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	Operating system, software & other extras
1 Mesh Matrix XP 1800+ SBPC 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	NEW	Jul 02	115	£699	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 40GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	6	NEC/ Mitsubishi MS 75F	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	nVidia GeForce4 MX 440	nVidia GeForce2 MX 440	64MB	onboard	Creative FPS1600	4/Y	16x	48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
2 CCL Computers Home XPK2 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	NEW	Jul 02	117	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/ 1.68GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 40GB	Soltek SL75-DRV4	Via KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	XFX GeForce4 MX 440	nVidia GeForce4 MX 440	64MB	onboard	Genius SP-G16	2/N	12x	40x/32x/12x	Windows XP Home
3 Systemax Inspire A1700G 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	NEW	Jul 02	113	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/ 1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 60GB	MSI MS6380E	Via KT333	56K	4	CTX EX760F	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Gainward GeForce2 MX 420	nVidia GeForce4 MX 420	64MB	onboard	Systemax CA4400	4/Y	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
4 Ideal Computing Aptus L20-XP+ 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	1	May 02	116	£699	1-year onsite 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/ 1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 40GB	Chaintech 7VJDA	Via KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Gainward GeForce2 Ti 450	nVidia GeForce2 Ti 450	64MB	onboard	Nisis S5 4.1	4/Y	16x	40x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Star Office
5 NetHighStreet.com Net PA699 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com	NEW	Jul 02	116	£699	1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 40GB	Asus A7V333	Via KT333	56K	6	Hansol 720E	17in	0.27mm	1,024x768	Gainward GeForce3 Ti 200	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 200	128MB	onboard	Creative FPS1600	4/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home
6 Multivision Vision Elite 420 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	2	Jun 02	116	£699	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/ 60GB	DFI AD 70 SC	Via KT266A	56K	4	NEC/ Mitsubishi MS 75F	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	nVidia GeForce4 MX 420	nVidia GeForce4 MX 420	64MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Videologic ZXR 500	5/Y	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
7 CCL Computers Home XP202 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	3	May 02	118	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/ 1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 40GB	Soltek SL75-DRV4	Via KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	WinFast GeForce2 Ti 200	nVidia GeForce2 Ti 200	64MB	onboard	Genius 200W	2/N	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 2001
8 Easy PC Direct E1800X 0800 195 4353 www.easypcdirect.co.uk	NEW	Jul 02	112	£699	3-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	256MB RAM	Seagate/ 40GB	Jetway	Via KT266	56K	2	Relisys TF770	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Gainward GeForce4 MX 440	nVidia GeForce4 MX 440	64MB	onboard	Mercury SW 880	2/Y	16x	48x/32x/12x	Windows XP Home, PC-cillin Encyclopaedia Britannica Lotus SmartSuite
9 Wisdom Computers Silver Bullet 0870 050 2299 www.wisdom-computers.com	NEW	Jul 02	94	£699	1-year onsite, 4-year labour	AMD Duron/ 1GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/ 40GB	Eagletec 5SA	Sis 735	56K	4	AOC 7VLR	17in	0.27mm	1,024x768	Mentor GeForce4 MX 400	nVidia GeForce4 MX 400	64MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative Inspire 5300	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, SmartSuite Millennium
10 Best Price Poweroid 2012 0870 220 0444 www.poweroid.com	NEW	Jul 02	102	£699	1-year return to base	Intel Pentium 4/ 1.9GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/ 30GB	Asus P4SC	Sis 650	56K	4	Iiyama LS902	19in	0.26mm	1,600x1,200	onboard	onboard	32MB	onboard	Creative SBS35	2/N	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Star Office

NEW

← Mesh achieves its first Superbudget Best Buy award with the Matrix XP 1800+ SBPC

1 Mesh Matrix XP 1800+ SBPC

Mesh is a regular name in the Budget and Power PC charts, and this month it's decided to have a shot at the sub-£700 market. The foray has paid off, with the Matrix winning *PC Advisor* Best Buy award.

Mesh has chosen the AMD route, packing in an Athlon XP 1800+ processor running at 1.53GHz. Coupled with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM it racked up a WorldBench 4 score of 115 – not the fastest of the new entries, but not far off.

The Maxtor hard drive is a 40GB model, and there's a 48-/40-/12-speed (read/write/rewrite) Teac CD-RW for backup and a 16-speed Pioneer DVD-ROM. Sound comes from the onboard Cmedia audio chip which, while integrated, can still support six channels for surround sound. Unfortunately this isn't exploited by the Creative FPS1600 speaker set, which only runs to four satellites and a subwoofer.

The graphics are ably taken care of by nVidia's GeForce4 MX 440 chip, which is a budget option but impressive all the same. Running through the Annihilator demo in Quake3 resulted in a frame rate of 69.1fps (frames per second) at 1,024x768 resolution.

The 17in NEC/Mitsubishi MS 75F monitor produces a good, solid display but is let down by its maximum resolution setting of 1,280x960, rather than the more usual 1,280x1,024.

Unfortunately, in the Superbudget category compromises have to be made. Thankfully, Mesh hasn't skimped on the warranty, topping off the package with a comprehensive three-year onsite deal.

2 CCL Computers Home XPK2

CCL Computers manages to grab itself a Recommended award this month with the impressive Home XPK2. Opting for AMD's second fastest processor, the 1.68GHz Athlon XP 2000+, has paid off. Supported by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, this CCL system achieved a WorldBench 4 score of 117. The Home XPK2's 40GB of storage courtesy of Maxtor's hard drive doesn't disappoint either. Optical honours are taken care of by a 12-speed DVD-ROM and a 40-/32-/12-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW.

Like the Best Buy Mesh Matrix, CCL has opted for the GeForce4 MX 440 graphics chip, allowing the Home XPK2 to produce 67fps (frames per second) running the Annihilator Quake3 demo at 1,024x768. The EX710F monitor from CTX provides a truly vivid display and even stretches to a resolution of 1,600x1,200, although some may find icons too small at that setting on a 17in display. To keep the cost down, sound comes from an onboard solution and the speakers only run to two desktop units.

NEW

↑ CCL Computers' new entry, the Home XPK2, is the fastest system to enter the chart this month

The package isn't as generous as Mesh's on the support side, with the warranty offering just one-year collect-and-return followed by two years cover for labour only.

CCL Computers has put together a good system, and offers the fastest new entry to the chart this month. However, the Home XPK2 is not dramatically faster than the competition and ultimately the difference isn't going to be that noticeable in everyday use. This PC's a competent runner-up, but could have benefitted from a more generous warranty.

3 Systemax Inspire A1700G

Third place is taken by another new entry this month, the Inspire A1700G. Weighing up the price/performance issue, Systemax has chosen AMD's 1700+ chip running at 1.47GHz, which managed a WorldBench 4 score of 113. There's the standard 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, but Systemax has pushed the boat out when it comes to storage, bundling a 60GB IBM hard drive.

The 40-/32-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) Systemax CD-RW is fairly standard, as is the own-brand 16-speed DVD-ROM. Like the Mesh Matrix, the onboard audio chip is capable of providing six-channel sound, although you won't get the full benefit from the Systemax CA4400 speaker setup as it only includes four satellites and a subwoofer.

The CTX EX700F monitor generates the same quality of display provided by the EX710F bundled with the CCL system, but it can't quite offer the same resolution support, topping out at 1,280x1,024. The Gainward GeForce4 graphics card uses the nVidia MX 420 chip, managing

NEW

↑ The Systemax Inspire A1700G features an impressively large 60GB IBM hard drive

65.1fps (frames per second) with the Quake3 Annihilator demo.

The Inspire's front-mounted USB ports are a handy addition, especially if you frequently need to plug and unplug different devices like digital cameras or external drives. There's also a bundled copy of Lotus SmartSuite to get you going.

The Systemax's warranty is unfortunately a little lacking, stretching to just one-year collect-and-return followed by a further two years covering labour only. But ultimately this is a worth contender, pipped at the post by the competition.

SUPERBUDGET PCs

↑ Strong competition sees the Aptus L20-XP+ fall from the top spot to number four this month

4 Ideal Computing Aptus L20-XP+

PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED Ideal's former Best Buy hangs in at number four, claiming the final Recommended award. The 1.47GHz AMD 1700+ Athlon XP processor is well complemented by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an adequate 40GB hard drive, achieving a WorldBench 4 score of 116.

The 17in CTX EX710F monitor remains one of the best shadow mask displays on the market, with a Gainward 64MB GeForce2 Ti 450 card ensuring top-quality graphics. Likewise, the Cmedia audio chip is better than the typical AC97 codec on motherboards and the Nisis S5 4.1 speakers provide good playback.

We also praise Ideal Computing for putting in a CD-RW drive – something that was sorely missed on the Aptus 1600XP, reviewed in February 02. The warranty is a reasonable one-year onsite, two-year return-to-base.

5 NetHighStreet.com Net PA699

NetHighStreet just misses out on an award this month with the Net PA699. With a 1.6GHz AMD Athlon XP 1900+ coupled with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, it got a WorldBench 4 result of 116. Rather than opt for nVidia's latest graphics card, NetHighStreet went for a GeForce3 Ti200-based card, which gave 64.4fps (frames per second) at 1,024x768 running the Annihilator demo in Quake3.

The curvy 17in Hansol 720E monitor does the job, but it's not the best. Sound comes from a six-channel onboard chip, but again you won't get the full effect from the four speakers and subwoofer in the Creative FPS1600 setup. The warranty unfortunately only runs to a pitiful one-year return-to-base cover.

The Net PA699 system we saw suffered from overheating problems during testing. However, NetHighStreet assured us that production units would include a case fan to alleviate the problem.

↓ The Net PA699 is a new entry this month but failed to earn itself a Recommended award

NEW

↑ A decent system in its heyday, the Vision Elite 420 now has to make way for more powerful systems

6 Multivision Vision Elite 420

The Vision Elite 420 from Multivision offered great base specifications and broke a few Superbudget barriers in its time, but now we see it drop to sixth place. While it isn't the fastest Superbudget PC in the chart, the Multivision's WorldBench 4 score of 116 reflects its high-end specifications. AMD's Athlon XP 1800+ processor is a quick runner at 1.53GHz and this is aided by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a vast 60GB hard drive. Further backup is provided by a fast 40-/32-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive.

The stylish Videologic ZXR 500 speakers and a SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card are up to scratch. The GeForce4 MX 420 card supplies the 17in NEC/Mitsubishi MS 75F screen which, though fair, has limited resolution support. With useful software and decent Logitech peripherals, the Vision Elite 420 is good, but has to make way for new entries.

All aboard the universal serial bus

The original USB (universal serial bus) specification had a somewhat troubled introduction, but the format has now gained acceptance and all new PCs support it.

Although more than adequate for printing and scanning, when it came to bandwidth-hungry applications like storage and video, USB 1.1 just couldn't cut the mustard. Its critics highlighted its sluggish 12Mbps (megabits per second) transfer speed compared to FireWire's 400Mbps maximum.

Version 2.0 levels the field, offering a hefty theoretical maximum 480Mbps of bandwidth. According to the USB-IF (USB implementers forum), this means you can burn a CD six times faster (three minutes 57 seconds versus USB 1.1's 26 minutes

57 seconds) and get full-motion 30fps (frames per second) video where 1.1 could only mange 20fps.

USB 2.0 also has the inherent advantage of the huge installed base of USB 1.1. As the protocol is backwards-compatible, a 2.0 device can be used on a 1.1 host system, albeit at a slower speed, and vice versa.

Microsoft might have given an indirect nod of approval to FireWire by including native support in Windows XP while omitting USB 2.0, but the industry seems to have embraced it with open arms making its future all but guaranteed. And now Microsoft has added support to XP via an update, USB 2.0 is a worthy successor to the de facto connectivity standard.

SUPERBUDGET PCs

↑ Although the Home XP202 falls to number seven this month, it is still the faster PC in the chart

PC WorldBench 4: Superbudget PCs

(longer bars are better) → faster

	40	60	80	100	120
CCL Computers Home XP202				118	
CCL Computers Home XPK2				117	
Ideal Computing Aptus L20-XP+				116	
Multivision Vision Elite 420				116	
NetHighStreet.com Net PA699				116	
Mesh Matrix XP 1800+ SBPC				115	
Systemax Inspire A1700G				113	
Easy PC Direct E1800X				112	
Best Price Poweroid 2012			102		
Wisdom Computers Silver Bullet			94		

7 CCL Computers Home XP202

Hanging in at number seven is the Home XP202 from CCL Computers. The 1.47GHz processor, combined with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM helped the system achieve a WorldBench 4 score of 118 – the fastest in the chart – and storage is provided by a 40GB Maxtor hard drive.

The CTX EX710F monitor offers a pin-sharp resolution of 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz, plus there's a WinFast 64MB GeForce2 Ti 200 graphics card. The audio hardware, however, leaves something to be desired. There are only two Genius speakers with no subwoofer to beef up the all-important bass, and the onboard sound is bottom of the range. The warranty is fair, though, offering one-year collect-and-return, two-year return-to-base cover.

8 Easy PC Direct E1800X

A new entry in at number eight is the E1800X. Its 1.53GHz Athlon XP 1800+ processor and 256MB RAM combined to achieve a WorldBench 4 score of 112, and there's also a 40GB Seagate hard drive. Graphics come from a GeForce4 MX 440-based card hooked up to a fair 17in Relisys TF770 monitor.

Sound on the E1800X is catered for by an onboard solution and a set of Mercury SW880 speakers offering two satellites and a subwoofer. The small case is cramped, which is awkward for upgrading. Much worse, we found the power supply on the review system we received hadn't been attached properly and fell into the case on setup. Easy PC has assured us this was an isolated incident and won't occur on shipping units.

NEW

↑ The Easy PC Direct E1800X will prove difficult to upgrade due to its cramped case

9 Wisdom Computers Silver Bullet

Looking like a cast-off from the set of *Terminator 2,* the Silver Bullet from Wisdom Computers has the type of styling that you'll either love or hate. Inside there's an AMD Duron chip running at 1GHz which, unable to match the performance of the Athlons, only managed a WorldBench 4 score of 94 with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM.

↓ A low WorldBench score means Wisdom Computers' Silver Bullet fails to figure higher in the chart

NEW

Storage runs to 40GB and the requisite DVD-ROM and CD-RW are also installed. The 17in AOC monitor, though noticeably curvy, is backed up by a GeForce4 MX 400 graphics card. Sound is well catered for by Creative's Live 5.1 card and a set of excellent Creative 5300 Inspire speakers.

10 Best Price Poweroid 2012

Best Price wins the award for most unusual new entry this month with the Poweroid 2012. If you're after a compact system then this might be the one for you.

The 1.9GHz Pentium 4 processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM only managed a WorldBench 4 score of 102. There's 30GB of storage, a 16-speed DVD-ROM and a 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive.

The graphics and sound are sufficient for office use, but won't start any fires in the gaming world. The one-year return-to-base warranty is also rather meagre.

↓ Just making the chart at number 10 is the Poweroid 2012, another new entry courtesy of Best Price

NEW

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