

BUDGET PCs		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 Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	1	Jun 02	118	£999	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/1.677GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Asus A7 A266-E	Via KT266A	56K	4	Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	Radeon 8500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Creative Labs Inspire 5300	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
	2 Multivision Vision Pro 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	2	Jun 02	120	£999	2-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/1.677GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Seagate/60GB	MSI 6390 LE2	Via KT266A	56K	4	Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	Radeon 8500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Videologic ZXR 500	5/Y	16x	40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
	3 Systemax Reliance P2260E 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	NEW	Jul 02	116	£999	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	Intel Pentium 4/2.2GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Intel/80GB	MSI MS-6566E	Intel 845E	56K	4	CTX PR705F	17in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Videologic ZXR 500	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
	4 Evesham Axis 1900+ 0870 728 7070 www.evesham.com	3	Apr 02	117	£1,049	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Asus A7 A266-E	Via KT266A	56K	2	Samsung 957 DF	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	Radeon 8500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Star Office, Cyberlink
	5 Best Price Poweroid 2100 020 8904 3347 www.poweroid.com	4	Jun 02	116	£999	1-year parts and labour, 4-year labour	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Soyo K7 Dragon Plus	Via KT266A	56K	8	Iiyama LS902	19in	0.26mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 DV	Radeon 8500	64MB	Creative Labs 8738 Integrated	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Remote control, smartcard reader
	6 PC World Advent 3984 BTO 01442 355 802 www.pcworld.co.uk	5	Jun 02	124	£1,155	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2100+/1.733GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Gigabyte 7VTXE+	Via KT266A	56K	2	Samsung 957 DF	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	OEM-GeForce4 Ti 4400	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4400	128MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002
	7 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL4 A2000+ 0870 010 6326 www.nec-online.co.uk	6	Jun 02	121	£1,199	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 2000+/1.677GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/120GB	MSI MS6367	nForce Crush12	56K	4	NEC HR17 MultiSync	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	OEM nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	128MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Labtec LCS2541UK	4/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Sun Star Office 5.2, games bundle
	8 Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05 020 8532 6120 www.higrade.com	7	May 02	116	£799	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	MSI nForce 420 Pro	nForce 420D	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	onboard	nForce onboard	32MB	onboard nForce	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	10x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002
	9 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 TI 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	8	Feb 02	121	£999	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/60GB	Asus A7 A266-E	Via KT266A	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
	10 Systemax A1900AD 0870 729 7364 www.systemax.co.uk	9	May 02	116	£1,029	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	MSI KT266	Via KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	nVidia GeForce4 MX-440	nVidia GeForce4 MX-440	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Videologic ZXR-500	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home

1 Mesh Matrix XP 2000+ BPC

The well-balanced Matrix holds on to its Best Buy award for a second month thanks to a winning combination of low price, good features and an excellent warranty. Although nearly every component in this PC can be beaten by other entries in the chart, the consistent quality and all-round package offered by the Matrix XP 2000+ BPC are without equal. The Athlon XP 2000+, running at 1.677GHz, is now AMD's second-fastest processor and is

↓ This month's all-round winner, the Mesh Matrix, can't be beaten on specification, price or warranty



twinned here with a sizable 80GB hard drive. Unfortunately, the system only includes 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM – with another 256MB the WorldBench 4 score of 118 could well have been quite a bit higher.

As an entertainment system the Matrix won't let you down. It might not have a 128MB GeForce4 graphics card but on a price-to-performance ratio ATI's 64MB Radeon LE is an easy winner, providing great visuals. It is twinned with the excellent 19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 92 monitor – currently the best monitor available in the Budget PC chart.

Together they produce high frame rates and a beautifully crisp picture, which will be perfect for graphics-intensive applications. Sound comes courtesy of Creative's new Inspire 5300 speakers and Audigy card. You'll also find a 16-speed DVD-ROM and a 40-/24-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW for backup.

As per usual, Mesh wraps this up with a useful software bundle, clear and helpful documentation, and a three-year onsite warranty. All in all the Matrix XP 2000+ is a worthy winner.

2 Multivision Vision Pro

Multivision retains second place and a Recommended award for another month with a system that's strikingly similar to Mesh's number one entry. The Vision Pro can't match the warranty on the Matrix; nonetheless it has more than enough impressive features to push it comfortably ahead of the rest of the competition.

Except for the impressive Logitech keyboard and mouse, the Vision Pro looks plain enough at first sight, but it proved to be one of the most powerful Budget PCs we've seen. Multivision has opted for 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM to go with the 1.677GHz Athlon XP 2000+, and the WorldBench 4 score of 120 makes Multivision's Vision Pro the third-fastest in the chart. The 60GB hard drive is barely average these days but, even so, it will still prove hard to fill.

With a 64MB Radeon LE graphics card from ATI and Mitsubishi's 19in Diamond Plus 92 monitor, the visual setup is identical to our Best Buy's and renders the same impressively sharp results. Likewise, the Videologic speakers are on a par with



↑ Very narrowly beaten to the top spot, the Multivision Vision Pro is an outstanding system

the popular Cambridge DTT2200s, and the Audigy sound card gives you the benefit not only of good audio, but also of a FireWire port.

There is, however, a disappointing lack of documentation with the Vision Pro so, unless you already know what you're doing, setting up this system will require patience and a little trial and error. On the plus side, Multivision's warranty has come on in leaps and bounds since last year. It can't quite match Mesh's generous package, but it comes close with two years' onsite cover.

3 Systemax Reliance P2260E

In the performance-dominated world of Power PCs, Intel's Pentium 4 chips have for many months failed to make an impression against the sheer speed and value for money offered by AMD's Athlon range. However, in the less cutting-edge arena of the Budget PC, the 2.2GHz Pentium 4 finds itself blessed with a greater opportunity to shine.

The Systemax Reliance's WorldBench 4 score of 116 is extremely acceptable considering the mere 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM it has onboard. Where the Pentium 4 does have an edge is in terms of graphics performance, and the P2260E is blessed with nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4200 card to help it along. Despite being the slowest of the new Titanium family, the 4200 performed strongly in our games tests.

Balanced throughout, there's little evidence of cost-cutting in the £999 Systemax Reliance. The IBM hard drive offers a capacious 80GB of storage space and, although the average user is unlikely to need this amount, it's much better to



↑ The only new entry to the Budget PC Top 10 this month is the well-balanced Systemax Reliance P2260E

have too much storage than too little. The P2260E's sound system is also excellent, pairing Creative's Audigy card with the Videologic ZXR-500 speakers.

If we were searching for criticisms we might complain that Systemax hasn't included a 19in monitor, which would be preferable in this price range. However, when the screen in question is CTX's 17in PR705F this argument falls flat. The Systemax Reliance P2260E effectively demonstrates that you can still build an impressive PC around the Intel Pentium 4 processor.

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↑ Our former Best Buy, the Evesham Axis, retains a Recommended award and is a great package

4 Evesham Axis 1900+

The Axis 1900+ offers a decent combination of features and value for its price, plus a comprehensive warranty, making it a worthy winner of a Recommended award. It may be a plain-looking system, but a look under the hood leaves no doubt that it's a powerful PC. The lynchpin is AMD's third fastest processor, the 1.6GHz Athlon XP 1900+. This is twinned with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a capacious 80GB Maxtor hard drive.

The 19in Samsung 957 DF monitor utilises shadow mask rather than aperture grille technology, so the display isn't as bright or colourful as some, but it is still crisp and detailed. Sound is well catered for by the Audigy sound card with built-in FireWire port, and the speakers are the ever-popular Cambridge DTT2200. The Axis' internal components are easily accessed and Evesham backs this up with a packed software bundle. Topping off the package is a generous three-year onsite warranty.

5 Best Price Poweroid 2100

Best Price's Poweroid 2100 is one of the more interesting models we have had in our Test Centre, and despite a couple of quibbles, it's still a good system. There's an Athlon XP 1900+ processor, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an 80GB hard drive. The WorldBench 4 score of 116 is one of the slowest in the chart, but there's little real performance difference. ATI's 64MB Radeon 8500 DV graphics card offers TV functionality, but you need to use the bundled adapter to hook up the monitor as it only features a DVI (digital visual interface) port – not the neatest solution.

The bottom half of the case has an individual look which you'll either love or hate. There's a generous four USB ports on the front, plus two at the back. With another two on the keyboard you can connect two peripherals to your heart's content. It also comes bundled with a smartcard reader and a remote control.



↑ With eight USB ports for adding peripherals, the Poweroid 2100 offers a world of possibilities



↑ But for its price, PC World's very decent system Advent system would have a Recommended award

6 PC World Advent 3984 BTO

The Advent might have earned a place higher up the chart if it hadn't been so expensive. Still, if you've got the money to spend, it might just be worth it. All the specifications are top notch: an Athlon XP 2100+ running at 1.733GHz, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an 80GB Maxtor hard drive. The Advent's WorldBench 4 score of 124 makes it the fastest Budget PC in the chart.

The 3984's graphics are handled by a 128MB Geforce4 Ti 4400 card, which is more than capable of coping with high-resolution, intensive graphics. The display looked sharp on the 19in Samsung 957 DF monitor, but colours are a little muted because of the shadow mask technology. Sound is provided by an Audigy card and the dependable Creative DTT2200 speakers. The Advent's documentation is useful and well detailed and there's a copy of Works Suite 2002, but we'd like to have seen more than two USB ports and a longer warranty.

FireWire: faster than smoke signals

What's the difference between IEEE 1394, FireWire and iLink? There isn't any: they're all terms for the same thing. Like USB (universal serial bus), FireWire is a glorified serial interface, although its vastly increased speed of 400Mbps (megabits per second) gives it a sizeable advantage over USB's meagre 12MBps. In theory, the 480Mbps USB 2.0 is faster still, but FireWire's consistent performance and ability to handle multiple connections without loss of speed makes it the perfect high-performance interface. And this is even before enhanced FireWire brings us speeds of 800Mbps or even 1,600Mbps

While USB is more than satisfactory for keyboards and mice, FireWire will work beautifully with such devices as printers,

scanners and storage devices. But where the standard truly comes into its own is with DV (digital video) – FireWire-equipped DV camcorders are taking the video world by storm.

So how do you get hold of this stunning technology? Well, if you've bought a PC in the last six months, you might well have FireWire already; ditto if you've just bought one of Creative's new Audigy cards or a DV camcorder. If in doubt, search for the small, fat USB-style ports on the back of the PC, or look for the 1394 bus controller under the Windows Control Panel. Still no joy? A host of online suppliers (for example, www.dabs.com or www.simply.co.uk) will supply you with an appropriate interface card for as little as £40.

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↑ Although it offers little room for expansion, the NEC is a nippy system with brilliant graphics

7 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL4 A2000+

Though it sits at seventh place, the PowerMate i-Select XL4 A2000+ is by no means a bad buy. There are better bargains available, but if you want the best graphics and storage the NEC is a good choice. With a vast 120GB hard drive, an Athlon XP 2000+ processor and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the PowerMate achieved an impressive WorldBench 4 score of 121.

Audio is disappointing with four Labtec satellite speakers plus subwoofer and the SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is past its sell-by date. Graphically, though, the i-Select is stunning thanks to the GeForce4 Ti 4600. You're out of luck if you want to add any extra PCI cards because there are no slots left on the motherboard, but the PowerMate has some redeeming features – the documentation, software and warranty are good.

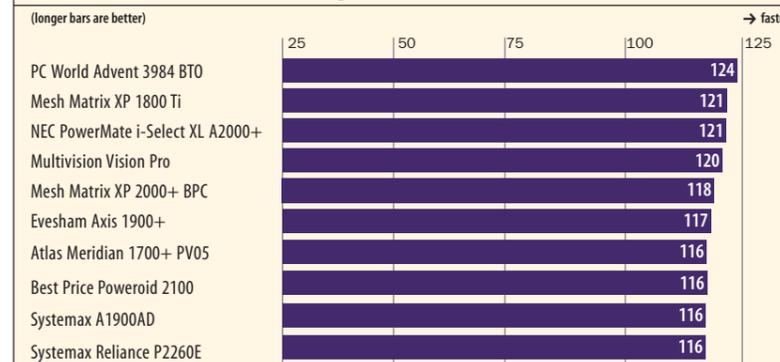
8 Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05

The Atlas' Athlon XP 1700+ processor isn't the fastest available, but the WorldBench 4 score of 116 shows



↑ The Atlas Meridian's sound and graphics are exemplary, though it was slightly slow on performance

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it can keep up. You'll find 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM inside, plus a 40GB hard drive, which is the bare minimum. While the Meridian won't give you top-of-the-range all-round performance, its onboard video is more than sufficient for gamers, thanks to nVidia's nForce chipset. Similarly, the onboard sound offers 5.1 support, so you can make full use of the impressive Creative DTT2200 surround speakers.

The Meridian's 17in LG 775FT monitor offers a crisp 0.24mm dot pitch with a maximum resolution of 1,024x768 at 75Hz. You can push it up to 1,280x1,024, although you have to drop down to 60Hz. Atlas has even thrown in a TV card, Logitech Cordless keyboard and mouse plus a copy of Microsoft Works Suite 2002.

9 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti

Mesh hangs on to a second placing in the chart this month with its Matrix XP 1800 Ti. Its WorldBench 4 score of 121, rendered by the Athlon XP 1800+ processor and 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, shows the Matrix XP 1800 Ti to be an impressive performer, and there's plenty of storage thanks to the 60GB hard drive.

While the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB monitor can't offer the same sort of screen real estate as a 19in model, it is the best 17in display in the chart. Twinned with a Leadtek WinFast GeForce3 Ti 200 graphics card, it provides excellent image quality. In terms of audio, the SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card is looking old but fortunately the DTT2200 surround speakers are impressive as always.



↑ After five months the Matrix XP 1800 is still in the chart, owing to its all-round good performance

10 Systemax A1900AD

The A1900AD is equipped with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 1.6GHz AMD Athlon 1900+ processor, racking up a WorldBench 4 score of 116. Clear audio is delivered by a Creative Audigy card through a set of Videologic ZXR-500 speakers. The GeForce4 MX 440 graphics card is designed with the budget user in mind – it can't compete with the higher-end cards, but offers good value for money. The display looks good on the colourful 19in CTX EX950F monitor.



↑ At the lower end of the price range, the Systemax is one for the bargain hunters