Top 10 Power PCs

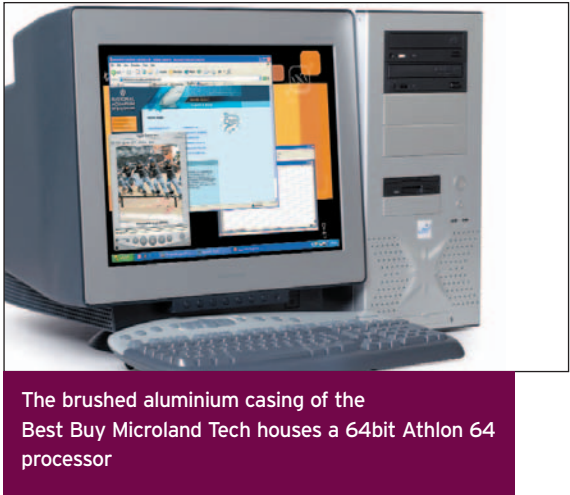| Power PCs		Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor		Graphics card maker	Sound card	DVD drive speed	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
		Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch		Graphics chip	Speakers	CD-RW drive speed		
					Maximum resolution@75Hz		Graphics card memory	Subwoofer			
1 PCADVISOR BEST BUY	**Microland Tech AD 101.01** 0870 443 0399 www.microlandtechnology.com Last month 1	• £1,549 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte GA-K8VT800	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB		ATI	Creative Audigy2 ZS	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, games bundle	The Tech AD 101.01 is a great all-round package that will appeal to anyone who wants the latest and greatest technology, especially if you're a gamer. The three-year warranty and price tag of £1,549 including VAT are simply the finishing touches to a machine that's well worth its Best Buy award.
			2GHz	160GB Serial ATA	8	0.24mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **141**			1,600x1,200		128MB	yes			
2 PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	**Multivision Ionix ST A64** 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 2	• £1,411 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K8T Neo	18in NEC MultiSync LCD1860NX flat-panel		ATI	onboard Realtek	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	The Ionix is one of five chart systems to sport AMD's Athlon 64 3200+ processor. The NEC flat-panel is an enticing addition – particularly if space is tight – and the graphics card is top notch, acting as a sophisticated TV tuner and video recorder as well. Sound quality, however, isn't quite up to scratch.
			2GHz	200GB Serial ATA	6	0.281mm		ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	6 x Creative Inspire 6700	24x/12x/8x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **141**			1,280x1,024		128MB	yes			
3 PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	**Time Platina 32 PQ** 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com Last month 3	• £1,499 inc VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon XP 3200+	1GB DDR RAM	MSI K7N2	19in LG Flatron F900P		ATI	Hercules Digifire 7.1	12x/4x/2x/1x (DVD-ROM/-R/-RW/-RAM)	Windows XP Pro, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, business/ music suites, games, 6in1 flash memory drive, gamepad	The Platina houses impressive components for a fair price. Though it isn't a 64bit chip, the Barton core AMD Athlon XP 3200+ processor packs a punch and will breeze through everyday tasks. The graphics card and monitor make gaming a joy and the system comes with a huge selection of software.
			2.2GHz Barton core	2 x 160GB Ultra ATA	4	0.24mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	32x/12x/8x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **133**			1,600x1,200		128MB	yes			
4 PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	**Evesham Axis 3200PP** 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com Last month 4	• £1,499 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+	256MB DDR RAM	MSI K8T Neo	17in Philips 170B flat-panel		ATI	Creative Audigy2 ZS	8x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+RW/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	Although the Axis 3200PP breaks the magic 140 barrier in our WorldBench 4 tests, we think it might have done better if its memory was cranked up a notch from the rather meagre 256MB of DDR RAM. A 17in Philips flat-panel and wireless keyboard and mouse help to keep desk space to a maximum.
			2GHz	160GB Serial ATA	8	0.264mm		ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **141**			1,280x1,024		128MB	yes			
5	**NetHighStreet Elite PA** 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 5	• £1,411 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour only warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon XP 3000+	1GB DDR RAM	MSI K7N2	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB		ATI	Creative Audigy2 ZS Platinum Pro	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x/3x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW/+RAM)	Windows XP Home, Norton Internet Security	The Elite PA may be slower than the award-winning systems, but its 1GB of DDR RAM will ensure smooth running of applications and this PC isn't short of backup options thanks to the LG Multidrive which writes to all types of DVD media. There's no office suite, but Norton Internet Security is bundled.
			2.17GHz Barton core	160GB Serial ATA	6	0.25mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **133**			1,600x1,200		128MB	yes			
6	**Mesh Matrix 64 3200 Ultra** 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 6	• £1,599 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Jan 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K8T Neo	18in NEC MultiSync LCD1860NX flat-panel		Sapphire	Creative Audigy2 ZS	8x/4x/2.4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0	The Matrix only manages sixth place mainly due to the high quality of the opposition. It's one of the fastest systems in the chart with a good spec. The pair of 120GB hard drives provide plenty of storage and the NEC flat-panel is an excellent choice with a space-saving design vastly superior to CRT monitors.
			2GHz	2 x 120GB Serial ATA	6	0.281mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	6 x Creative Inspire 6700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **142**			1,280x1,024		128MB	yes			
7	**Multivision Ionix Pro ZS** 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 7	• £1,432 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base labour only warranty • First review Oct 03	AMD Athlon XP 3200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K7N2	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB		ATI	Creative Audigy2 ZS Platinum Pro	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office	The Ionix Pro ZS is a fast system – achieving a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 138. There are a couple of niggles however. Ability Office doesn't provide the value for money of Microsoft's Works 7.0 or Works Suite 2004. Also, the bundled speaker system has only six satellites as opposed to seven.
			2.2GHz Barton core	2 x 120GB Serial ATA	6	0.24mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	6 x Creative Inspire 6700	40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **138**			1,600x1,200		128MB	yes			
8	**Shepley Raid P4 2.8** 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk Last month 8	• £1,526 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour only warranty • First review Jan 04	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Epox 4PCA3+	17in LG Flatron L1710B flat-panel		ATI	Hercules Digifire 7.1	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x/3x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW/-RAM)	Windows XP Home, Norton Ghost 2003	Compared to other chart contenders, the Shepley system struggled to accomplish the tasks we set it and the flimsy keyboard is a huge disappointment considering the price tag. However the LG flat-panel is a capable model and the three 80GB hard drives give you plenty of room for your data.
			2.8GHz	3 x 80GB Serial ATA	6	0.264mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Videologic ZXR-750	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **124**			1,280x1,024		128MB	yes			
9	**Mesh Matrix 64 FX Plus** 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 9	• £1,996 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Dec 03	AMD Athlon 64 FX-51	1GB DDR RAM	Asus SK8N	18in NEC MultiSync LCD1860NX flat-panel		ATI	Creative Audigy2 ZS	8x/4x/2.4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0	The Mesh's excessive price prevents it from finishing higher than ninth place. The NEC flat-panel is a superior 18in model that boasts a superb image, while the 128MB ATI Radeon 9800 Pro is one of the fastest graphics cards available. All this is covered by a three-year warranty.
			2.2GHz	200GB Ultra ATA	6	0.281mm		ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **144**			1,280x1,024		128MB	yes			
10	**PC World Advent 3617** 01442 355 802 www.pcworld.co.uk Last month 10	• £1,599 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 03	AMD Athlon 64 3200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI K8TM	17in Philips 170W4P flat-panel		MSI	onboard Realtek	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x/3x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW/-RAM)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0	While performance-wise the Advent lagged behind some of the other 64bit systems, this is still a fast PC. The design, however, leaves a lot to be desired. There's little room for upgrading, and though it's a compact tower unit, it follows the PC styling of the 90s rather than today's eye-catching case designs.
			2GHz	2 x 160GB Ultra ATA	6	0.291mm		nVidia GeForce FX 5200	2 x Harman Kardon Creature	32x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
			WorldBench 4 **139**			1,280x1,024		256MB	yes			

The brushed aluminium casing of the Best Buy Microland Tech houses a 64bit Athlon 64 processor

Buying advice

Power PCs

If you are buying a new system and have a budget of more than £1,410 then the Power PC chart is the place to look.

The price constraints of the Budget and Superbudget charts mean that compromises have to be made. In this chart, however, there is no price limit. Manufacturers can put in whatever components they like regardless of cost. We're still judging value for money, it's just that there's no upper price ceiling.

• Processor We've recently seen the first AMD Athlon 64 processors enter the Power PC chart. Athlon XP chips are still a good bet, but make sure they have the Barton core as this makes them faster and more efficient than the older Athlon XP processors using the Thoroughbred core. If you would prefer an Intel CPU, look out for Pentium 4 chips running at more than 3GHz. These processors use HT (hyperthreading) technology that can, theoretically at least, make your processor act as two individual CPUs.
• Memory The absolute minimum memory allocation in your new PC should be 512MB of fast DDR RAM.

Some vendors will give you as much as 1GB, so it's worth shopping around. PC2700 (DDR333) is adequate but opt for the faster PC3200 (DDR400) standard if at all possible.
• Storage Get at least a 120GB hard disk for your money. Most vendors will offer more space than this, perhaps on two or more drives. Look for the Serial ATA interface because it allows you to access your data more quickly. With more than one hard drive you may want to opt for a Raid configuration as this will make accessing and storing data faster still. If not, two hard drives are still a good idea as they provide you

with additional backup options and protection against failures.
• Monitor In terms of CRT (cathode ray tube) monitors, accept no less than a 19in display with a dot pitch of 0.25mm or less. It should be able to reach a resolution of 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. If you opt for a flat-panel display, it should be at least 17in and have a native resolution of 1,280x1,024.
• Graphics card ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro seems to be the most popular choice in this category at the moment, although a good alternative is nVidia's GeForce FX 5950. If gaming is of the upmost importance

then look for a graphics card with no less than 128MB of DDR RAM. Radeon All-in-Wonder cards from ATI fulfil the functions of both a graphics card and a TV tuner without compromising games performance.
• Sound card Speaker systems should have a subwoofer and at least six satellite speakers – seven are better still. Either the Creative Inspire 7700 or Videologic ZXR-750 systems will serve you well. Creative has the sound card market all but sewn up at the moment with the Audigy2 ZS, but there are other 7.1 sound cards available such as the Hercules Digifire.