

TOP 10 POWER PCs

Details	Last month's position	First reviewed	World-Bench 2000	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Processor type/speed	RAM	Hard disk/capacity	Motherboard	Chipset	Modem	USB ports	Monitor	Screen size	Dot pitch	Max resolution @75Hz	Refresh rate@max resolution	Graphics card	Graphics chip	Graphics card memory	Sound card	Speakers	No of speakers/subwoofer	DVD-ROM speed	CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate	Floppy disk drive	Office suite & other extras
1 Mesh Matrix XP 1900-R85 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	NEW	Jan 02	259	£1,399	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/1.6GHz	1,024MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Asus A7M266	Via KT233	56K	4	Mitsubishi DPRO 920	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	ATI Radeon 8500	ATI Radeon 8500	64MB	Creative Audigy	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Y	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2001 Nero, PowerDVD
2 Hi-Grade Meridian XP1.8G PA 020 8532 6100 www.higrade.com	1	Dec 01	255	£1,439	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/60GB	Asus A7M266	AMD 760	56K	4	LG Flatron 915F	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	nVidia GeForce Titanium	nVidia GeForce Ti500	64MB	onboard	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Y	Windows 2000 Pro, Microsoft Works Suite 2001
3 Evesham Axis 1.5e 0800 038 0800 www.evesham.com	2	Dec 01	244	£1,649	2-year onsite, 1-year parts and labour	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/100GB	Gigabyte GA-7DX	AMD 760	56K	4	Samsung 170T	17in	0.26mm	1,280x1,024	1,280x1,024 @75Hz	nVidia GeForce Titanium	nVidia GeForce Ti500	64MB	Creative Audigy	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Y	Windows 2000, StarOffice
4 Evesham Evolution 2000 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com	3	Oct 01	230	£1,499	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	Intel Pentium 4/2GHz	256MB Rambus	Maxtor/60GB	Asus P4T	Intel GD 850	56K	4	LG Flatron 915FT	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	Leadtek GeForce3 DDR	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Y	Windows 2000, StarOffice, BigFix
5 Watford Electronics Hurricane 1400 CRT 0870 220 0700 www.watford.co.uk	4	Nov 01	195	£1,200	1-year onsite, 5-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	Gigabyte GA-7DXR	AMD 760	56K	2	AOC 9Kr	19in	0.26mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @75Hz	Leadtek Winfast GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Videologic SonicFury	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	12x	40x/20x/10x	Y	Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001
6 Systemax A1400 RV Lifestyle 0880 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	5	Aug 01	196	£1,299	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/60GB	Gigabyte GA-7DX	AMD 760	56K	2	CTX PR960F	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	Systemax GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Videologic SonicFury	Videologic DigiTheatre LC	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Y	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, games titles
7 Atlas Meridian A1330 PVM 020 8532 6111 www.higrade.com	6	May 01	209	£1,299	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	128MB DDR RAM	Quantum/60GB	Asus A7M266	AMD 760	56K	4	CTX PR960F	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	Gainward GeForce2 Ultra	nVidia GeForce2 Ultra	64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/8x/4x	Y	Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001, Norton AntiVirus, webcam, TV/FM
8 Atlas Meridian A14 PAPN 020 8532 6111 www.higrade.com	7	Nov 01	197	£1,499	1-year onsite 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/60GB	Asus A7M266	AMD 761	56K	4	Sampo	17in	0.24mm	1,280x1,024	1,280x1,024 @75Hz	Gainward GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/12x/10x	Y	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite, McAfee AntiVirus
9 Carrera SSC Octan Foresight 4260 0870 066 0682 www.ssc.co.uk	8	Nov 01	220	£1,599	1-year onsite, 4-year return to base	Intel Pentium 4/2GHz	256MB Rambus	Western Digital/60GB	MSI 850 Pro II	Intel GD 850	56K	3	NEC 95F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @75Hz	Leadtek GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/12x/10x	Y	Windows 2000, MS Works Suite 2001, Norton AntiVirus
10 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 1.7G 020 8532 6111 www.higrade.com	9	Jun 01	217	£1,599	1-year onsite	Intel Pentium 4/1.7GHz	256MB Rambus	IBM/45GB	Intel	Intel GD 850	56K	2	LG Flatron	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @85Hz	Hercules 3D Prophet II	nVidia GeForce2 Ultra	64MB	Videologic SonicFury	Videologic DigiTheatre LC	5/Y	16x	32x/8x/8x	Y	Windows 2000, MS Works Suite 2000, Norton AntiVirus

1 Mesh Matrix XP 1900-R85

Rarely do we get to see so many firsts in a single PC, but the specs of the Mesh Matrix XP are nothing short of superlative. It's an absolute speed king of a PC with groundbreaking components, and to top it all off it has an exclusive warranty for *PC Advisor* readers. Add



good value for money to the equation and you have a real winner on your hands.

As usual, Mesh has supplied a tidy, well presented PC with ample documentation, but it's what's under the hood that makes it stand out. At the heart is AMD's new Athlon XP 1900+ processor backed up by a huge 1,024MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and an 80GB hard drive. It's small wonder the Matrix XP won the highest WorldBench 2000 score of 259. However, we should mention that, although we used Windows 2000 Pro for testing, the PC will ship with XP Home.

Potential buyers are spoilt by the Matrix's audio and visual experience.

← Our new Best Buy, the Mesh Matrix XP, achieves the highest WorldBench 2000 score of 259

ATI's 64MB Radeon 8500 equals, if not surpasses, the GeForce3, and the monitor complements it well. We were impressed by the new Audigy card, while the DTT2200 speakers offer superb cinema sound.

To be picky, a copy of Works Suite 2001 isn't the most generous software bundle. But a three-year onsite warranty more than makes up for this.

2 Hi-Grade Meridian XP1.8G PA

Almost as soon as it topped our charts, Hi-Grade's Athlon XP system has been displaced by Mesh's machine, which also has an AMD XP processor. The XP name has nothing to do with Microsoft's new operating system. Instead, AMD claims its XP stands for extra performance. This is certainly no



↑ Although the Meridian XP has been pushed out of the top spot, it remains a high-performing machine

misnomer. The Hi-Grade Meridian XP1.8G PA uses a 1.53GHz Athlon XP 1800+ processor and scored an impressive 255 in our WorldBench tests – 25 points higher than the Evesham Evolution 2000, featuring Intel's Pentium

4 processor. Of course, this fantastic score is not just down to the processor. The Meridian backs up the XP chip with 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, nVidia's brand-new Titanium graphics card with 64MB of DDR RAM and a fast 60GB Western Digital hard drive – all of which contributes to the Meridian's success.

But the Meridian isn't just about performance. Hi-Grade completes the package with a range of high-quality peripherals, including a 19in LF Flatron 915FT monitor, wireless keyboard and mouse from Logitech, a 16-speed DVD-ROM and 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. There's also a copy of Microsoft Works Suite 2001, and everything is backed up by a three-year warranty (two-year onsite and one-year return-to-base).

3 Evesham Axis 1.5e

Evesham's Athlon XP-based PC has to settle for third place this month due to the new entry at the top of the chart. However, that's not to say that the Axis 1.5e doesn't have

↓ The Axis 1.5e also features the Athlon XP processor



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plenty going for it. The Evesham Axis matches the Meridian for both processor and RAM and, if you need a lot of storage, you'll welcome the 100GB hard drive.

There's also a 32-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive for backups and a 16-speed DVD-ROM.

Evesham has positioned two USB ports on the front of the 1.5e's case, which makes it easy to plug in devices. The best thing about this package, though, is the 17in Samsung digital flat-panel display. A digital connector on the 64MB DDR (double data rate) RAM Titanium graphics card matches this, so image clarity is assured. The sound card is the latest offering from Creative Labs, the Audigy.

4 Evesham Evolution 2000

The Evolution's WorldBench 2000 score of 230 was once outstanding, but it has now been surpassed by the systems from Mesh, Hi-Grade and Evesham. This is still a speedy system, however, which isn't just due to the fast chip and 256MB of

↓ The Evesham Evolution 2000 combines a Pentium 4 processor with the Windows 2000 operating system



Rambus. Our tests showed that the system ran far faster with Windows 2000 than with Me, which suggests that you get the best out of a P4 with Windows 2000.

Speed is not the only area where the Evolution excels. Gamers will be happy with the 64MB Leadtek GeForce3 card and the 19in LG 915FT monitor. There's ample storage space on the 60GB hard drive, plus a 16-speed DVD-ROM and a fast CD-RW. Sound is from a Creative Live 5.1 card and DTT2200 speakers, plus there's a FireWire card for digital video work. Although the Evolution 2000 is no longer the speediest system in the chart, it's still an impressive, value-for-money PC with an excellent hardware line-up.

5 Watford Electronics Hurricane 1400 CRT

Watford has made little noise lately, but the Hurricane suggests this isn't the last time we'll hear from the company. It may not be the best performer in the chart, but it's still a powerful contender.

The 1400 CRT uses AMD's 1.4GHz chip coupled with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, achieving 195 WorldBench points. It is equally well equipped in other areas, with a 60GB hard drive, a 12-speed DVD-ROM and 40-/20-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. The graphics and sound both have impressive hardware and there's a copy of Works Suite 2001. The real surprise, though, is the £1,200 price tag – very good value for money.

6 Systemax A1400 RV Lifestyle 0880

This former Best Buy offers a 1.4GHz Athlon with 256MB DDR (double data rate)



↑ The Hurricane 1400 CRT falls another space to number five, but remains a decent competitor

RAM, which helped it reach an impressive WorldBench 2000 score of 196. On the storage side, there's a 60GB Maxtor drive, 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW and a 16-speed DVD-ROM.

The Systemax's display is handled by a superb 19in CTX PR960F and a GeForce3 graphics card, which should satisfy even the most demanding gamer. Surround sound gives movies and games maximum impact, and there's a good software bundle. Plus, the tidy internal layout, two spare drive bays and three PCI slots will make upgrading a breeze.

↓ Our former Best Buy, the Systemax A1400, is easy to upgrade but can't keep up with the Athlon XP PCs



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↑ The Atlas Meridian A1330 PVM remains in our chart but slips another spot to number seven

7 Atlas Meridian A1330 PVM

The Meridian is slipping down the chart, but its WorldBench 2000 score of 209 and £1,299 price tag are still competitive. Atlas has opted for AMD's 1.3GHz chip, coupled with the AMD 760 DDR (double data rate) chipset. You'll also find 128MB of DDR RAM and a 60GB Quantum hard drive. A 19in CTX PR960F monitor is twinned with a 64MB DDR GeForce2 Ultra graphics card. Atlas has fitted a 16-speed DVD-ROM drive and a 32-/eight-/quad-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. A Creative Live 5.1 sound card and DTT2200 surround speakers handle the sound. It's a well-specified system, but the passing of time means it has to be content with seventh place.

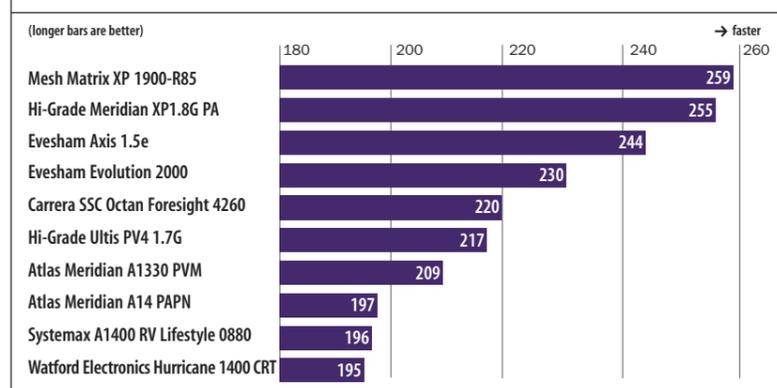


← The Atlas Meridian A14 PAPN's flat-panel is a stylish, space-saving addition

8 Atlas Meridian A14 PAPN

At a time when 19in monitors are the norm in the Power PC category, Atlas goes one better by including a space-saving 17in flat-panel display. The previously prohibitive cost of even 15in units used to mean that flat-panels were only an expensive upgrade. This is changing, though, as prices drop. The 17in Sampo unit offers a maximum resolution of 1,280x1,024 and is adequate for everyday use.

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The Meridian is well specified in other areas, with a 1.4GHz Athlon and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM producing a WorldBench 2000 result of 197. There's a 60GB hard drive, plus a CD-RW and a 16-speed DVD-ROM. Unfortunately, the £1,499 price tag prevents it from climbing higher up the chart.

9 Carrera SSC Octan Foresight 4260

Carrera falls to ninth place this month with the Octan Foresight 4260. The 2GHz Pentium 4 and 256MB of Rambus produced a WorldBench 2000 score of 220 – fast, but not enough to give it a higher chart placing. The Octan Foresight 4260 features a 60GB hard drive, a 32-/12-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW from LiteOn and a 16-speed Pioneer DVD-ROM drive.

The 19in NEC 95F monitor is fair, as is the Leadtek 64MB GeForce3 graphics card. A SoundBlaster 5.1 card and a set of DTT2200 speakers supply the sound. There's even an external Leadtek TV tuner, so you can turn your monitor into a TV. The

↓ The Carrera SSC Octan Foresight is pushed to eighth place due to the new Athlon-XP based systems



Carrera's warranty lasts five years, with the first year onsite, but that only covers labour costs not parts. On the whole it's a good system, but is outclassed by other machines further up the chart.

10 Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 1.7G

The Hi-Grade Ultis PV4 1.7G scored a respectable WorldBench 2000 result of 217 with its 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor and 256MB Rambus memory. The 19in LG Flatron monitor is crisp and clear and, with a Hercules 3D Prophet II card using nVidia's GeForce2 Ultra chipset, its images are high quality.

The Ultis features a 16-speed DVD-ROM, with a 32-/eight-/eight-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW available for backups. The warranty only lasts for a year, but it is onsite. In terms of software, along with Windows 2000, you get a copy of Works 2000 and Norton AntiVirus.

↓ The Hi-Grade Ultis PV4's warranty only lasts for a year, which may not be suitable for some buyers



→ Turn the page to see what's happening in the Top 10 Budget PC chart

Standalone speaker options

If you want full surround sound, then you're going to need a six-speaker setup (five satellites and a subwoofer), referred to as 5.1. Modern sound cards, such as Creative's Live 5.1 and Videologic's SonicFury, can output all six channels from the card itself – simply connect the speakers up and you're ready to go.

The other option is an external 5.1 decoder. Videologic's DigiTheatre and Creative's DTT3500 both provide an external decoder that accepts a digital stream and does the necessary conversion to pump it out to the right speakers. However, you will need an S/PDIF (Sony/Philips digital interface) connection

on your PC to make full use of this. If you've got a hardware DVD decoder card, then you've probably got this connection already. If your sound card has digital-out, then some software DVD players will make use of this and output the digital stream. You can also connect an external decoder up to a standalone DVD player, as most provide the necessary digital output.

If you're more interested in good stereo, rather than full surround, then Aego2 from Acoustic Energy is hard to beat. It's an expensive setup but, if you've got the money to spend, you won't be disappointed.