TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

Details	Last month's position	First reviewed	PC World-Bench	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	Office suite & other extras
1 CCL Computers Home-XLS 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	1	Feb 02	120 (WB 4)	£729*	1-year onsite, 2-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	Epox	Via KT266	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Leadtek WinFast Titanium	nVidia GeForce2 Ti	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Genius 320W	2/N	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2001
2 Best Price Poweroid 2006 020 8904 3347 www.poweroid.com	2	Feb 02	114 (WB 4)	£699	1-year RTB parts and labour, 4-year RTB labour	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB SDRAM	Maxtor/40GB	Asus	Via Apollo KT133	56K	4	Iiyama VM 1402	17in	0.27mm	1,024x768	ATI All in Wonder Radeon	ATI Radeon	32MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative DTT 2200	5/Y	16x	32x/8x/4x	Windows XP Home
3 Ideal Computing Aptus 1600XP 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	3	Feb 02	118 (WB 4)	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	Chaintech	AMD 761	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	64MB	onboard Audio 8738	Creative DTT 2200	5/Y	8x	N/A	Windows XP Home, Star Office 5.2
4 Evesham Axis 1600+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com	4	Feb 02	112 (WB 4)	£699	2-year onsite, 1-year RTB parts and labour	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Samsung/40GB	MSI	nVidia nForce	56K	2	LG EzyFlat	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	onboard nVidia GeForce2	integrated nVidia GeForce3	32MB	onboard nVidia	Cambridge four-point	4/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home
5 Campus Eclipse 330 GTX 0870 066 0711 www.campus-direct.co.uk	5	Feb 02	112 (WB 4)	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/40GB	Gigabyte	Via KT266A	56K	3	Relisys TF785	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Abit Siluro T400	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	64MB	onboard Creative	Voyager 480W	2/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
6 NetHighStreet.com 0121 693 0052 www.nethighstreet.com	6	Feb 02	115 (WB 4)	£699	1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Quantum/30GB	Asus	Via KT266A	56K	4	Relisys TF785	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Videologic VividXS	STMicro Electronics Kyro II	32MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Cambridge FPS1600	4/Y	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
7 Multivision Vision Elite XP LT 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	7	Jan 02	188 (WB 2000)	£699	1-year RTB parts and labour, 4-year RTB labour	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/40GB	MSI	Via KT266	56K	4	Hansol 705D	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	Hercules 3D Prophet 4500	nVidia GeForce2	64MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative DTT 2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus Millennium
8 Systemax A1300RV 1170 0870 729 7364 www.simply.co.uk	8	Nov 01	187 (WB 2000)	£739*	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Biostar	Via KT133A	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	Gainward GeForce2 MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Creative SBS52	2/N	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite Me, Easy CD Creator
9 CCL Computers Home-XLR 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	9	Nov 01	182 (WB 2000)	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.2GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Soltek SL75KAV	Via KT133A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Hercules Prophet 4500	Kyro II	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Genius Fantasia SP-G16	2/N	16x	32x/8x/8x	Windows 98 SE, Microsoft Works, Nero, Cyberlink DVD, Genius Net Scroll
10 EasyPC 1300B 0800 195 4353 www.easypcdirect.co.uk	10	Nov 01	179 (WB 2000)	£699	3-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	Seagate/40GB	Jetway 663A Pro	Via KT133	56K	2	Relisys TF785 FST	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Inno 3D MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Mercury SW-880	2/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows Me, TV card, Lotus SmartSuite Me, Windows DVD, Nero, remote control

* Due to a rise in the cost of RAM, the price of these PCs increased as we went to press. Because of the timing of this change, we were unable to amend the Top 10. See next month for an updated chart.

← With an unbeatable WorldBench 4 score and a strong specification, the CCL holds on to the top spot

1 CCL Computers Home-XLS

Superbudget PC buyers no longer have to make do with ageing technology and substandard performance. The CCL, in common with many of this month's new entries, is equipped with AMD's 1600+ Athlon XP processor. This relatively new processor runs at 1.4GHz but, in reality, offers performance closer to that of a 1.6GHz Athlon chip. Producing an astonishing WorldBench 4 score of 120, the Home-XLS was a clear winner in this month's Superbudget chart, although the fast 40GB hard drive and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM will also have contributed to this high score.

The graphics subsystem is second to none, led by nVidia's new GeForce2 Ti. Representing superb value for money while promising high frame rates (only the Best Price's Radeon card could get close in our games and video tests), it's an excellent choice for budget-conscious consumers.

The 17in CTX monitor has topped the Top 10 monitors chart in past issues, and its vibrant image quality and strong resolution support make it the best of the screens in the Superbudget category. The CD-RW drive is one of the best yet seen in this chart, with 24-speed CD-R and 10-speed CD-RW facilities proving first class.

Critically speaking, the onboard sound card and Genius speakers hardly offer the ultimate in sound quality and there could have been more documentation supplied with the Home-XLS. Internally, the case is clean and accessible, although it is not particularly spacious. For most users, though, these gripes will only be minor details, and the CCL Computer's excellent performance elsewhere marks it out as a clear winner of our Best Buy.

2 Best Price Poweroid 2006

Performance may be important but, as the Best Price Poweroid demonstrates, the entire specification is just as important. Even at the Superbudget price point, you don't want the manufacturer to cut corners.

↑ A superb overall setup makes the Recommended Poweroid a great Superbudget system

The Poweroid offers enough speed – its modest 1.4GHz Athlon, twinned with 256MB of SDRAM, produced a highly respectable WorldBench 4 score of 114. But it's the supporting cast that makes the Poweroid 2006 an excellent all-rounder. The Iiyama monitor may have a 0.27mm dot pitch and low resolution support, but the colourful picture is more than palatable. The ATI All in Wonder Radeon graphics card is also more than a match for the GeForce2 MX cards featured elsewhere in the chart.

The Best Price has some superb video and TV options. Even the sound system – a Creative Live 5.1 and DTT 2200 speakers – is impressive, while the 40GB hard drive gets a boost from the Promise 100 interface.

Although the Best Buy Home-XLS ranks as the better deal, the Recommended Poweroid 2006 still offers plenty of superb features. Thanks to its advanced sound and video capabilities, the Best Price is a credible second choice.

3 Ideal Computing Aptus 1600XP

The Ideal Aptus is a PC that appears to do everything right – well, almost everything. Crucially, it's the omission of a CD-RW drive that consigns this PC to third place. Even in the Superbudget category, a CD-RW drive is now a must rather than an option. Ideal's thrift even extends to the choice of office suite – the free StarOffice package is selected in preference to Microsoft Office or Lotus SmartSuite – and the meagre eight-speed DVD playback.

However, such cost-cutting exercises allow for some high-quality peripherals. There's a set of meaty speakers and a colourful LG monitor. The Aptus also

→ The Aptus loses out through the omission of a CD-RW drive, but remains a strong competitor

has an excellent turn of speed, thanks to the 1600+ Athlon XP processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which turn in a WorldBench 4 score of 118. For anyone looking to maximise speed at the expense of a CD-RW, the Aptus 1600XP is a definite possibility.

Unfortunately for Ideal, even without providing all of the crucial components, it's beaten on straight speed by the chart-topping CCL Computers system.

4 Evesham Axis 1600+

Having secured a tight hold over the graphics card market, nVidia has now turned its attention to motherboards. Evesham's new Axis 1600+ Athlon XP PC sports an nForce motherboard, whose unique architecture is hyped as being able to deliver high-quality integrated graphics and sound.

The evidence this time round suggests that, good though the nForce is, you'll still get more bang for your buck from non-integrated components. The graphics

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

controller, for instance, offers ageing GeForce2 performance. And, although its video encoding is fairly good, you're not going to get the highest frame rates from your games collection.

The Evesham's sound, on the other hand, is clean but, even with the high-calibre four-point speakers, lacks the versatility and resonance of a PC equipped with the Creative Live 5.1. Windows performance is slightly disappointing, and the Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 112 is surprisingly low for a 1600+ processor.

There's no such thing as an all-bad Evesham PC, though, and the Axis 1600+ comes with some quality accessories, plenty of opportunity for expansion and strong documentation. However, it's likely that, unburdened by the nForce architecture, the Axis would be placed higher up the chart.

↑ The Evesham Axis 1600+ offers plenty of accessories and will prove a doddle to upgrade

↑ The Campus' detailed manual is in its favour, as is its spacious case, three USB and two FireWire ports

5 Campus Eclipse 330 GTX

The Campus Eclipse scores high marks for presentation, but lacks the speed needed to put its rivals out of the picture. However, it's nice to see a clear, detailed manual – a frequent omission in this chart. The case is good, with plenty of expansion space, and there's also three USB and two FireWire ports. It's just a shame that the elaborate case design makes it so difficult for the uninitiated to get under the lid.

Otherwise, the Eclipse offers an assortment of decent peripherals, including a 40GB hard drive. System performance is perhaps the biggest flaw – the 1600+ Athlon XP and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM only scored 112 in our WorldBench 4 tests. Campus PCs are becoming chart regulars, though, and could soon be winning some awards.

6 NetHighStreet.com

The NetHighStreet was unlucky enough to be part of a particularly strong batch of new entrants. The 30GB hard drive is slightly undersized and the Videologic VividXS graphics card, although far from poor, falls behind the competition in the ever-changing video card market.

We did expect more of the 1600+ Athlon XP processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, but a WorldBench 4 score of 115 is still respectable. The audio system is good, but we weren't convinced by the monitor. Internally the system is fine, but more instructions would have helped, and the one-year return-to-base warranty isn't reassuring. Although the NetHighStreet wasn't good enough for the top five, it wasn't far off and remains a capable workhorse.

↓ The NetHighStreet could have benefited from a slightly larger hard drive, but its score was still good

Motherboards – what to look for

When choosing your motherboard, it's worth spending a little more to get a good name. Don't, however, splash out huge amounts of money in the belief that the motherboard will remain futureproof. With the never-ending stream of new components and features, buying a new processor 12 months down the line will almost certainly require a whole new motherboard as well.

In the short term, you can still do plenty to secure your motherboard's survival. PCI cards are still quite common, so try and get a board with at least four such slots or more if possible. Many motherboards come with space for two memory modules, although again the more the merrier. Try and get a motherboard that supports DDR (double data rate) RAM – cheaper SDRAM will be phased out in the future, so having DDR RAM will at least let you use your old memory when upgrading.

Integrated graphics and sound cards can save you money, but you're unlikely to get the same performance from these devices that you would get from a high-quality standalone version. Don't let manufacturers use these onboard devices as an excuse for giving you fewer PCI and AGP slots. If buying with an integrated graphics card, try and get a motherboard that has a separate AGP slot – otherwise you'll never be able to upgrade the graphics device.

USB is increasing in popularity, and although two ports is still common, some motherboards come with far more. With the arrival of USB 2.0, it is also worth looking for a board that supports this emerging standard. FireWire is another handy addition, while an enhanced drive interface – such as the Promise ATA-100 or SCSI – will bring welcome added speed to your hard drive.

• See page 81 for our *Technofile* feature on motherboards

TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET PCs

↑ Sticking at number seven is the ex-Best Buy system, the Multivision Vision Elite XP LT

PC WorldBench: Superbudget PCs

(longer bars are better)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　→ faster

WorldBench 4	25	50	75	100	125
CCL Computers Home-XLS					120
Ideal Computing Aptus 1600XP					118
NetHighStreet.com					114
Best Price Poweroid 2006					113
Evesham Axis 1600+					112
Campus Eclipse 330 GTX					112

WorldBench 2000	110	130	150	170	190
Multivision Vision Elite XP LT					188
Systemax A1300RV 1170					187
CCL Computers Home-XLR					182
EasyPC 1300B					179

7 Multivision Vision Elite XP LT

The first Superbudget PC to offer AMD's new 1600+ Athlon XP processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the Multivision couldn't fail to take its place at the head of January's chart. That it slipped so far so quickly to seventh place one month later, displaced by several new entries with the same central system, is a sign that the Vision Elite didn't explore its full potential.
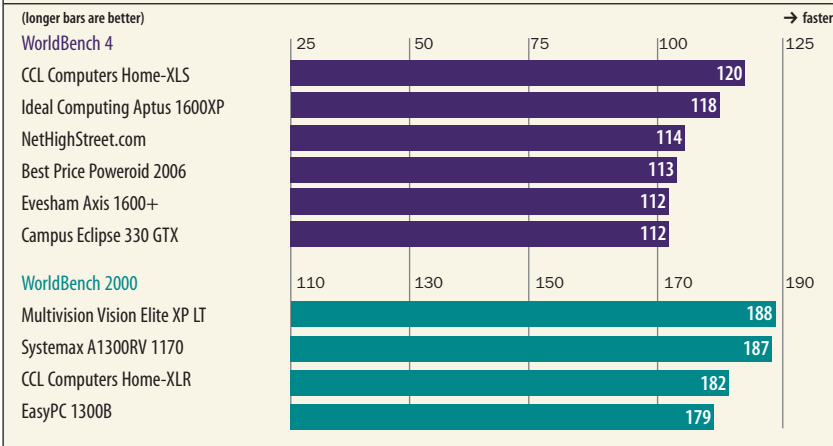
That's not to say that the Multivision Vision Elite XP doesn't have its strengths. Its drive facilities are plentiful, and the 40GB Seagate hard drive and CD-writer, offering 16-speed CD-R and 12-speed CD-RW, are impressive. The four added USB ports and Multivision's clear sound system, which pairs Creative's Live 5.1 card with five vibrant DDT 2200 speakers, are also top notch.

There are some drawbacks, though, and the 17in Hansol monitor isn't the best we've seen. Also, as with a number of Superbudget PCs, documentation is lacking, although internal access for upgrading is easy.

↑ The Systemax is let down by sub-standard sound: onboard facilities never match an add-in card

8 Systemax A1300RV 1170

The 1.3GHz Athlon-powered Systemax struggles in vain to fight off the challenge of the 1.4GHz 1600+ Athlon XP PCs, even with the quality of its sub-components – that is, the LG monitor, 64MB Gainward graphics card and 40GB hard drive. Indeed, the weak sound system is the one flaw in the Systemax's decent list of accessories. Although no longer the fastest PC on offer, the Systemax is surprisingly strong for an eighth place contender.

↑ The CCL Computers Home-XLR is starting to look a little tired, with an ageing graphics card

9 CCL Computers Home-XLR

As the second of two CCL PCs in the Superbudget chart, it's merely the passage of time that leaves the Home-XLR looking a little frayed around the edges. In the light of the AMD Athlon processor managing just 1.2GHz, its WorldBench 2000 score isn't as meagre as you might expect. The spacious case is also a bonus and, though the Kyro II graphics card may be losing its lustre, the

17in CTX EX710F monitor remains an inspiring addition to any Superbudget PC. Elsewhere, the PC is reliable rather than exciting, and a price cut would vastly increase its appeal.

10 EasyPC 1300B

There's no room for second best in the cut-throat Superbudget PCs market, and the EasyPC's 1.3GHz processor fails to keep up with AMD's new 1600+ Athlon chip. In fact, its poor WorldBench 2000 performance is the main reason why the EasyPC is stuck at tenth position. There are other flaws, most notably the dreadful case – with six screws to undo, you must lift off the whole housing to gain access to the PC's innards. The EasyPC remains a solid purchase but, as our charts show, there are now nine other PCs that represent better value.

↓ The EasyPC 1300B remains at number 10 due to its unimpressive WorldBench 2000 score

→ Turn to page 106 for the factors relevant when purchasing a PC in our *Buying advice*