

Top 10 charts

Every month the *PC Advisor* Test Centre reviews a selection of the latest products, and those that we rate highly enough win a place in our charts. Their position is based on how they score against other products in the same category, and the charts are constantly updated as new products are reviewed. All products are scored on a ratio of features and performance against price, so high scores indicate good value for money as well technical quality. All prices exclude VAT.

Our price categories for PCs and notebooks are as follows: Power PCs, over £1,200; Budget PCs, £700-1,200; Superbudget PCs, sub-£700. Power notebooks, over £1,500; and Budget notebooks, sub-£1,500. Our Digital camera price categories are Professional, over £700; Intermediate, over £300; and Beginners, under £300.

In case of difficulty...

If you are interested in purchasing any of the systems reviewed in our charts, please contact the manufacturer directly and ask for the specific product we have tested, mentioning *PC Advisor* and the issue in which it was reviewed. If, for any reason, a manufacturer is unable to match

the price and specification, or make a suitable replacement, please email us at reviews@idg.com.

Reviews and customer service issues

When it comes to buying a PC or peripheral there are two main elements to take into account: the quality of the hardware and the support and customer service provided by the manufacturer or reseller. Assessing the former is a relatively straightforward job, but monitoring the latter is much trickier.

When we review a product, we test its performance, build quality, features on offer and its value for money. We rely on a range of real-world performance tests, while our expert reviewers check out how well the product is put together.



To judge how it stands up to the competition in terms of features, including warranty and overall value for money, it is scored against a database of similar products previously reviewed by *PC Advisor*. The highest-scoring product in all these areas will win out, so our charts illustrate how well each product fared against the competition.

The aim is to provide you with an exhaustive guide to the quality of the hardware – essential information when choosing which product to buy. However, this is only part of the equation: quality of service and support after purchase are just as important.

To get the bigger picture, you must read the Reviews section alongside the rest of the magazine, especially our News and ConsumerWatch pages, where we cover issues such as a supplier's stability and reliability, and its customer service track record.

We keep this information separate from Reviews because otherwise the section would become unmanageably large, making it hard to display all the data in a clear, tabular format. ■

What is PC WorldBench 4?

WorldBench 4 is the latest version of our benchmarking software, which has been updated to allow us to test PCs running Windows XP, and also has an upgraded base system against which results are compared. For the next few months you will see older PCs with a WorldBench 2000 result, while all new PCs will be tested using the new software. The results cannot be compared.

The PC WorldBench 4 benchmarking software tests how well a system runs 11 different applications and provides the best indication of its real-world performance. The 11 packages are: Photoshop 5.0, PhotoPaint 8.0, Quicken Deluxe 99, Lotus 1-2-3 9.0, Lotus Word Pro 9.0, Access 2000, Excel 2000, PowerPoint 2000, Word 2000, Netscape Communicator 4.73 and Visio 5.0 SE.

Test results are then collated and compared against a reference system – namely a Gateway Select 1200 PC, with a 1.2GHz AMD Athlon processor, 128MB of RAM, 20GB Quantum Fireball hard drive and VisionTek GeForce3 graphics card. To make it easy to compare, the control PC's score is set at 100, so a system that scores 150 is 50 percent faster than the control PC and so on.



To understand computer jargon see our Glossary on the cover disc

PC Advisor's recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.