





BUDGET PCs																											
Details		Last month's position	First reviewed	PC World-Bench 4	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Processor type/speed	RAM	Hard disk/capacity	Mother-board	Chipset	Modem	USB ports		Monitor	Screen size	Dot pitch	Max resolution @75Hz	Graphics card	Graphics chip	Graphics card memory	Sound card	Speakers	No of speakers/subwoofer	DVD -ROM speed	CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software & other extras
 1	Evesham Axis 2600+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com	NEW	Dec 02	122	£999	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ / 2.1GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/ 100GB	MSI MS-6712	Via KT400	56K	6		LG Flatron F900P	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0
 2	Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	NEW	Dec 02	128	£999	3-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ / 2.0GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 120GB	Asus A7V-8X	Via KT400	56K	4		Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	MSI GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
 3	Multivision Vision KT 4 9700 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk	NEW	Dec 02	117	£999	3-year onsite, 3-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ / 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 120GB	MSI MS-6590 KT4	Via KT400	56K	6		Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 93SB	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 9700	Radeon	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
 4	NetHighStreet Net PA999 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com	NEW	Dec 02	113	£999	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	Intel Pentium 4/ 2.5GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 80GB	Asus P4S8X	Sis468	56K	6		CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 9700	Radeon	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice
5	Systemax Inspire 7317 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	NEW	Dec 02	119	£1,199	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ / 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 120GB	MSI KT4V-L	Via KT400	56K	6		CTX PV700	17in flat-panel	0.26mm	1,280x1,024	MSI GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
6	Ideal Computing Aptus M120 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	NEW	Dec 02	120	£899	1-year onsite, 4-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ / 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 80GB	Gigabyte GA7VRXP	Via KT400	56K	6		Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Gainward GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	onboard	Mercury Home Theatre	4/yes	16x	48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office
7	Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk	1	Sep 02	118	£999	3-year onsite, 3-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 2100+ / 1.73GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 80GB	MSI 6380E	Via KT3 Ultra	56K	5		Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7
8	Evesham Axis 2200+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com	2	Sep 02	120	£949	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ / 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 80GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	6		Samsung SyncMaster 957DF	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Leadtek WinFast A250	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0
9	CCL Computers Home 978X 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	NEW	Dec 02	116	£1,149	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ / 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 120GB	Asus A7V-8X	Via KT400	56K	6		Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 9700	Radeon	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Videologic ZXR 500	5/yes	16x	48x/48x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office
10	NEC Powermate i-Select XL5 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk	NEW	Dec 02	111	£1,199	1-year onsite	Intel Pentium 4/ 2.4GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/ 40GB	Gigabyte	Sis 962	56K	5		NEC LT17u	17in flat-panel	0.26mm	1,280x1,024	ATI Radeon 9700	Radeon	128MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/yes	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 2002

1 Evesham Axis 2600+

Two things stand out about the Best Buy Evesham Axis 2600+. The first is its name: the new 2.1GHz Athlon XP 2600+, AMD's fastest processor yet, is the driving force behind this system. Secondly, Evesham has decided to use PC3200 (or DDR400) memory. Running at 400MHz, this should theoretically produce better performance than slower PC2700 (DDR333) RAM that has been used in most of the other systems in the chart this month.

↓ A speedy processor and new faster DDR memory take the Evesham Axis 2600+ to the top of the chart



With this high-end specification we were expecting a pretty decent run in the WorldBench 4 tests. In the event, though, we weren't exactly stunned. Its score of 122 was six points shy of the second-placed Mesh system, but considering there is only 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM this is understandable. Another 256MB of PC3200 memory could have added a few points to the score and might have even outstripped the Mesh.

The graphics test results were also very good, but not as impressive as the Mesh's. However, the Evesham's video encoding capabilities were the best overall – two and a half minutes of DV (digital video footage) was converted into Mpeg-2 format in six minutes 22 seconds, some 23 seconds quicker than the Mesh.

Where the Evesham really stands out, and one of the reasons why it nabbed the coveted Best Buy award, is in terms of the monitor. The LG Flatron F900P is not only a good-looking display but offers excellent image quality and a four-port USB hub. A price tag of £999 and a three-year warranty, with the first two years onsite, round off what is an outstanding package.

2 Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro

Mesh has also chosen one of the latest Athlon XP chips to power its Budget PC entry this month, but has opted for the 2400+ rather than the 2600+ housed in the Evesham. Despite the slower processor running at only 2GHz, as opposed to the 2600+'s 2.1GHz, the Matrix XP won the WorldBench 4 race hands down. Its impressive score of 128 would stand out in the Power PC chart and is a full six points clear of the Best Buy Evesham Axis.

Graphics test results were equally dazzling – 83fps (frames per second) running Quake III's Annihilator demo at 1,600x1,200 beat the Evesham by 5fps. Admittedly, the difference isn't noticeable to the human eye, but it demonstrates that Mesh has maximised the potential of its GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card.

In terms of memory, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM has recently become the standard in the Budget category and the Matrix XP doesn't disappoint on that front. A massive 120GB will provide more storage space than you'll ever need and the 48-/40-/12-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW takes care of backup.

Creative Audigy sound cards have also become the standard in this category. Budget manufacturers have finally realised the importance of good-quality sound and FireWire ports – something that the previous favourite, the SoundBlaster Live 5.1 didn't offer. Creative also provides the speakers with the Inspire 5300 system.

The real letdown, though, is the Matrix's warranty – three years is plenty but it's only return-to-base cover. However, it's still a good deal for £999.

↓ With a WorldBench score that would do a Power PC proud, Mesh gets a deserved Recommended award



3 Multivision Vision KT 4 9700

Multivision rounds off the top three Budget PCs with the Vision KT 4 9700. As the name suggests, this Recommended system boasts the ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card bundled with 128MB of memory. Combined with the Athlon XP 2200+ processor, the Vision KT managed respectable scores in both the graphics and video encoding tests. An equally respectable 117 in WorldBench 4 means that this system can handle most tasks well – whether you want to play games, edit video footage or perform more mundane jobs, this system won't let you down.

Multivision has opted for the stylish Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 93SB monitor. It offers a dot pitch of 0.25mm, will reach resolutions of 1,600x1,200 and always delivers a crisp, clear picture. For all its style, though, the Diamond Pro 93SB has no USB hub on offer. Although this isn't a vital requirement in a monitor it would certainly add to the value.

The Creative Audigy sound card and Inspire 5300 speakers provide great surround audio and there is a whopping

120GB of storage space courtesy of the IBM hard drive. In terms of backup, you get a 40-/40-/12- (read/write/rewrite) speed CD-RW.

Multivision has to settle for third place this month due to the outstanding quality of the top two PCs, but if you're after complete peace of mind then the Vision is for you. Three years of onsite cover is a good deal, but when it's backed up by three further years of labour-only cover you're looking at one of the best deals available.

↓ The Multivision Vision KT 4 9700 has competitive specifications and a generous six-year warranty



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4 NetHighStreet Net PA999

NetHighStreet takes the final Recommended award with the Net PA999. The 2.5GHz Pentium 4 chip helped this system achieve a WorldBench 4 score of only 113, which was a good few points behind the rest of the competition. However, performance scores aren't the only thing we judge systems on and the Net PA999 is strong in all other areas making it well worth a Recommended award.

The CTX monitor offers good image quality and helps the 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card fulfil its potential. The frame rates achieved in the graphics tests were impressive too – 77.6fps (frames per second) at a resolution of 1,600x1,200. This score was only beaten by the Evesham and Mesh in the top two spots, both sporting AMD's brand-new Athlon XP chips. Sound is handled by Creative – an Audigy sound card and Inspire 5300 speakers, which will satisfy even the most demanding audiophiles.

↓ Though not a high flyer, the NetHighStreet is a good all-round system with a decent price tag



5 Systemax Inspire 7317

Systemax has opted for a flat-panel monitor with the Inspire 7317. The PV700 is one of the best displays available at the moment as it offers a good-quality image and handles resolutions up to 1,280x1,024. Indeed, it has won many awards in our Test Centre. One down side, though, is that there's no USB hub. The CTX doesn't cost a bomb so Systemax has managed to accommodate it without having to cut too many corners elsewhere. The Inspire's reasonable WorldBench 4 rating of 119 proves this.

The 128MB MSI GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card is well paired with the CTX flat-panel and the Videologic ZXR 500 speakers create immersive surround sound. If you need to save space but still want a good display and audio then the Inspire 7317 is worth considering. And with a two-year onsite warranty followed by a third year of return-to-base cover, Systemax offers peace of mind. At £1,199, it's a touch pricey though.



↑ Though it has a stylish flat-panel and speedy performance, the Systemax Inspire is pricey

and offers a dot pitch of 0.25mm, so it will fulfil your basic monitor requirements. However, the lack of additional features such as a USB hub or built-in speakers is disappointing. Another area of compromise is sound. The Aptus M120's audio chip is an onboard solution and, though it can handle six channels, the bundled Mercury Home Theatre speakers only feature a subwoofer and four satellites.

6 Ideal Computing Aptus M120

Ideal Computing sits at number six with the Aptus M120. At just £899, this mid-charted system is competitively priced. Indeed, the WorldBench 4 score of 120 would be considered an achievement even in the Power PC chart. However, the overall package is let down by the fact that the monitor is only a 17in model.

The Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB reaches a resolution of 1,600x1,200



↑ The Aptus M120 could improve on its display and audio setup but it is still a solid, speedy system

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↑ Last month's Best Buy is beaten by the wave of new processors, but it is still an attractive system

If you're not too bothered by the display and audio quality and more interested in a speedy performance at a low price then Ideal Computing's Aptus could be the machine for you. Its five-year warranty, with the first year onsite, is also a plus point.

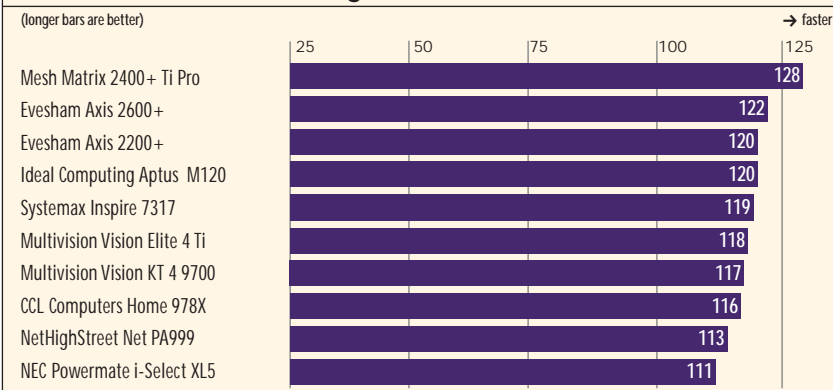
7 Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti

Our former Best Buy falls to seventh place this month. The Vision Elite houses an Athlon XP 2100+ chip, which has been succeeded by three more power-efficient chips. Even so, the CPU pushes the Elite to a respectable WorldBench 4 score of 118. This may not be the speediest performance in the chart, but it's unlikely you'll notice it in everyday tasks. The display setup is good – an Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 teamed up with a 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4200 graphics card. Sound is also handled well thanks to a Creative Audigy card and Videologic's ZXR 500 speaker system. Ultimately, though, when you take into account that you can get a faster CPU at a lower price, the Vision Elite doesn't seem such a good deal.



↑ The Evesham's decent WorldBench 4 score easily matches those of the high new entries

PC WorldBench 4: Budget PCs



8 Evesham Axis 2200+

Last month's second-placed system, the Evesham Axis 2200+, has dropped to number eight due to the influx of new entrants with faster processors and value-for-money price tags. But the Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 120 easily matches those of many of the newer systems in this chart and is only two points shy of the first-placed Axis 2600+.

The Axis offers plenty of storage space thanks to its 80GB hard drive and there is an almost-standard 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. In terms of the graphics setup, the 64MB GeForce4 Ti 4200 could have been improved but it held its own in our tests. The Samsung SyncMaster 957DF is a fair display as well, so gamers and designers should be more than happy with the overall performance of the Axis.

The Evesham's warranty offers two-year onsite cover followed by a third year return-to-base, which is among the better deals in this chart. One drawback, however, is the lack of an office suite.

9 CCL Computers Home 978X

Opting for an Asus motherboard with the new Via KT400 chipset, the Home 978X managed a rating of 116 in WorldBench 4. If you're prepared to overlook this performance, though, you'll be rewarded with an outstanding monitor. The Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 offers built-in speakers, a four-port USB hub and the picture quality is top-notch. You'd be hard pushed to find enough devices to fill the 10 USB ports,



← The CCL may have a great monitor, but its average performance and high price tag pull it back to ninth place

but it's always better to have too many than too few. Taking into account the high price tag and its low WorldBench score, though, you can see why the 978X doesn't sit further up the chart.

10 NEC Powermate i-Select XL5

The Powermate scored the lowest WorldBench 4 rating in the chart, but NEC has obviously had to cut corners to keep this system within the Budget price range and still offer a flat-panel display. The SoundBlaster Live 5.1 sound card offers good audio quality but lacks a FireWire port. The hard drive is only 40GB, much smaller than the other systems in the chart. There's plenty of USB ports, but you might expect more than a one-year warranty for a price tag of £1,199, even if it is onsite cover.



← A poor performance score and small hard drive mean this NEC gets no further than tenth place

The memory race

The Evesham Axis 2600+, our new Best Buy machine, is the first system we have seen that uses the new PC3200 DDR (double data rate) RAM. Running at 400MHz, PC3200 or DDR400 memory modules should offer faster performance than the previous standards, PC2700 (DDR333) and PC2100 (DDR266).

The performance of a PC is very much affected by the type and amount of RAM used, along with other factors such as the processor, motherboard and chipset. The Evesham only achieved a score of 120 in the WorldBench 4 tests. That's eight points behind the Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro, which that uses PC2700 DDR RAM. However, this is due to the Mesh

housing 512MB of RAM, whereas the Evesham only opted for 256MB. If Evesham had added an extra 256MB, there's a strong possibility that the score would have been higher.

It's worth bearing in mind, though, that if you have PC3200 DDR RAM you will only benefit from adding more memory if you add another PC3200 module. Adding memory with a lesser clock speed would cause the PC3200 module to run at the lower speed, making the faster memory pointless.

We expect to see more systems using the new PC3200 (DDR400) modules in the near future, which should push WorldBench scores higher. However, it is still relatively expensive and may take a while before it becomes the industry standard.