











Top 10 Budget PCs

		Budget 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				
PCADVISOR BEST BUY	1	 <b>Best Price Poweroid 2301</b> 020 8904 3347 www.bestpricecomputers.co.uk Last month 1	• £1,200 inc VAT • 2-year return-to-base, 3-year labour only warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	1GB DDR RAM 2 x 120GB Serial ATA	Asus K8V Deluxe 10	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 2,048x1,536	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	onboard SoundMax 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x/3x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW/-RAM) 40x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, InterVideo WinCinema, InterVideo WinDVD, B Recorder Gold 5.0	Hitting the top spot with a sizzling 143 points in our WorldBench 4 tests is the Poweroid 2301, and it's clear to see why. Among its rich spec list is an impressive processor, vast amounts of memory, a jaw-dropping pair of hard drives, a stunning monitor and a solid graphics card. A worthy choice.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	143								
PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	2	 <b>Microland Tech AD 104.01</b> 0870 443 0399 www.microlandtechnology.com Last month 2	• £1,200 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	Gigabyte GA-8VT800 Pro 8	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB	onboard Realtek 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, Ahead Nero	Only one point behind the Poweroid, the Microland just misses out on first place. The graphics sub-system is first class and the 19in monitor, with its 0.24mm dot pitch and terrific colour palette, sets this PC alight. The Tech AD is well laid out, comes with a Logitech cordless keyboard and a good software bundle.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	142								
PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	3	 <b>NetHighStreet Elite PA 999</b> 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 3	• £999 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour only warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	1GB DDR RAM 120GB Serial ATA	Gigabyte GA-7N400 Pro 2 6	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	Sapphire ATI Radeon 9800 SE 128MB	onboard Realtek 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Norton Internet Security, Ahead Nero	You won't get a 64bit processor for this price but we have no qualms about the Elite's speed, especially as 1GB of DDR RAM is included. The hard drive isn't the largest, but only video enthusiasts should find the 120GB inadequate. Sadly, the graphics card produces rather average 3D games performance.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	138								
PCADVISOR RECOMMENDED	4	 <b>Mesh Matrix 64 3000+ XT</b> 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 4	• £1,199 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon 64 3000+ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	Asus K8V Deluxe 6	17in ViewSonic VE175b flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	ATI ATI Radeon 9600 XT 128MB	Creative Audigy2 ZS 7 x Creative Inspire 7700 yes	16x/4x/2.4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 40x/24x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, Pinnacle Instant CD/DVD	Even with its slower 64bit Athlon processor, the Mesh still matches the performance of those machines housing the 3200+ versions. The Sony CD and DVD writers are smooth in operation and the audio quality generated by the sound card and speakers makes this an ideal choice for audio enthusiasts.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	142								
	5	 <b>Carrera SSC Octan Ultimate 3200pa</b> 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 5	• £1,199 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 180GB Ultra ATA	Leadtek WinFast K7NCR18 Pro 6	17in AG Neovo S-17 flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	Creative Audigy2 ZS 7 x Creative Inspire 7700 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 48x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, Ahead Nero	The Ultimate 3200pa was first seen in the February issue and, due to its success, has been reassembled to slide under the £1,200 price limit. The spec list may have been downgraded, but it's a testament to the calibre of the original that, despite cutbacks, this PC still commands a position in the top five.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	137								
	6	 <b>Evesham Axis 64 3000+ XT</b> 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com Last month 6	• £1,200 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon 64 3000+ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Serial ATA	MSI K8T Neo 6	17in Philips 170B flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder) 128MB	onboard Realtek 5 x Creative Inspire P580 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 40x/24x/16x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, Pinnacle Instant CD/DVD	In all honesty, there isn't any one aspect of the Evesham that we can single out for either praise or criticism. This PC was consistently pleasing without ever stopping us in our tracks. The ample software bundle, neat internals and cordless keyboard and mouse are all worthy additions to a worthy PC.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	138								
	7	 <b>Time Neptune 3000+ PQ</b> 01282 777 555 www.timecomputers.com Last month 7	• £1,199 inc VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Spr 04	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	MSI KT6M-MLS 5	17in Iiyama 17JN1 flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	MSI nVidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra 256MB	Creative Audigy2 ZS 7 x Videologic ZXR-750 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, 7-in-1 flash memory drive	Although this system's graphics card is one of the fastest on the market, it's never allowed to slip out of second gear thanks to the Neptune's poor base specs. The Neptune does try to atone with its sound card and seven-in-one flash memory drive and internally the PC is very well organised.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	128								
	8	 <b>Mesh Matrix 3000+ MX TFT</b> 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 8	• £1,175 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Asus A7N8X Deluxe 6	17in Sharp LL-T17A4 flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 128MB	onboard nForce2 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	8x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 32x/24x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	This Mesh is beginning to show its age. The graphics chip isn't the best and we would prefer a sound card rather than an onboard audio controller. However, its monitor is highly capable and the multiformat DVD writer stands comparison with any of the drives in this month's entries.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	133								
	9	 <b>NetHighStreet Net PA 999</b> 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 9	• £1,175 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 1-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Ultra ATA	MSI K7N2 4	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy2 ZS 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	12x/4x/4x/2x/2x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice, PC-cillin 2002	When this chart features a vastly superior machine from NetHighStreet that costs £175 less, you would be mad to buy the Net PA 999 at this price. Its processor is ageing and the hard drive is only an Ultra ATA version. The biggest shortcoming, though, is its warranty: just two years with no onsite cover.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	132								
	10	 <b>NEC Powermate i-Select D3410</b> 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk Last month 10	• £1,174 inc VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Spr 04	Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Gigabyte GA-8S648FXM 4	15in NEC MultiSync LV15m flat-panel 0.297mm 1,024x768	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 XT 256MB	Creative Audigy2 ZS 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW) 48x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/-R/-RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0, Norton AntiVirus 2003 (90-day version)	The Powermate limps to a meagre score of 117 in our WorldBench 4 tests. Graphics results aren't much better and even the might of the graphics card isn't enough to impress. The flat-panel isn't large enough and the slightly reduced price tag still can't salvage this disappointing entry from NEC.	
				<b>WorldBench 4</b>	117								



The Best Price Poweroid boasts an impressive processor, vast amounts of memory and a stunning monitor

Buying advice

Budget PCs

Buying a PC when you're on a budget can be tough. The trick is to figure out precisely what you want to use the system for. This way, you know in which areas you need to spend money and in which you can compromise.

For example, if you're an avid gamer you'll need a good graphics card and monitor. Alternatively, if you're into digital video editing then you'll want the biggest hard drive you can afford.

- **Processor** AMD Athlon processors dominate the entire chart at the moment and the 64bit 3200+ looks a popular choice. If you prefer to take the Intel-branded route then look for a Pentium 4 that runs at speeds of at least 3GHz. Bear in mind, too, that when AMD or Intel bring out a new chip the price of older models tends to come down, so keep an eye on the runners-up rather than the high-flyers.
- **Memory** The standard memory allocation in the Budget chart is now 512MB of DDR RAM, which should be enough to serve the needs of most PC users. Shop around and you

can even get 1GB. Aim for DDR333 (PC2700) or DDR400 (PC3200) RAM as this gives the best performance.

- **Storage** While 100GB of storage should be ample for most PC users, Budget systems tend to come with a hard drive of at least 120GB. Though you may never fill it, go for as much storage space as possible. In terms of CD-RW drives, don't settle for anything less than 40/16/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities.
- **Monitor** You should be able to get a decent 19in monitor for your money. Only be satisfied with a 17in model if it has very good specifications.

Either way, check that the screen can achieve an optimal resolution of 1,280x1,024 at 75Hz. Better still, for really sharp images look for 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. In terms of dot pitch, 0.25mm or lower is fine.

Flat-panel displays will push up the price of the Budget system but these screens might still be worth looking at if desk space is at a premium.

- **Graphics card** In terms of dedicated graphics memory, look for a minimum of 128MB. Top-of-the-range cards include nVidia's GeForce FX 5950 Ultra and ATI's Radeon 9800 XT and Pro. However, if you

don't need astoundingly fast frame rates all the time then the GeForce FX 5700 and ATI Radeon 9600 XT are still adequate graphics cards.

- **Sound card** When it comes to audio Creative's Audigy2 sound card is the best option, although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still a dependable choice. Avoid onboard audio if at all possible as its performance is never as impressive as that of a dedicated sound card.

If creating good-quality surround sound is important to you then look for a speaker system with five satellites and a subwoofer.