


**TOP 10 SUPERBUDGET 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
<b>1</b> <b>Multivision Vision Elite XP LT</b> 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	<b>NEW</b>	Jan 02	188	£699	1-yr parts and labour rtb, 2-yr labour rtb	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/40GB	MSI	Via KT266	56K	4	Hansol 705D	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	Hercules 3D Prophet 4500	Kyro II	64MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative DDT 2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/12x	Y	Windows XP Home, Lotus Millennium
<b>2</b> <b>Systemax A1300RV 1170</b> 0870 729 7364 www.simply.co.uk	1	Nov 01	187	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Biostar	Via KT133A	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	Gainward GeForce2 MX400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Creative SB52	2/N	16x	32x/12x/8x	Y	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite Me, Easy CD Creator
<b>3</b> <b>CCL Computers Home-XLR</b> 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	2	Nov 01	182	£699	1-year collect and rtn, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.2GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Soltek SL75KAV	Via KT133A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	1,600x1,200 @75Hz	Hercules 3D Prophet 4500	Kyro II	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Genius Fantasia SP-G16	2/N	16x	32x/8x/8x	Y	Windows 98 SE, Works, Nero, Cyberlink DVD Genius Net Scroll
<b>4</b> <b>EasyPC 1300B</b> 0800 195 4353 www.easypcdirect.co.uk	3	Nov 01	179	£699	3-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	Seagate/40GB	Jetway 663A Pro	Via KT133	56K	2	Relysis TF785 FST	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	1,600x1,200 @60Hz	Inno 3D MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Mercury SW-880	2/Y	16x	32x/16x/8x	Y	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite Me, Win DVD, Nero, Remote, TV Card
<b>5</b> <b>Nethighstreet.com Net1000S</b> 0121 693 0052 www.nethighstreet.com	4	Nov 01	174	£699	1-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.2GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Soltek SL75KAV	Via KT133A	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	Hercules 3D 4000XT	Kyro Chipset	32MB	Creative Labs PCI 128	Midiland SW190 Super	2/Y	16x	N/A	Y	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite, Norton AntiVirus
<b>6</b> <b>Maxdata MW Alpha 1129 WAS</b> 01344 788 910 www.maxdata.com	5	Nov 01	164	£668	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon/1.2GHz	128MB SDRAM	Maxtor/40GB	MicroStar	Via KT133	56K	2	Belinea 10 30 80	17in	0.26mm	1,600x1,200	1,920x1,440 @75Hz	nVidia GeForce2 GTS	nVidia GeForce2 GTS	64MB	Creative Labs PCI 128	X Advance	2/N	16x	32x/8x/8x	Y	Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001, five games, DVD, McAfee, CorelDraw
<b>7</b> <b>Ideal Computing Apollo 1000</b> 0870 545 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk/apollo	6	Aug 01	162	£699	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon/1GHz	128MB SDRAM	Maxtor/30GB	Asus A7V-E	Via KT133	56K	4	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	Creative Labs PCI 128	4Q SP-115	2/N	12x	N/A	Y	Windows 98
<b>8</b> <b>Staples-Scott Series 300</b> 0800 600 900 www.staples.co.uk	7	Nov 01	153	£618	2-year onsite	AMD Athlon/1GHz	128MB SDRAM	Western Digital/30GB	Legend QDI	Via KT133	56K	2	Zaluf 554 Economy	15in	0.28mm	848x480	1,024x768 @65Hz	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 MX	32MB	onboard AC97 Codec	TS120	2/N	12x	32x/8x/4x	Y	Windows Me, MS Works Suite 2001, MSI DVD
<b>9</b> <b>Campus Eclipse 330GT</b> 0870 066 0711 www.campus-direct.co.uk	8	Aug 01	161	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1GHz	128MB SDRAM	Maxtor/30GB	Gigabyte GA-7ZX	Via KT133	56K	2	Iiyama VM 1402	17in	0.27mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	Hercules 3D Prophet II MX	nVidia GeForce2 MX	32MB	onboard Via	Labtec Spin-60	2/N	16x	32x/8x/4x	Y	Windows Me
<b>10</b> <b>Compute It ValueMax Home Office 850</b> 0870 748 7487 www.it-pc.co.uk	9	Aug 01	142	£599	3-year return to base	AMD Duron/850MHz	128MB SDRAM	Maxtor/20GB	ECS M7KV	Via KT133	56K	2	Samtron 75E	17in	0.28mm	1,024x768	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	3D Power GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 MX	32MB	onboard Via	Juster SP692	2/N	12x	N/A	Y	Windows Me, Corel WordPerfect Suite 8.0, 100MB Zip drive, printer

**1** **Multivision Vision Elite XP LT**

Multivision has put together a great package in the form of the Vision Elite XP LT. It's the first Superbudget PC to include Microsoft's XP Home operating system and is twinned with an AMD Athlon XP processor. Its speedy performance in our tests and balance of good components just pushed it ahead of the Systemax, making it our new Best Buy.

The move to XP Home is far greater than that from Windows 98 to Me because it offers functionality and stability way beyond Microsoft's previous consumer operating systems, and you will see the benefit of this in the Vision Elite. The new 1.4GHz Athlon XP 1600+ from AMD is combined with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 40GB hard drive, which helps the Vision Elite pull in a WorldBench score of 188 – the highest in the chart.

The Multivision's 64MB Hercules 3D 4500 offers a high level of graphics and, combined with the superlative Creative DTT



**NEW** ↑ The Best Buy Multivision Vision Elite is the first Superbudget PC to feature Windows XP Home OS

2200 speakers and subwoofer, makes this PC an excellent entertainment system.

The only low point on an otherwise great machine is the Hansol 705D monitor. It's nowhere near as good as the LG monitors Multivision normally bundles on its low-cost systems. Though the documentation is lacking, the Vision Elite XP LT does come with a great peripherals bundle. The Logitech keyboard, mouse and webcam are reliable products,

while the CD-RW drive is the fastest in our chart. Internal access is easy and the USB card means you handily have four extra ports.

**2** **Systemax A1300RV 1170**

Sometimes it seems like it's never the right time to buy a PC, as it'll always be superseded within a few months. But there's never been a better time to take the plunge. What you can get for £699 is outstanding, as our ex-Best Buy from Systemax proves.

The company is one of two manufacturers (EasyPC is the other) that has opted for the second-fastest processor from AMD, the 1.3GHz Athlon. Combined with 256MB of SDRAM and a 64MB Gainward GeForce2 MX400 graphics card, the A1300RV gains a WorldBench 2000 score of 187. Its 40GB IBM drive speeds up data access and helps it to beat similarly specified rivals.

The Systemax is also the best-looking PC in the charts. The tall and slender case is plain, but it houses a slot-loading



↑ Slipping to the Recommended spot, the Systemax A1300RV 1170 is still an impressive, stylish machine

Pioneer 16-speed DVD-ROM. This is backed up by Logitech peripherals and a stylish 17in monitor, which is nicely complemented by the 64MB Gainward GeForce2 MX400 graphics card.

Backup is provided by a fast CD-RW and your investment is protected by a three-year onsite warranty. It's just a shame that the weak onboard sound proves you can't have everything.

**3** **CCL Computers Home-XLR**

The Home-XLR is a well balanced system and it fully deserves third place in our charts. With a 1.2GHz AMD Athlon chip, 256MB of SDRAM and a 40GB IBM hard drive, it got the third highest WorldBench 2000 score of 182, which would be respectable in the Budget PC chart.

The tower case is vast, so you'll need plenty of room to house it. However, it's a bonus if you want to upgrade as there's plenty of space and scope to add in new devices. That said, there's only one 5.25in bay as the other two bays are taken up by a fast CD-RW and a 16-speed DVD-ROM.

Though the sound is only adequate, the Home-XLR features the best graphics setup in the chart. The 64MB Hercules Prophet 4500 graphics card, boasting the fairly new Kyro II chipset, produces excellent image quality in partnership with the brilliant CTX EX710F monitor. The documentation that comes with the Home-XLR isn't the most detailed, and the three-year warranty doesn't cover onsite visits.

The EasyPC 1300B is another well considered, nicely laid-out Superbudget PC that comes with some good extras. It's one of the highest



↑ In third place, the CCL Computers Home-XLR has a decent specification and lots of space for upgrades

The peripherals aren't exactly top-drawer, either. However, taken as a whole, the complete package easily makes up for these niggles.

**4** **EasyPC 1300B**

The EasyPC 1300B is another well considered, nicely laid-out Superbudget PC that comes with some good extras. It's one of the highest

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↑ The EasyPC will prove a pain to upgrade, but on the plus side it does feature a subwoofer

specified systems in the chart, as its 1.3GHz AMD Athlon is combined with 256MB of SDRAM and a generous 40GB hard drive. The 1300B's WorldBench 2000 score of 179 isn't quite as good as the top three competitors', though this is probably due to the slower spin rate on the hard drive.

The Relysis monitor is more than capable of coping with top resolutions, but the 64MB Inno graphics card doesn't translate that potential into higher frame rates for smoother, faster graphics. However, our real gripe stems from the palaver involved in opening the casing: there are six screws to undo, and you must lift off the whole housing to gain access to the interior rather than just remove one panel. It may sound harsh, but this will prove a real pain whenever you try to upgrade.

However, the EasyPC does have some outstanding features. Backup is courtesy

of a speedy CD-RW and, though the 1300B comes with onboard sound, it's one of only three PCs to include a subwoofer. This makes a huge difference to the EasyPC's sound quality.

## 5 Nethighstreet.com Net1000S

In fifth position this month is the Net1000S. The setup is similar to the second-placed CCL, so it's built for top performance. The specification produced a respectable WorldBench 2000 score of 174. But given that the drive spins at 7,200rpm it should have scored higher, so it's not as well primed as the competition.

The popular LG Flatron monitor is stylish, with good picture quality. The graphics card had considerably less bite than most of our new entries, but it performed remarkably well on frame rates.

The Net1000S has to take the prize for best sound in this month's chart. The speakers are far from great, but they do come with a subwoofer. When you factor in

↓ The Net1000S has the best sound in the chart, but its performance is beaten by higher entries



a PCI 128 sound card, you get a very decent audio experience.

A noticeable omission on the 1000S is a CD-RW drive, and the one-year return-to-base warranty isn't that generous. However, the Net1000S offers just enough to stay in the top half of our charts.

## 6 Maxdata MW Alpha 1129 WAS

The MW Alpha would be a good choice for novice users, thanks to its excellent documentation. However, its performance does not match this high standard and its WorldBench 2000 score is a mere 164, primarily because of the meagre 128MB SDRAM. Though the 40GB hard drive will be difficult to fill, it spins at only 5,400rpm – the slowest in the chart.

The Maxdata is the smallest system here, making it a good space-saver. It's also cramped internally, so it won't be easy to upgrade. Graphically, the Alpha copes well thanks to the 17in Belinea monitor and the 64MB GeForce2 GTS,

↓ The Maxdata is perfect for beginners, with extensive documentation and a generous software bundle



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which is a cut above the popular MX option. Backup is courtesy of a Teac CD-RW and the standard onsite warranty only lasts for a year.

## 7 Ideal Computing Apollo 1000

The past few months have seen an unprecedented improvement in specifications at this price point.

↓ The Apollo is being left behind, due to its average performance and lack of backup facilities



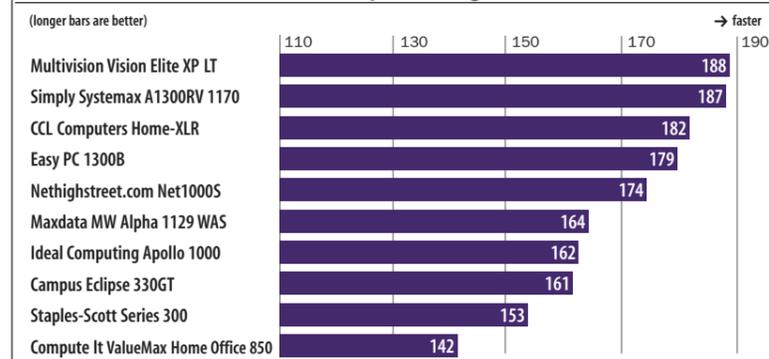
This means that previous releases – such as Ideal Computing's former Best Buy – simply can't compete with the influx of new systems.

The Apollo has a 1GHz Athlon processor, which, combined with 128MB of SDRAM and a 30GB hard drive, produces a WorldBench 2000 score of 162 – good, but beaten by the more recent arrivals. The 17in monitor is crisp, with bright image quality and a steady picture – a good match for the 64MB GeForce2 MX graphics card. The sound card is also better than the onboard audio found on some of the other PCs in the Superbudget chart.

↓ The Series 300 has good features and a modest price tag, but it is still not the best value for money



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Our only quibble with the Apollo was the lack of backup facilities – if you want a CD-RW drive for this price, you'd be better off with the Campus. The one-year warranty is also a little miserly.

## 8 Staples-Scott Series 300

The Series 300 has well-balanced components and a two-year onsite warranty, but still isn't the best value for money. The 1GHz Athlon, with 128MB of SDRAM and 30GB hard drive, can't compete with the faster models as the WorldBench 2000 score of 153 shows. The 15in monitor is a disappointment, and the 32MB GeForce2 MX gives very average graphics. There's a good software bundle, 12-speed DVD-ROM and a good backup option, but these features aren't enough to push it above eighth place.

## 9 Campus Eclipse 330GT

The Eclipse 330GT survives for another month, though it has to make do with ninth place. With a 1GHz AMD Athlon, 128MB of SDRAM and 30GB hard drive, the Campus completed WorldBench 2000 with only 161 points. It fell behind with graphics – the 32MB Hercules 3D Prophet is lacklustre and the 17in Iiyama monitor is barely adequate. Audio is fair, with the Labtec speakers atoning for the poor onboard sound. The Campus is fitted with CD-RW and 16-speed DVD-ROM drives, and is backed up by a three-year warranty.

## 10 Compute It ValueMax Home Office 850

Its price is low, but it's not enough to stop the ValueMax Home Office 850 slipping to



↑ Hanging on in there, the Campus is a good, solid system, but not up to the competition

number 10 in the chart. The 850MHz Duron processor from AMD and 128MB of RAM produced a low WorldBench 2000 score of 142. The Home Office 850's 20GB Maxtor hard drive isn't generous but, if you require extra storage, you can back up using the 100MB Omega Zip drive. The Samtron 17in monitor surpassed our low expectations and the GeForce2 MX graphics cards is one of the better incarnations.

↓ Despite its low price tag, the ValueMax Home Office 850 still has to settle for tenth place



## Onboard audio or sound cards?

**O**nboard sound is the audio equivalent of onboard graphics and is more prevalent on budget PCs – anyone wishing to buy a value-for-money Superbudget PC from our Top 10 chart will probably end up with onboard sound. Rather than using a card that goes into a PCI slot, onboard sound is integrated on to the motherboard. This way manufacturers can keep the price down because they don't have to shell out for extra components. Unfortunately, the performance of onboard sound is a poor relation to that generated by sound cards. It's therefore important to decide whether you'll be able to live without a decent sound card.

If you want to recreate that cinematic audio experience or make music on your PC, onboard sound facilities are not going to cut the mustard. Most integrated sound only offers two-speaker stereo support, so it won't matter how many speakers you add – you won't be able to get surround sound or immerse yourself in 3D-positional audio. A sound card provides superior functionality, not only through the extra channel support on the hardware, but also in the bundled software.

That said, there have been some good improvements in onboard sound, but you'll need to invest in the new nForce motherboard to enjoy them.