











Top 10 Superbudget PCs

			Superbudget 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			
PC ADVISOR BEST BUY	1		Microland Tech AD 103.01 0870 443 0399 www.microlandtechnology.com Last month 1	• £700 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.25GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Gigabyte GA-7VT600 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200		ATI ATI Radeon 9600 128MB	onboard Realtek 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 32x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003	A combination of good features and great performance win the Microland its Best Buy award. This system is truly the best you can get for £700. 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.
	2		NetHighStreet Net Elite PA700 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 2	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.25GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	MSI K7N2 4	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200		ATI ATI Radeon 9600 128MB	onboard nForce2 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	16x (DVD-ROM) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice	The fastest of the sub-£700 PCs, the Elite scored 130 in our WorldBench 4 tests making this PC breeze through just about any task. The 120GB hard drive is speedy (despite not using the newer Serial ATA interface), although we would have liked to have seen a DVD writer included alongside the CD-RW drive.
	3		Systemax Inspire 7437 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk Last month 4	• £675 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	MSI KT4V 6	17in CTX EX700F Plus 0.25mm 1,280x1,024		MSI nVidia GeForce FX 5200 128MB	onboard Realtek 5 x Videologic ZXR-550 yes	16x (DVD-ROM) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003	If you want a home cinema consider the 7437 – the cheapest PC on this chart. Its graphics card gives only average gaming performance but its home entertainment facilities do it proud. The speaker capabilities are excellent. There's also an excellent software bundle and a three-year onsite warranty.
PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED	4		Carrera SSC Vision Plus 2600pa 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 3	• £700 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB Ultra ATA	Leadtek Winfast K7NCR18D Pro 6	17in Iiyama Vision Master 1403 0.27mm 1,024x768		ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	onboard nForce2 2 x Cyber Acoustics CA-3001 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 32x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	Slipping to fourth place, this Carrera system defies its outmoded Athlon XP 2600+ processor to produce one of the highest WorldBench 4 scores. The Vision Plus' strength is that it knows where it can safely cut back – the 4x DVD+RW facilities are great and the Radeon 9800 All-in-Wonder offers features galore.
	5		Best Price Poweroid 2015 0870 220 0444 www.bestpricecomputers.co.uk Last month 5	• £700 inc VAT • 2-year return-to-base, 3-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.25GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Gigabyte GA-7VT600 8	17in Iiyama Vision Master 1402 0.27mm 1,024x768		ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	onboard Realtek 2 x Altec Lansing 220 no	8x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 32x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home	Only its cut-price monitor prevented the Poweroid 2015 from making a splash this month. The 17in Iiyama 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.
	6		Gladiator Trojan 2500+ 0845 644 4666 www.gladiatorcomputers.co.uk Last month 6	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2500+ 1.84GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 80GB Serial ATA	MSI KT6 Delta 9	19in Relisys TE988 0.26mm 1,600x1,200		MSI nVidia GeForce FX 5600 256MB	onboard C-Media 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	16x (DVD-ROM) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003	Gladiator is unfortunate to have come up against such strong competition 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 for gamers and we can't fault the Creative Inspire P580 for vivid surround sound.
PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED	7		Mesh Matrix 2400+ SBX 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 7	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 04	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB Serial ATA	Asus A7N8X 6	15in Sharp LL-T15A4 flat-panel 0.297mm 1,024x768		nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5600 128MB	onboard Realtek 2 x Creative SBS250 no	16x (DVD-ROM) 48x/48x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, Microsoft Works 7.0	Despite being at seventh place the Mesh is far from being a bad system. 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 to have a larger screen. There's a good software package and a three-year warranty.
	8		Carrera Octan 2800AIW 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 8	• £850 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.08GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Leadtek WinFast K7NCR18D Pro 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200		ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	onboard nForce2 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x (DVD-ROM) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2003	For £150 more than the other chart entries, the Carrera Octan delivers a vastly superior monitor and its powerful speakers promise great audio. However, the rest of the machines beat it for all-round value and the lack of a DVD writer is simply scandalous for the price.
	9		eMachines 620 0870 242 0444 www.pcworld.co.uk Last month 9	• £700 inc VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 04	Intel Celeron 2.7GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB Ultra ATA	Intel AL845GE 6	15in eView L151 flat-panel 0.297mm 1,024x768		nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5200 64MB	onboard Realtek 2 x SP-30A no	16x (DVD-ROM) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 6.0	The eMachines' 2.7GHz Celeron chip is far slower than any equivalent P4 or Athlon XP would be, producing only 97 WorldBench 4 points. Otherwise this PC is well designed with fair memory and storage space. While the bundled version of Microsoft Works isn't the newest, it's fine for everyday use.
PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED	10		Packard Bell iXtreme 6060 01628 512 426 www.packardbell.co.uk Last month 10	• £699 inc VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 04	Intel Celeron 2.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB Ultra ATA	Gigabyte GA-8SIML 4	17in Packard Bell FC700 0.25mm 1,280x1,024		nVidia nVidia GeForce4 MX 440 64MB	onboard S/S 2 x Storm no	12x/4x/2x (DVD-ROM/-R/-RW) 32x/16x/8x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Norton Internet Security 2004, Microsoft Works 7.0	Even at this price, the iXtreme is poor value for money. In terms of performance it's miles behind the competition, scoring just 90 WorldBench 4 points. The 2.6GHz Celeron chip might sound powerful, but it struggled with our tasks. The specs are no better than average and the onsite warranty only lasts for one year.



The Microland Tech AD not only looks good, its visual setup is top-notch too thanks to its Mitsubishi monitor and Radeon 9600

Buying advice

Superbudget PCs

• **Processor** AMD Athlon XP processors dominate the Superbudget PC chart at the moment, although within this price range you'll also be able to afford a Pentium 4 running at anything up to 2.8GHz. Intel chips are better for graphics and video work, while AMD CPUs are superior all-rounders. Look for nothing less than an Athlon XP 2600+ processor although, in all seriousness, you should be holding out for an XP 2800+ or even an XP

3000+. Most Athlon chips use the latest Barton core, so expect a price decrease if you're offered a processor with an older Thoroughbred core. • **Memory** Windows XP loves RAM, and the more of it you have, the smoother your Windows sessions will be. Insist on 512MB of DDR RAM in this price category. The price of RAM has gone up in recent months, but don't be fobbed off by manufacturers trying to make you settle for 256MB. • **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 Superbudget system. Serial ATA drives will store and retrieve data quicker than Ultra ATA drives but the average PC user will only notice the difference when they're constantly saving and opening very big files. A CD-RW drive is almost standard these days, but look for at least a 48-speed CD-R model (52-speed is better still) and 24-speed CD-RW capabilities. Some manufacturers will also give you a DVD writer, but if you're trying to save money with a Superbudget PC, such a drive is probably a luxury you can do without.

• **Monitor** So many Superbudget manufacturers now offer 19in monitors that it hardly seems worth settling for a cramped 17in unit. Make sure, however, that the brand is a good one. Superbudget flat-panels may seem the ideal way to save space, but be aware that the quality you'll get at this price point is unlikely to be particularly high – a CRT is definitely a safer bet. • **Graphics card** For good graphics performance you can get a decent 128MB card, such as the GeForce FX 5600, for a little extra. Better still is the ATI Radeon 9800, and you may find some PCs with All-in-Wonder

cards – these offer sophisticated television, radio and video facilities and prove that you don't necessarily have to be a games fan to have fun with a graphics card. • **Sound card** Onboard audio is standard in the Superbudget chart, but the quality of these controllers is much higher than it used to be – the nVidia nForce solutions are particularly good. All doubts should be dispelled by buying a strong set of speakers. Any of the 5.1 (five speakers and a subwoofer) sets in the Creative Inspire or Videologic ranges will be ideal, although you can now buy 6.1 sets for that extra grunt.