

TOP 10 BUDGET 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 Evesham Axis 1900+ 0870 728 7070 www.evesham.com	NEW	Apr 02	117 (WB 4)	£999	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Asus A7 A266-E	KT266	56K	2	Samsung 957 DF	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Star Office, Cyberlink
2 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti 020 8208 4702 www.mesh.co.uk	1	Feb 02	121 (WB 4)	£999	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/60GB	Asus A7 A266-E	KT266	56K	4	Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Leadtek WinFast GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 200	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2001
3 Multivision Vision Ultima Ti 200 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	2	Feb 02	118 (WB 4)	£999	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Seagate/60GB	MSI 6380LE Pro2	Via KT266A	56K	6	Hansol 920D	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Hercules 3D Prophet	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 200	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus Suite 2001, Videowave, gamepad, webcam
4 Systemax A1900FA 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	3	Feb 02	114 (WB 4)	£1,139	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	MSI MS-6380LE	KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Gainward GeForce3 Ti 550	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, games, gamepad, ATI TV Wonder VE Lite TV tuner
5 Ideal Computing Ideal Aptus 1800XP 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	4	Feb 02	123 (WB 4)	£1,199	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	Chaintech 7CTKJD	AMD 761	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	Hercules 3D Prophet III	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	8x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Star Office, remote control
6 NEC Powermate i-Select XL3 A1900+ 0870 010 6326 www.nec-online.com	5	Feb 02	111 (WB 4)	£1,199	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/80GB	Gigabyte GA-7DX	AMD 761	56K	4	NEC HR-19	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	WinFast Leadtek	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Labtec LCS2632	2/Y	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows 98 SE, Word, Money, Norton AntiVirus, games bundle, webcam
7 Evesham Axis 1700+ Ti2 0870 728 7070 www.evesham.com	6	Feb 02	110 (WB 4)	£1,199	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	Gigabyte GA-7VTXE/GA-7VTXH	Via KT266A	56K	4	Samsung 107FT flat-panel	17in	0.26mm	1,280x1,024	OEM GeForce2 Ti	nVidia GeForce2 Ti	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2001, StarOffice, Big Fix
8 Hi-Grade Meridian N1400PV12 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com	7	Dec 01	241 (WB 2000)	£849	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	UDMA 100/40GB	Asus nForce	Crush 12	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	onboard	onboard	32MB	onboard 5.1 Dolby ProLogic	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows 2000, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium
9 Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	8	Dec 01	196 (WB 2000)	£1,239	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/40GB	MSI K7T266	Via KT266	56K	2	CTX PR960F	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	Systemax GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium
10 Best Price Poweroid 2004 020 8904 3347 www.poweroid.com	10	Nov 01	188 (WB 2000)	£1,199	5-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB SDRAM	Seagate x 2/60GB	Epop EP-8KTA3	Via KT133	56K	4 (2 on front)	Iiyama VM Pro 411	17in TFT	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Leadtek WinFast GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite

1 Evesham Axis 1900+

Evesham's previous entry could only muster sixth place in our Top 10 Budget chart, but this month sees the company come back with a vengeance. The Axis 1900+ offers an unbeatable combination of features and value for money. Add a three-year onsite warranty into the mix and you have a worthy winner of our Best Buy award.

With the exception of the ergonomic keyboard and optical mouse, the Axis 1900+ is a plain-looking system.

↓ Our new Best Buy is the Evesham Axis 1900+, which combines features and value for money effortlessly



However, one glance under the hood left us in no doubt that this was a powerhouse of a PC. AMD's second fastest processor, the Athlon XP 1900+, is twinned with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and storage is provided by a capacious 80GB hard drive.

The Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 117 isn't the fastest, but the top four PCs are close in terms of performance. The 19in Samsung 957 DF monitor utilises shadow mask rather than aperture grille technology, so the display isn't as bright or colourful compared to some of the competition. That said, the 1,600x1,200 resolution at 75Hz support and its 0.24mm dot pitch offer a crisp, detailed picture.

The Radeon 8500LE card means that graphics are impressive. Sound is well catered for by the Audigy sound card with built-in FireWire port, and the speakers are the ever-popular Cambridge SoundWorks DTT2200. The Axis' internal components are easily accessed and Evesham backs this up with a generous software bundle, which includes a video-editing program.

2 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti

The Matrix XP 1800 Ti fits well into Mesh's tradition of producing well-rounded, good-value PCs with thorough documentation for the novice user. Although it loses its Best Buy award to Evesham this month, don't be put off – the Matrix XP remains an excellent system.

The Mesh doesn't boast the fastest processor around, but its Athlon XP 1800+ is the second speediest CPU in the chart. It's also one of only three Budget machines to have 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. The subsequent WorldBench 4 score of 121 makes the Matrix XP 1800 Ti an impressive performer – the second fastest PC in the Budget PC chart.

Storage is provided by a 60GB hard drive, and the speedy Teac CD-RW drive will have your files backed up in no time. While the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB monitor can't offer the same screen real estate as a 19in model, it's certainly the best 17in display in the chart. Indeed, we'd rather see a good-quality smaller screen than a mediocre large one.



↑ The Matrix XP 1800 Ti drops to number two this month, but holds on to its Recommended award

Twinned with a Leadtek WinFast GeForce3 Ti 200 graphics card, it provides excellent image quality.

As with most entries, the Mesh Matrix uses the solid SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card with Cambridge's DTT2200 speakers – probably the best value-for-money sound combination around. The software bundle is pretty sparse, but you do get Microsoft Works Suite 2001, which is enough to get you started. The Matrix XP's combination of power, good-quality components and a generous three-year onsite warranty makes it worthy of a Recommended award.

3 Multivision Vision Ultima Ti 200

Multivision often builds machines with a great combination of high-end specifications and supreme value for money. The Vision Ultima Ti 200 is no exception and, as such, it continues to be a deserving winner of our Recommended award. With the fastest AMD Athlon XP chip at this time – the 1900+ – and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the Ultima Ti 200 was always going to be a powerful system. Add a 60GB hard drive spinning at 7,200rpm (revolutions per minute) and it's no wonder it achieved a WorldBench 4 score of 118. This may not be the fastest WorldBench 4 score in the chart, but it's still a creditable result.

There are six USB ports available on the Ultima Ti, which should prove invaluable if you use lots of peripherals. Though the Vision is primed for power, Multivision hasn't forgotten the rest of the package. A fast 40-/24-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive provides extra backup, and the dependable Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card, which is



↑ With top-notch specifications, the Vision Ultima Ti 200 is a powerful system at a reasonable price

supported by DTT2200 speakers, takes care of the audio. The 64MB DDR (double data rate) RAM GeForce3 Ti 200 graphics card from Hercules and 19in monitor produce crisp, smooth graphics performance. However, the screen's shadow mask tube can't match the clarity of an aperture grille model.

A generous software bundle and some nice extras, such as a webcam, redeem the lack of documentation. However, it's a bit of a shame that Multivision only protects your investment with a one-year onsite warranty.

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↑ The Systemax A1900FA offers high-quality graphics and audio, while leaving plenty of space for upgrading

4 Systemax A1900FA

With a good array of features and specifications, the A1900FA keeps its Recommended award. Systemax's 1.6GHz Athlon XP 1900+ is twinned with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 60GB hard drive, which provides plenty of storage. Unfortunately, this relatively low amount of memory accounts for its WorldBench 4 score of 114.

A card that uses one of the best chipsets currently available, namely the GeForce3 Ti 500, takes care of the Systemax's graphics. Aiding image quality is a CTX 19in monitor, which handles pictures with aplomb. To get the most out of the graphical prowess of this PC, there's a games bundle and gamepad. The Audigy sound card and DTT2200 speakers provide high-quality audio, there's a FireWire port at the back of the PC, although only two USB ports seem miserly. The large case means the components aren't cramped, and leaves lots of space for upgrading.

5 Ideal Computing Ideal Aptus 1800XP

The Ideal Aptus 1800XP is one of the best-looking systems in our Top 10 Budget chart. This may be due to an LG monitor with more style than substance, but the inclusion of an Audigy sound card proves its beauty is more than skin deep. Ideal Computing was one of four manufacturers that opted for 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and backed it up with a 1.53GHz Athlon XP 1800+ processor, rendering the fastest WorldBench 4 score of 123.

There's ample storage from a 60GB hard drive and one of the fastest CD-RW drives. Graphically, the GeForce3 Ti 500 is brilliant, but the LG 775FT monitor, which only reaches 1,280x1,024 resolution and is hampered by a low refresh rate, doesn't match it. The Audigy has two FireWire ports but, like the Systemax, there are only two USB ports. The bundled StarOffice suite is also only adequate.



↑ The Ideal Aptus 1800XP from Ideal Computing remains the speediest system in the Top 10 chart



↑ Although the Powermate i-Select's operating system could do with an upgrade, its hardware setup is decent

6 NEC Powermate i-Select XL3 A1900+

The Powermate from NEC only narrowly missed out on a higher chart position. NEC decided to stick with Windows 98 SE, rather than XP Home, as its operating system but hasn't scrimped on most of the specifications. Its 1.6GHz processor is joined by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and one of the largest hard drive in the chart – 80GB is a welcome addition.

The Powermate's WorldBench 4 score of 111 is good, but would have been pushed a little further by extra memory. NEC's own excellent 19in aperture grille monitor combines with a 64MB GeForce3 graphics card, so image quality is spot on, though a GeForce3 Ti card would give smoother graphics rendering. The Powermate has a superb three-year onsite warranty and, in general, is a well considered package. The only gripes are the low-speed CD-RW drive and poor speakers – they are from Labtec, but paltry for a £1,199 PC.

The Audigy: our answer to audio anxiety?

It wasn't long ago that computer audio was produced by a PC speaker which could only utter tones of a single frequency. Roll forward to the present and you'll see that sound has become a lot more sophisticated. Creative Labs is one company that has been at the forefront of audio innovations and its latest release, the Audigy, is making a good showing across our Budget and Power PC charts.

The Audigy SB1394 sound card pushes the boat out for the best in PC sound. There are several versions available that are all built around Creative's recently announced Audigy chip, which has around four times the power of the EMU10K1 processor used on its cheaper SoundBlaster Live series. This

enables the chip to calculate more 3D sound effects simultaneously, which translates to more accurate 3D sound in games and other applications.

The Audigy has high-quality 24bit/96kHz multichannel DACs (digital-to-analogue converters) and ADCs (analog-to-digital converters) normally found only in high-end consumer stereo equipment. It is also one of the first mass consumer sound cards with 5.1 multichannel high-fidelity digital audio playback.

If that's not enough to whet your appetite, the Audigy also has a FireWire port for high-speed – that is, 400Mbps (megabits per second) – transfer of MP3 collections and it's the best standard for digital video editing.

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↑ Failing to follow in Evesham's tradition, the Axis 1700+ Ti2 needs to house more high-end components

7 Evesham Axis 1700+ Ti2

Unusually for an Evesham, the Ti2 doesn't have enough high-end components to keep up with the competition. While the 1.47GHz processor is faster than previous models, there's only 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. The hard drive is also smaller than in the past – just 40GB. This all produced a WorldBench 4 score of 110, which is the slowest in our chart.

The 17in Samsung monitor 107FT is clear and bright and is matched by the 64MB GeForce2 Ti graphics card. The DVI (digital video interface) port can be connected to the flat-panel display, but gamers should look elsewhere for high-end graphics. There's a plethora of FireWire and USB ports for connecting peripherals and an extra fan on the chipset to keep things cool. The warranty is good, as is the manual and software bundle.

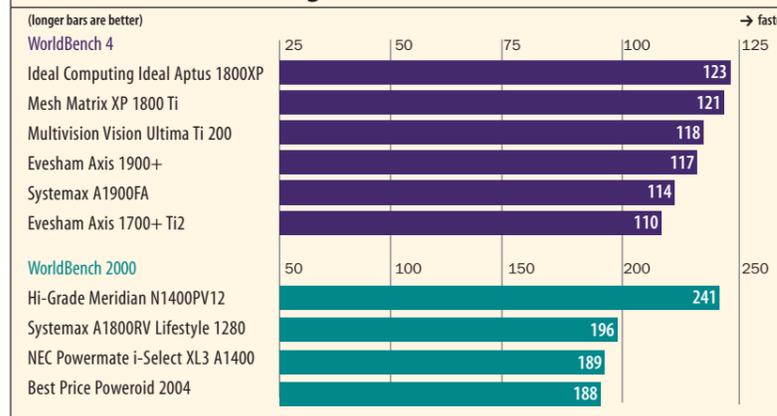
8 Hi-Grade Meridian N1400PV12

This ex-Best Buy remains one of the fastest Budget PCs despite the influx of new contenders with better specifications. The 1.4GHz Athlon XP 1600+ is twinned with 256MB of DDR (double data rate)

↓ The Meridian's nForce motherboard ensures decent graphics and audio – and surprisingly it's all onboard



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RAM and helped produce a WorldBench 2000 score of 241. Its hard drive offers 40GB of space, which is now the minimum you should expect from a Budget PC. The Hi-Grade uses an Asus nForce motherboard, with onboard sound and graphics. Onboard options are usually a long way behind dedicated cards, but the performance from the nVidia chipset is better than many PCs with a separate graphics card. The graphics supports 1,024x768 at 75Hz, so the results are impressive. However, combined with the low-resolution monitor it won't be enough for gamers.

9 Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280

The Lifestyle 1280 from Systemax drops to ninth place this month. While its Windows Me operating system may soon be a thing of the past, the A1800RV contains an Athlon XP 1800+ backed up by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which are still impressive specifications. However, the WorldBench 2000 score of 196 has been surpassed by faster systems. With a 64MB GeForce3 graphics card and sound provided by Creative's Audigy card, this is very much a consumer PC. If that weren't evidence enough, the Lifestyle 1280 also comes with a games bundle and gamepad.

10 Best Price Poweroid 2004

The Poweroid stays at number 10 due to the NEC Powermate i-Select XL3 A1400 dropping out of the chart. Its metallic casing does well on aesthetic value, but it



↑ Sitting at ninth place, the Systemax A1800RV is slowly being usurped by the competition

isn't enough to redeem it from the 256MB of slower SDRAM, 1.4GHz Athlon and Windows Me. Despite this, the WorldBench 2000 score of 188 was quite high, although it was probably due to the advanced hard drive. The Raid controller spreads the workload across two drives, so the 60GB storage can be accessed in less time than a single drive. The other features on the Poweroid are excellent and we're sure it won't be long before we see an updated entry in our charts.

↓ The Poweroid 2004 is hanging on at number 10, but we're looking forward to an updated entry

