GB Ultra ATA	4	0.25mm	nVidia GeForce FX 5600	5 x Creative Inspire P580	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				127						
3	NetHighStreet Net Elite PA700 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com New	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K7N2	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB	ATI	onboard nForce2	16x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice.org
			2.25GHz	120GB Ultra ATA	4	0.24mm	ATI Radeon 9600	5 x Creative Inspire P580	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				130						
4	Systemax Inspire 7437 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2600+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI KT4AV	17in CTX EX700F Plus	MSI	onboard Realtek	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003
			2.13GHz	120GB Ultra ATA	6	0.25mm	nVidia GeForce FX 5200	5 x Videologic ZXR-550	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				124						
5	Best Price Poweroid 2015 PA700 0870 220 0444 www.bestpricecomputers.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 2-year return-to-base, 3-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte GA-7VT600	17in Iiyama Vision Master 1402	ATI	onboard Realtek	8x/4x/4x/2x/4x	Windows XP Home
			2.25GHz	120GB Ultra ATA	8	0.27mm	ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	2 x Altec Lansing 220	(DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	
WorldBench 4				128						
6	Gladiator Trojan 2500+ 0845 644 4666 www.gladiatorcomputers.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2500+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI KT6 Delta	19in Relisys TE988	MSI	onboard C-Media	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003
			1.84GHz Barton core	80GB Serial ATA	9	0.26mm	nVidia GeForce FX 5600	5 x Creative Inspire P580	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				122						
7	Mesh Matrix 2400+ SBX 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com New	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2400+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7N8X	15in Sharp LL-T15A4 flat-panel	nVidia	onboard Realtek	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE
			2GHz	80GB Serial ATA	6	0.297mm	nVidia GeForce FX 5600	2 x Creative SBS250	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				125						
8	Carrera Octan 2800AIW 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 1	• £850 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+	512MB DDR RAM	Leadtek WinFast K7NCR18D Pro	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB	ATI	onboard nForce2	16x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003
			2.08GHz Barton core	120GB Ultra ATA	6	0.24mm	ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				134						
9	eMachines 620 0870 242 0444 www.pcworld.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 04	Intel Celeron	512MB DDR RAM	Intel ALB45GE	15in eView L151 flat-panel	nVidia	onboard Realtek	16x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0
			2.7GHz	80GB Ultra ATA	6	0.297mm	nVidia GeForce FX 5200	2 x SP-30A	(DVD-ROM)	
WorldBench 4				97						
10	Packard Bell iXtreme 6060 01628 512 400 www.packardbell.co.uk New	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	Intel Celeron	256MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte GA-8SIML	17in Packard Bell FC700	nVidia	onboard SIS	12x/4x/2x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0, Norton Internet Security 2004
			2.6GHz	80GB Ultra ATA	4	0.25mm	nVidia GeForce4 MX 440	2 x Storm	(DVD-ROM/-R/-RW)	
WorldBench 4				90						



pretty strong combination, as confirmed by the good WorldBench 4 score of 127. The 120GB hard drive is a good size but we'd have liked to have seen some better backup options - a CD-RW is okay, but DVD writers are much better for backing up large amounts of data.

The graphics and sound offerings are fairly strong, but compared to the 19in screens we've come to expect the 17in ViewSonic feels a little cramped. The warranty lasts six years though (the best in the chart) and a good software bundle rounds off a very capable system.

3 NEW NetHighStreet Net Elite PA700

PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED The fastest PC of the new entries, the Elite PA700 scored 130 in our WorldBench 4 tests, suggesting that this PC should breeze through just about any task you set it. The 120GB hard drive is speedy (despite not using the newer Serial ATA interface), although we would have liked to see a DVD writer included alongside the CD-RW drive.

The 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 graphics card is a solid performer, even if it isn't a top-of-the-range model. The 19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB monitor offers enough screen inches to please hardened gamers and, with a pixel pitch of 0.24mm, it gives a very sharp, clear image. It's the speakers in most of the new

1 NEW Microland Tech AD 103.01

PC ADVISOR BEST BUY This month we've brought the upper price limit of the Superbudget PC chart down to £700. This is largely to reflect the fact that you can get more for your money than ever, and we reckon that there are plenty of good deals to be had for this price. Some manufacturers have proved us right by providing some top-quality kit for review, but there are still a few Christmas turkeys hanging around.

Top of the class was the Microland Tech AD 103.01. A combination of

good features and great performance win the day for Microland and this system is truly the best you can get for £700. Athlon XP processors continue to prevail, but the price cut does mean that most manufacturers are including the older chips with the Thoroughbred core.

Compared to the versions using the Barton core, these processors have to be run at higher clock speeds (generating more heat) to produce the same performance - the Microland's XP 2800+ processor actually runs at 2.25GHz, rather than 2.08GHz in the case of the equivalent 2800+ chip with a Barton core.

Nonetheless, the WorldBench score of 124 is quite reasonable and this PC will perform well under pressure.

The hard drive offers 120GB and the dual-format DVD writer supports both DVD-R/-RW and DVD+R/+RW standards as well as CD-R/-RW. Unfortunately, this is the only drive in the PC so if you want to copy discs then you'll first have to transfer the files on to the hard drive - not the smoothest of processes. The warranty lasts three years and the monitor and graphics card will keep those of you who use graphics-intensive apps very happy indeed. A worthy winner of the Best Buy award.

2 NEW Multivision Ionix 56 XT

PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED Only an inferior monitor and the lack of a DVD writer prevented the Ionix 56 XT from taking the Best Buy award this month with what is a very strong all-round system.

The Superbudget category is all about compromise. You can't have everything for £700, so vendors have to decide what the most important features are and where they can afford to be more conservative. However, Multivision has kept compromises to a minimum.

The Athlon XP 2700+ processor and 512MB of fast DDR RAM make a



systems that have suffered from the £700 price limit, but the Elite's Creative Inspire P580 units are among the best in the chart.

The warranty doesn't include any onsite cover and another minor niggle is the rather dated case design. If aesthetics are important to you then perhaps you should give the Elite a miss. However, if you're more interested in inner beauty then this system should prove most attractive.

played its part as well. The 120GB of storage space on the hard drive is generous and with a dual-format DVD writer you won't be short of backup options.

The Radeon 9800 SE All-in-Wonder is not only a top-notch graphics card but a TV tuner as well. Besides being able to tune into television and radio broadcasts with this PC, you can enjoy the sophisticated recording features that have secured the popularity of the All-in-Wonder range. The real sticking point is the display - the 17in liyama monitor is shaped like a fishbowl and offers a dot pitch of 0.27mm along with a maximum resolution of 1,024x768. This is far from impressive and means that the good graphics card largely goes to waste.

The warranty is five years long but doesn't include any onsite cover. There's not much software bundled and the lack of an office suite isn't ideal.



7 NEW Mesh Matrix 2400+ SBX

Seventh place might not reflect too well on the Mesh but it's far from being a bad system. Despite using the slowest AMD chip in the chart, the Matrix notched up a respectable 125 in our WorldBench 4 tests.

The most striking feature of this PC is the 15in flat-panel display. But while this is good for saving space, the majority of users would prefer a larger screen. This seems a particular waste since the 128MB GeForce FX 5600 card is one of the best in the chart. In our opinion, Mesh would have been better off including a DVD writer or increasing the size of the hard drive - even though the latter is a fast Serial ATA version.

Alternatively, Mesh might have improved on the rather insubstantial speakers. Nonetheless, the good software package and three-year warranty are very welcome and, as with many Mesh PCs, the inside of the case is very well laid out with plenty of room for upgrading.

Its WorldBench 4 score of 134 is easily the fastest and the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB is vastly superior to the other monitors seen this month. It's also good to see the screen backed up by the almost-faultless Radeon All-in-Wonder card, while the powerful Creative Inspire 5300 speakers guarantee great audio reproduction. We also like the five-year warranty. For all its charms, we doubt this PC is really worth an extra £150. And at this price, the lack of a DVD writer is scandalous.



9 NEW eMachines 620

Intel's Celeron processors are excruciatingly slow. The clock speeds may sound high, but

the eMachines' 2.7GHz chip is far slower than any 2.7GHz P4 or Athlon XP 2700+ would be, producing just 97 WorldBench 4 points.

Otherwise the eMachines 620 is a compact and well-designed PC, with 512MB of DDR RAM to ensure all applications run smoothly and an 80GB hard drive for storing your data. The 15in flat-panel display is great for saving space and offers a reasonable image, although gamers would probably prefer a larger screen.

The bundled version of Microsoft Works isn't the newest edition but it's fine for beginners. A one-year warranty seems a little stingy, though. And while you'll definitely need to upgrade this PC, you won't find much room underneath the lid.

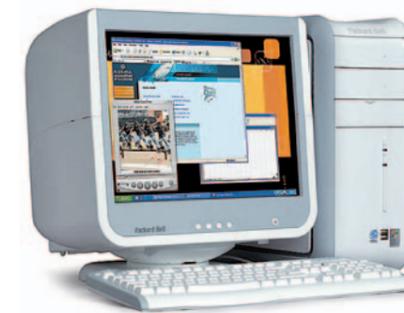


10 NEW Packard Bell iXtreme 6060

Even at this price, the Packard Bell iXtreme is poor value for money. In terms of performance the 6060 is miles behind the competition, scoring just 90 WorldBench 4 points. The 2.6GHz Celeron chip might sound powerful, but it struggled with our tasks.

In terms of design, the 6060 is an eyesore. Attempting to make this PC resemble a Mac hasn't worked and we can only imagine how grubby the gleaming white keyboard will get within a couple of weeks. The specs are no better than average and the warranty only lasts for a year.

On the up side there's a DVD writer. But even this is marred by the fact that it can only write to the DVD-R/-RW format.



4 NEW Systemax Inspire 7437

PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED In fourth place and taking the last Recommended award is the Inspire 7437 from Systemax. The Inspire catches the eye with its well co-ordinated system design, but there's plenty under the lid to match the outer style.

If you want to create a home cinema the Systemax is worth considering as it houses MSI's GeForce FX 5200. While this graphics card only gives you average gaming performance, its home entertainment facilities lift it out of the mire. Add to this the surround sound capabilities of the meaty Videologic ZXR-550 speakers and you have a PC that knows how to keep an audience. The one failing is the 17in screen, although the CTX EX700F Plus does compensate with strong image quality.

The Athlon XP 2600+ chip produces a decent WorldBench 4 score of 124. The 120GB hard drive should satisfy your needs, even if you like to store a lot of digital video. There might not be a DVD writer but there's a decent software bundle and a three-year onsite warranty. You'll be hard pushed to find a better deal for the price.

5 NEW Best Price Poweroid 2015

Only the cut-price monitor prevented the Poweroid 2015 from making a splash this month. The Athlon XP 2800+ was the driving force behind the Poweroid's impressive WorldBench 4 score of 128, although the 512MB of fast DDR RAM



6 NEW Gladiator Trojan 2500+

Gladiator is unfortunate to have come up against such a strong field in its first foray into the Superbudget PC category, but there is plenty to admire in this system. The 256MB MSI GeForce FX 5600 card is one of the best in the chart for gamers, although the 19in Relisys monitor is a letdown and its poor 0.26mm dot pitch and bulging screen make for a less than comfortable viewing experience.

The WorldBench 4 score of 122 isn't bad for this category, but it is a few points behind the fastest contenders. We have to say, though, that you may well notice this difference in day-to-day use. The Trojan's hard drive isn't the biggest at 80GB but its Serial ATA capabilities should compensate. And we can't fault the use of the Creative Inspire P580 for vivid surround sound. We'd liked to have seen a longer warranty, but the software bundle is good and the presence of nine USB 2.0 ports mean that you can connect peripherals until the cows come home.



8 Carrera Octan 2800AIW

Though all of the new entries are priced at £700, last month's Best Buy is still at the old upper price limit of £850. Despite getting more for the extra £150, the Carrera Octan moves down to eighth place as the rest of the field beats it for all-round value.

Buying advice



Processors You won't get the best chips at this price point, but you can still benefit from some very

powerful CPUs. In terms of AMD processors, look for an Athlon XP 2400+ or higher - a Barton core is a real advantage. Intel offers its older Pentium 4 chips to vendors at a reasonable rate although these don't have the features of some of the newer Pentium 4 processors - for example, HT (hyperthreading) technology. Don't go below 2.6GHz for a Pentium 4 and try to avoid Celerons altogether - they are just too slow.



Memory Settle for no less than 256MB of DDR RAM or your system will struggle with more complex tasks. The best you could expect at this price point is 512MB.



Storage Look for at least 80GB as it's better to have too much storage space than too little. If you're into

archiving or editing digital video try and get as big a hard drive as possible, but you're unlikely to get more than 120GB in a sub-£700 PC. Serial ATA drives will store and retrieve data quicker than an Ultra ATA drive but the average PC user will only notice the difference when they're constantly saving and opening very big files.



Monitor At this price 17in CRT monitors are common, though some 19in screens are available. Go for a dot

pitch of 0.25mm or less. Flat-panels are fairly rare in this price range and, unless you can guarantee quality, are best avoided. Remember, a 15in flat-panel's viewing area is almost as large as a 17in CRT monitor.



Graphics card A high-end graphics card is wasted if you're not into gaming or video editing. If good

graphics performance is a must, get a decent 128MB card such as the GeForce FX 5600. Better still is the ATI Radeon 9800 or All-in-Wonder cards - these offer sophisticated TV, radio and video facilities and prove that you don't have to be into games to have fun with a graphics card.



Sound card and speakers Generally at this price you won't get a standalone sound card. Thankfully, most

motherboards have good audio chips built in and these are often able to handle six-channel sound. If you want to play music or create a cinematic experience then you'll need to buy at least a 5.1 set of speakers - five satellites with a subwoofer.