



Evesham Axis RD Plus

PC PRO
A LIST

PRICE £799 (£939 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER Evesham Technology 0870 160 9500

VERDICT Delicate balancing of performance, features, warranty and quietness earns Evesham the main honours this month.

Glance through the Evesham Axis' specs on the feature table (see p94), and you may well wonder exactly how it beats the Mesh to the post this month. The Axis RD Plus has a 17in TFT, a three-piece speaker system and few extras, while the Matrix Vector 2006 boasts a 19in TFT, 5.1 speakers and several extras.

However, look a little closer and you'll find compelling reasons to choose the RD Plus. One is that – like all current Evesham PCs – it comes with Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005. This makes it ideal

for watching or serving your videos, photos and music, but bear in mind that a TV tuner and MCE remote cost an extra £80.

The three-year on-site warranty is more compelling and is only matched by NEC – Mesh offers two years' on-site cover, but the third is return-to-base. Then there's the fact that a 19in TFT offers no advantage in terms of resolution against a 17in – both are stuck with 1,280 x 1,024 pixels. We like the 17in ViewSonic VX715 too – it offers a bright, even and well-contrasted image, with a fast response time that won't let you see any smearing in games.

Speakers are a more personal choice, and whether you'd prefer a surround-sound set (complete with its tangle of wires) or a more discrete 2.1 set will depend on whether you want surround sound or not. The fact is that the I-Trigue 3200 set not only looks good, but offers decent bass and treble.

Another highlight is the CrossFire-capable motherboard. The MSI board has two PCI Express 16x slots, one of which is

filled with a Radeon X800 GTO. If you want better performance, you can install a master card at a later date. At our tough settings, the X800 GTO managed 46fps – not the fastest here, but still capable of playing the latest games at high detail levels.

We had no complaints with 2D performance. Despite having half the memory of every other PC here, the dual-core Athlon 64 X2 3800+ helped it to a healthy 1.03 in our 2D application benchmarks.

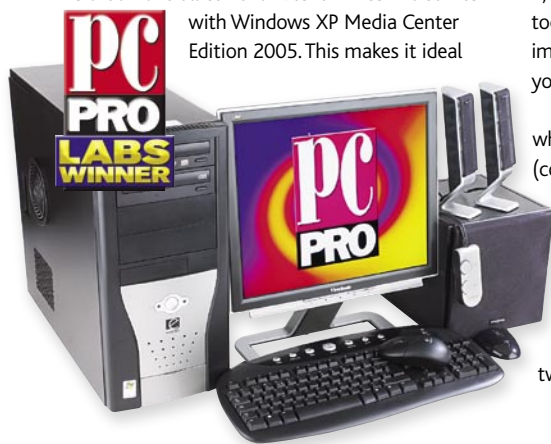
The storage subsystem is solid too. A 200GB hard disk provides plenty of room for data and media, while the combination of a fast dual-layer DVD writer and a DVD-ROM drive means you'll be able to make DVD backups on-the-fly.

With FireWire, Gigabit Ethernet, 10/100 Ethernet and six USB 2 ports, the only tickbox left unchecked is an S/PDIF output. This is made up for by quiet running – the RD Plus measured only 36dBA from the front when idle.

It all adds up to a great PC for £799: a solid warranty, good performance and a selection of quality peripherals.

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
QUIETNESS	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★



Gladiator Jupiter II 3800 Dual Core

PRICE £799 (£939 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER Gladiator Computers 0845 644 4666

VERDICT There's a lot to like about the Jupiter II, but it's let down by a minimal warranty and a graphics card bettered by everything else on test.

Turn on Gladiator's Jupiter II and initially you'll only know it's working by the blue light that glows around the circumference of the large power button. It isn't the quietest machine we've ever reviewed, though – once it's warmed up to normal working temperature, the idle noise increases to 38dBA from the front and a couple of dBA louder from the side.

Both the chassis and motherboard are made by Asus. We're not convinced by the shiny plastic fascia – the doors are too flimsy

for our liking and could easily break off. The top two hide a fast Lite-On DVD writer and a partnering DVD-ROM drive, while the lower two reveal a floppy drive/card reader combo and USB and audio ports.

Inside the case you won't find luxuries such as tool-less drive bays or expansion slots, but there's plenty of room for expansion. We like Gladiator's choice of an Asus A8N-SLI motherboard – as the name suggests, it has two PCI Express 16x slots and one is occupied by a GeForce 6600 GT graphics card.

It was the slowest card on test, managing only 32fps in our Far Cry test, but you can easily add a second 6600 GT at a later date to boost performance. 2D performance was around average – the Athlon 64 X2 3800+ scored 1.00. Nonetheless, this is a solid result and few will need more power.

The A8N-SLI provides FireWire, Gigabit Ethernet, RAID and eight-channel audio.

Creative's new Inspire T3030 2.1 speakers don't use all those channels but produce a reasonably well-rounded sound. They're no match for Evesham or PC Nextday's speaker sets, though.

The grey/silver 17in Hyundai TFT doesn't match the Jupiter II's black theme, but it has DVI and D-SUB inputs, a two-port USB 2 hub and a claimed response time of 3ms. In games and movies, the Q70U was no better than 12ms monitors, but image quality was fine on the whole – the only issue was slightly narrow horizontal viewing angles.

The 250GB hard disk is bigger than most, but the only bundled software is Works 8.5. However, the real bone of contention is the warranty. Where other manufacturers back up their systems with up to three years of on-site cover, the Jupiter II only comes with a year of return-to-base cover.

As there's no evidence of any extras to make up for this, the Gladiator loses out in the value stakes. Ultimately, there are better deals to be found this month.

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
QUIETNESS	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

