

NEW YEAR NEW PC

It's time to check out the January sales, so we've put together 13 value-for-money PCs that won't break the bank at £1,200

Now that the Christmas rush is over, for the bargain hunters among us the start of a new year means just one thing – New Year Sales. If you held back from buying a brand new PC before Christmas in the hope of finding a bargain in the January sales, then this is the group test for you. We invited 13 PC manufacturers to meet the challenge of putting together a fully featured PC that was geared towards value for money.

With a price limit of £1,200 ex VAT, we set the following minimum specification: a 750MHz processor or faster, 128MB of RAM, a 20GB hard drive with some form of backup device, a 17in monitor, 32MB graphics card and Microsoft Windows Me. We also asked for Internet connectivity and reasonable multimedia capabilities. The software bundle was left up to the supplier but the final price had to include delivery, a three-year parts and labour warranty and any credit card surcharges. Most of all, though, we had to feel that we were getting the best value possible for our hard-earned cash.

PHOTOGRAPHY HUGH THRELFALL

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• PCs tested by Lars-Goran Nilsson, reviewed by Scott Montgomery and Jalal Werfalli



Atlas Meridian A1000 PW



ATLAS HAS BASED this system on AMD's 1GHz Athlon processor. This popular CPU is plugged into the socket of an excellent Asus A7V motherboard. As well as supporting both UltraDMA66 and UltraDMA100 standards, the VIA KT133 chipset on the Asus board is compatible with both PC100 and PC133 SDRAM.

Atlas has sensibly opted to install 128MB of PC133 memory in the form of a single DIMM, leaving two DIMM slots

free. The quality choice of main components helps Atlas score an impressive 177 points in our SYSmark tests, gaining second place overall.

Two of the three available 5.25in bays are occupied by a Teac CD-RW and Hitachi DVD-ROM drive, and the bundle includes one CD-R and one CD-RW disc. An UltraDMA100-compatible 30.7GB IBM hard disk completes the storage solution.

The supplied Diamond SupraSST internal modem provides connection to the Internet and sound is admirably taken care of by a VideoLogic SonicFury sound card and DigiTheatre LC surround-sound speaker system. Graphics from the GeForce2 MX AGP card are fed to a 17in CTX PR705F monitor. The picture is vibrant and steady and the unit will comfortably handle a resolution of 1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz. 3D performance is also above average in the group, with the Atlas

coming fourth and sixth overall in our 3DMark and Quake III tests respectively. With impressive 3D scores such as these we were pleased to see that Atlas has catered for gamers by including a Genius joystick, and a decent selection of games that includes FIFA 2000. You can connect the MX card to a TV, or receive a TV signal through the Prolink TV tuner.

A copy of Lotus SmartSuite Millennium is bundled, which offers everything you need. The inclusion of a Lexmark Z12 inkjet printer and Umax scanner has helped make this a well-rounded system that offers the best value for money.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.83 (£1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT Atlas 07000 285 275

www.atlasplc.com

PROS Good-quality components; impressive performance; extra peripherals

CONS Not as nifty as some others on test

OVERALL With an impressive array of peripherals and a decent level of performance to boot, the Atlas makes the grade for Editor's Choice

FEATURES ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
OVERALL RATING ★★★★★



Dell Dimension 4100 1000MHz



DELL'S SYSTEM IS based on Intel's 815E chipset. Plugged into the FC-PGA socket on the Dell-branded motherboard is a 1GHz Intel Pentium III processor. The powerful CPU is backed up with 128MB of PC133 memory in the form of a single DIMM. This leaves only one DIMM slot free.

Performance-wise, the Dell only managed a lower than average SYSmark score of 162. However, most users will find this more than adequate.

Connection to the Internet is via an Aztec V.90 internal modem.

This fills one of the five available PCI slots. A second PCI slot is occupied by a Turtle Beach Santa Cruz sound card that feeds a pair of Altec Lansing speakers.

Graphics are handled by the now aging nVidia TNT2 M64 chipset. Connected to the 32MB TNT2 card is a Dell-badged 17in monitor with a maximum resolution of 1,152 x 864 at 75Hz and a rather curved face – not

quite in the same league as other screens here. Compared to other PCs here, the poor graphics let this system down.

The Dell only managed to outrank the Gateway in our 3DMark and Quake III tests. We would rather have seen a GeForce2 MX graphics card in the system. That said, the TNT2 card is still capable of running all but the most demanding of games.

A modest 20GB hard disk is supplied and is complemented by an LG CED-

8080B CD-RW drive. The latter comes with both a CD-R and CD-RW disc. An NEC DV-5700A DVD-ROM drive completes the optical complement.

Dell has bundled an HP DeskJet 610C printer plus parallel cable with the 4100. Together with the copy of Microsoft Works Suite 2000, this means that you can be productive from day one. Overall, Dell has put together a sensible package that performs adequately in most areas but is let down by its poor 3D performance. However, if a printer and decent office package are your main priorities, then you could do worse than the Dell.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.83 (£1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT Dell 0870 907 5664

www.dell.co.uk

PROS Good overall package; printer and cable included

CONS Poor graphics and monitor let down the rest of the system; small hard disk

OVERALL A machine that fulfils the criteria we set but fails to shine above the others in the group

FEATURES ★★★
PERFORMANCE ★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★
OVERALL RATING ★★★

evesham.com Origin 1000MX



the power cables are all shielded, indicating that care has been taken during the system build. There's plenty of room for motherboard expansion too, as four PCI slots are free together with a single ISA slot for any older cards you may have kicking about. However, when it comes to adding some extra drives you have only one empty 3.5in bay to play with.

The 3DPower GeForce2 MX card is a cheaper graphics option, but that's not to say it can't do the job. With 3,328 3DMarks and 46.9fps in Quake III, the Origin should handle today's games without any problems. A built-in TV-out also adds the versatility to connect the card to a television if you're after a bigger window.

The Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 73 monitor can only be described as a mediocre example of a Diamondtron NF tube. While it is a flat, aperture-grille tube with an inherently vibrant picture, it did suffer from poor power regulation.

AS THE NAME SUGGESTS there's a 1GHz Athlon processor residing on the VIA KT133-driven Chaintech 7AJA motherboard inside this offering. And with 128MB of PC133 memory occupying one of the three DIMM slots, the Origin manages a respectable overall SYSmark score of 169, placing it pretty much in the middle of the pack.

Lifting the lid, the first thing that strikes you is the overall tidiness. Most of the cables are neatly held back, while

The onboard sound has been disabled and evesham.com has opted for a card that's pretty standard on many of the PCs on test. The SB Live! Value card is good, while the speakers provide four-point surround sound.

A well-sized 30GB UltraDMA100 hard drive from Maxtor, and a Panasonic CD-RW take care of storage, while a 16-speed Pioneer DVD-ROM should do your discs justice.

However, in terms of value for money, the Origin has not got that much to offer, as peripherals are few and far between. Microsoft Works Suite 2000 is bundled, but not much else. So although it is a fine example of a PC we can't recommend it as a New Year bargain.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.83 (1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT evesham.com 0800 038 0800

www.evesham.com

PROS Decent sized hard drive; tidy innards

CONS Limited expansion; no peripherals

OVERALL If the monitor had been better and a few more peripherals were thrown in, this could be a winning PC

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

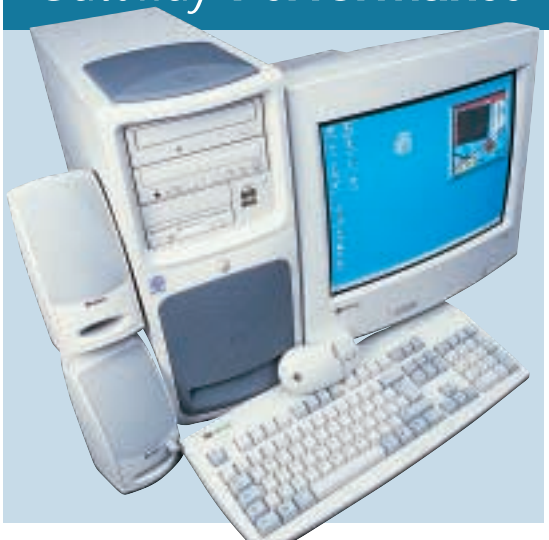
★★★

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

Gateway Performance 1000



UltraDMA100 support to match the 20GB Western Digital hard disk.

Considering all these factors, it is surprising that the Gateway didn't perform better.

The motherboard has four PCI slots and one shared PCI/CNR. Of these, the shared slot is occupied by the PCI modem and one of the PCI slots is occupied by a cut-down SoundBlaster Audio PCI 128D sound card. This card has no joystick port, although this system has four USB

ports (two front and two rear) and, considering many gaming peripherals are USB these days, the lack of the port is of little consequence. You won't be able to plug in your old faithful joystick though, without a convertor. The speaker system is a set of Boston BA265s.

The TNT2 M64 graphics card is rather long in the tooth and is just not up to competing with modern cards at resolutions of 1,280 x 1,024, which is why this system did so poorly in the 3D

NOW HERE'S A processor you rarely see: a 1GHz Pentium III. Athlon-based systems frequently have this clock speed, but Pentium III-based systems are rare. With 128MB of PC133 memory onboard we would have expected this system to be blisteringly fast, however it is far from a good performer, sitting at the bottom of the 3D graphics tables and in the middle of the SYSmark tables.

The motherboard is Intel 815E-based, which provides the necessary

results. With a frame rate well below 20fps, games will be unplayable at this sort of resolution. It is a shame such an outdated component lets this system down so badly.

The monitor is a Gateway-branded EV700 17in unit. The optical drives are a Philips CD-RW providing eight-speed writing, four-speed rewriting and 32-speed reading. A Panasonic SR-8586 DVD drive allows DVD reading at 16-speed and CD reading at 40-speed.

With Works Suite 2000, this bundle has the software you'll need to work from the word go. Overall this system is not too bad, but its performance leaves a lot to be desired. A GeForce2 MX card would have made a huge difference.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,432.32 (£1,219 ex VAT)

CONTACT Gateway 0800 552 000

www.gateway.com/uk

PROS Front USB ports

CONS Very dated graphics card; over budget

OVERALL With an MX card for around £120, this system could be good. As it stands, its graphics performance is awful

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★

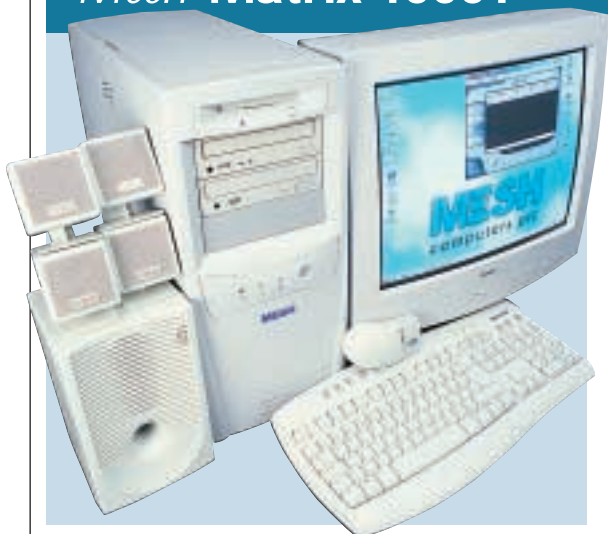
★★★★

★★★★

★★★★



Mesh Matrix 1000T



Asus A7V motherboard. This is the optimal setup for optical disc copying. The hard disk is connected to the primary UltraDMA100 socket, allowing it to perform at its maximum bandwidth transfer of 100Mbytes/sec. The other socket is free for upgrade.

The processor is a 1GHz Athlon. Memory is in the form of a single 128MB stick of PC133 memory. It is good to see Mesh is now using this faster memory. Two

THIS IS ALMOST identical in terms of specification to the Panrix, apart from the monitor (a 19in Iiyama) and the case. The Mesh case has an unclippable drive bay (with one bay free) for easy installation or removal of hard disks. The drive is a 30.7GB IBM Deskstar.

One 5.25in bay is free, with the other two occupied by the Teac CD-RW and a Pioneer DVD-115. Both optical drives are on different EIDE cables connected to the two UltraDMA66 sockets on the

DIMM sockets remain free for memory upgrades. The motherboard has four PCI slots and one shared PCI/AMR slot, two of which are filled. One is occupied by the SoundBlaster Live! Value sound card and the other by a Conexant HCF V.90 modem. The sound card pipes out to FPS1000 speakers.

The graphics card is a 32MB Hercules 3D Prophet 2 MX. This is a brilliant low-cost graphics solution at a fraction of the price of the full-blown

GTS card. The performance is excellent, though, as the Quake III result shows, 41.4fps being a very playable frame rate at 1,280 x 1,024 in 16bit colour.

The SYSmark score is slightly lower than the similar Panrix, with the Mesh scoring 165 overall to Panrix's 176. Considering the similarity of specification between the two systems, this discrepancy is a little odd, and must be the result of the drivers being used or tweaking of the setup of Windows.

With Microsoft Works Suite 2000 this system has software to get you up and running straight away. It is a good solid entrant, just slightly slower than comparable machines.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.82 (1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT Mesh 020 8208 4706

www.meshcomputers.com

PROS Mesh has finally put PC133 memory in this system!

CONS Not as fast as the Panrix

OVERALL A good solid system at a good price, although as the Panrix shows, it could be faster

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

Multivision Vision Elite Pro GTS



scores, although the most likely culprit is the lack of VIA 4-in-1 drivers for the motherboard.

There are five PCI and one shared PCI/ISA slots, of which three PCI and the shared slots are free. The inclusion of an ISA slot is unusual these days, and is a welcome feature if you have old cards. The occupied PCI slots are filled with the modem and a SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 card, which pipes its output to the excellent VideoLogic DigiTheatre LC speaker

WITH ITS 900MHZ CPU this is one of the lowest clocked Athlon systems and as a result languishes at the bottom end of all the results graphs – except the Quake III test where it blasted its way to fourth place by producing 69.1fps.

The motherboard is an EPoX EP-8KTA2 with the KT133A chipset. The board has 128MB of PC100 memory, with two DIMM slots free. The speed of the memory is doubtless partly responsible for the lower SYSmark

system. For sound enthusiasts this machine is worth a second glance.

The hard disk is a 30.7GB IBM Deskstar, while for optical storage a Mirai CRD-BP1300P CD-RW and a Hitachi GD-7500 DVD drive are installed.

Sitting in the AGP slot is a 64MB Hercules 3D Prophet II Pro. This is why the Multivision clawed out the frames it did in Quake III. It is distinct from the 64MB 3D Prophet 2 GTS, which has a memory speed of 366MHz, whereas this

Pro version runs the memory at a blistering 400MHz. Not only this, but the card is more stable than the GTS because the core is running at 200MHz – in other words, it is not overclocked to make the card fast as it is in the 64MB GTS. The Pro also has S-Video for connecting your PC to a television. The video card outputs to a Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 720 monitor, which has a fairly sharp image.

The system comes with Lotus SmartSuite Millennium and is an all-round good entrant. The sound and graphics combination is excellent – shame about the 4-in-1 drivers.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,526.33 (1,299 ex VAT)

CONTACT Multivision 0121 550 8000

www.multivision.co.uk

PROS 3D Prophet 2 Pro gives excellent graphics performance

CONS Missing 4-in-1 driver slows results; over budget

OVERALL Apart from the glitch with the drivers, this is a decent system

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

NEC Direction SM-1000A



The SoundBlaster Live! Value provides an output signal for the Labtec LCS-2414 speakers. The modem is a Conexant soft U56 model. If you're into upgrading, you will want to steer clear of this machine as only the shared slot is free plus the DIMM slot, and there are three free 3.5in drive bays, but only one free EIDE channel.

The graphics card is a Leadtek 32MB nVidia GeForce2, which allows the system to claw its way

to second place in the 3DMark table with a score of 5,215 at 1,280 x 1,024 in 16bit colour. Its Quake III score was similarly impressive at 80.3fps.

The card pipes out to an NEC-branded VR19 19in monitor. The image on this is fairly good; although the lower fascia is a bit big and makes the screen look smaller than it is. The video card has an S-Video output for those who like to connect their PC to a TV.

THE NEC SYSTEM IS built on a Micro-ATX motherboard from MSI, the MS-6340. However, this has limited upgrade options, so we're not sure why NEC chose it. The system achieved a SYSmark score of 170, though, which placed it near the middle of the table. The processor is a 1GHz AMD Athlon. The board has two DIMM slots, with a 128MB stick of PC133 memory occupying one. There are also two PCI slots and a shared PCI/CNR slot.

The hard disk is a 30GB Quantum

Fireball, and for optical storage an LG CED-8080B CD-RW is included, giving eight-speed writing, four-speed rewriting and 32-speed reading, while for DVD handling there is a Pioneer DVD-115 with 16-speed DVD reading and 40-speed CD reading.

With a Logitech webcam and a stereo headset thrown in, this system isn't too bad. What hinders it is the lack of upgradability. If you don't need to upgrade though, it is fast for games. And with a pretty good software bundle, including Encarta, Microsoft Flight Sim 98 and Works 2000, you could do a lot worse.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.82 (1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT NEC 0870 010 6322

www.nec-online.co.uk

PROS Good performance results in 3DMark and SYSmark

CONS No real upgrading options

OVERALL This is a good system, although with few options for upgrading it can't offer much in the way of future proofing

FEATURES	★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★

Hints and tips for buying a new PC

In the market for a new PC? PCW has put together a few guidelines to help you find the one best suited to your needs.

First up, take time to research what you really want. Do you need a PC for gaming? If so, a top-notch graphics card should be high on your list. Or perhaps you want one for business or to use for educational assignments. If so then performance may not be a priority, whereas software will. Either way be sure you know your requirements before you shop, as you might end up spending over the odds on an unsuitable system. A good place to start is the adverts in the pages of PCW, which will give you a good idea of what's out there and let you compare prices.

So where should you buy? Nowadays the high-street stores are under heavy fire from Internet retailers. With lower overheads, these mail-order companies are able to



undercut their rivals, offering some very tasty deals.

If you do decide to save some money by buying in this way, confirm the order in writing so that you have something you can refer to if

there's a dispute. In addition, when buying over the Internet always use a major credit card that offers a buyer's protection/insurance policy.

A new PC will invariably come with an operating system pre-installed - either Microsoft Windows 98, Me or 2000. Sometimes this is all you get, so remember to ask about or make room in your budget for the software you need. An office suite such as Microsoft Office or Lotus SmartSuite Millennium is perhaps the most important.

With today's bloatware software, consider getting the biggest hard drive that you can buy, preferably larger than 15GB. Furthermore, a CD rewriter or perhaps an alternative media drive such as those from

Iomega will be useful to back up data.

Memory is important too. Many retailers are still offering 64MB of RAM, but 128MB will handle intensive applications far better. Also, check how many DIMM slots are free just in case you wish to add more memory later.

The monitor and graphics are very important as this is how you interface with your computer. Many monitors come with perfectly flat screens that are very comfortable to use. Graphics cards also have a variety of ports. Look out for S-Video and composite ports and dual D-SUB ports if you want to run two monitors at the same time.

A modem, sound card and speakers should be included, but again the need for these depends on your situation and some manufacturers might not include these at all. Remember - always ask.

JALAL WERFALLI



Packard Bell ixtreme 9100



THE TRANSPARENT borders on the monitor, case and keyboard are not to everyone's liking, but it's refreshing to see something other than beige.

Inside is an MSI motherboard sporting an 800MHz Pentium III mounted in the FC-PGA socket. This board uses VIA's Apollo Pro 133A chipset, which supports a 133MHz bus and 4x AGP – handy, as the 128MB of memory in one of the three DIMM slots conforms to the 133MHz standard, and

the nVidia GeForce2 MX card is AGP 4x ready.

The ixtreme does reasonably well in the 3D tests and is up there with the other MX-based systems, but the slower clocked Pentium leaves the system in last place in the overall SYSmark score with a rating of 133.

The 17in Packard Bell monitor just isn't up to the job. With a shadow-mask tube that's curved and reflective it's not very comfortable to look at. Worse still, there's an overall lack of focus

across the picture. However, there is a power supply around the back for the pair of Diamond Multimedia speakers.

As for storage, a Philips CD-RW allows backups to be made from the vertically mounted 30.7GB hard drive or directly from the NEC 12-speed DVD-ROM drive. The Creative SoundBlaster Live! Value card processes sounds to the speakers and sits in one of the five PCI slots. Fitted in two other PCI slots are a Hauppauge WinTV tuner for viewing

television on your PC, and a FireWire card that sprouts a total of four ports (one at the front, one internally and two at the rear) – ideal for DV cameras. One PCI slot is available for future additions.

The two motherboard-based USB ports are filled by the keyboard and mouse, but that is not a problem as there are a further two USB ports on the front of the PC. It's therefore a shame that nothing else was included to make use of these ports. No office software was present, either.

The ixtreme has got connectivity sorted out but this is let down by a poor monitor, minimal software and a warranty that extends to only one year.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,499 (£1,275.74 ex VAT)

CONTACT Packard Bell 01628 508 200

www.packardbell-europe.com

PROS FireWire and extra USB ports; good-sized hard drive; different styling

CONS Poor monitor; slower performance; over budget

OVERALL Can't match the others in terms of value for money, performance and software

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★

★★

★★★

★★★

Panrix Magnum 1000W



THIS SYSTEM FROM Panrix doesn't come in the large case we have seen over the past few months, although it still stays cool with front and rear fans keeping the air moving throughout. The 1GHz Athlon is no longer cutting edge, but is still a very fast processor.

The Asus A7V motherboard has five USB ports as standard, as well as four EIDE sockets (two UltraDMA66 and two UltraDMA100). Connected to one of the UltraDMA66 channels is the Acer

CD-RW, while the other holds the Hitachi DVD-ROM. This may seem a waste of the connectors, but it is actually the best configuration for CD copying software as the two drives don't share the bandwidth on the channel. On one of UltraDMA100 channels is the 30.7GB IBM Deskstar hard disk.

The motherboard has four PCI slots, one PCI/AMR shared slot and an AGP Pro slot, which holds the very fast, inexpensive 32MB

Hercules 3D Prophet II MX graphics card. The motherboard also has three DIMM slots of which one is occupied by a single 128MB stick of PC133 memory. Of the PCI slots, two are occupied – one by the SoundBlaster Live! 1024 and the other by the Diamond Supra modem.

The Creative four-point surround speaker system doesn't cater for digital sound, but helps to keep the price down. The monitor is a Hansol 900P. This 19in model provides an excellent image, with

the OSD controlled by a single wheel mounted on the lower fascia. The screen is not the flattest around, but then general image quality is just as important as flatness.

Performance was respectable on the Panrix with a SYSmark score of 176, although we have seen faster scores from 1GHz machines in the past. In Quake III it managed 45.4fps at 1,280x 1,024 at 16bit, which is a more than playable frame rate.

The Panrix is a neat system that is well put together. The components are well set up, although the performance isn't as fast as some previous 1GHz machines we've tested.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.83 (1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT Panrix 0113 244 4958

www.panrix.com

PROS Well configured system with quality components

CONS Performance lower than we expected

OVERALL A good solid PC, with good upgradability and some fine components installed

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

Polar Parsec 1100



A 1.1GHZ ATHLON pounds away in this machine, along with one of the lowest profile heatsink and fan combinations we've seen. The veins of the heatsink remain totally cold and a check of the BIOS reveals a super-cool processor temperature of 29-33 degrees – amazing for an Athlon of this clock speed.

A single 128MB PC100 DIMM is present, which is a pity as this system would have been a bit faster with PC133. There are two DIMM slots free for

upgrade. The motherboard is a Jetway 663AS, which utilises the VIA KT133 chipset.

The motherboard has onboard sound, which is not state of the art, but the VIA-based AC'97 is adequate for most purposes. The two Yamaha speakers and subwoofer deliver good sound. The onboard sound shouldn't put you off as it's no worse than a low-end sound card and keeps a PCI slot free. The motherboard has four PCI slots, an AMR and a

shared PCI/ISA slot. One PCI slot is occupied by the modem.

The motherboard unfortunately doesn't support UltraDMA100, so the 30.7GB IBM Deskstar hard disk doesn't run at its optimal bandwidth, instead running at UltraDMA66. The optical drives on this system are attached to the other EIDE cable. The Sony CRX140E CD-RW provides removable storage, while for DVD and CD reading, a Hitachi GD7500 is installed.

The graphics card is a Hercules 3D Prophet II GeForce2 GTS. This 64MB version of the card (along with the mammoth processor) has placed the Polar firmly at the top of both the Quake III and 3DMark tables. The monitor is a Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 720 19in model.

With Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, this is a good basic system. There are lots of slots for upgrading as well as a quality graphics card and processor combination for gaming. It's a shame about the PC100 memory and the lack of UltraDMA100 support. Had these been in place, this system could have been the winner.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,410 (1,200 ex VAT)

CONTACT Polar 0161 482 7000

www.polartechnology.com

PROS Fast graphics and an all-round good-quality system

CONS PC100 memory and no UltraDMA100 support

OVERALL The failings lose this system the crown. It is excellent for fast graphics though

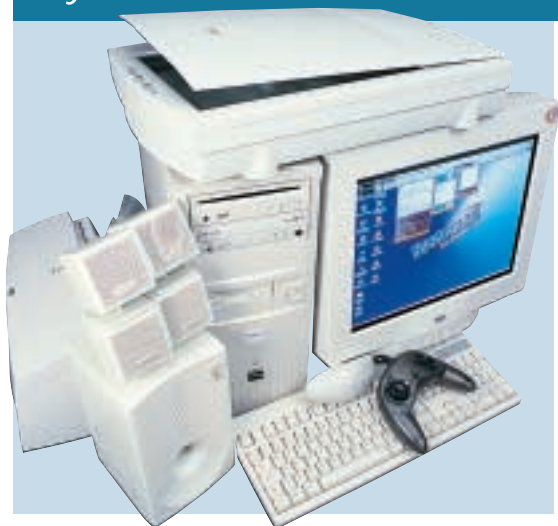
FEATURES

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING ★★★★★

Systemax A1000RV Lifestyle 0250



DESPITE HAVING A 1GHz Athlon driving it, the Systemax doesn't manage to pull itself out of the bottom half of any of the tables – although none of the scores are really poor. Like Multivision's entrant, the Systemax did not have the correct 4-in-1 VIA drivers installed, so the scores do not reflect the quality of the hardware installed.

The motherboard is a Biostar M7VKB and installed in one of the three DIMM slots is a single 128MB stick of

PC133 memory. This system has legacy support in the form of a shared PCI/ISA slot, which may be relevant for those with older cards. There are also four PCI slots and an AMR. The AMR, the shared slot and one PCI slot are free for upgrade. There is one 3.5in and one 5.25in bay free.

A SoundBlaster Live! Value, a Hauppauge WinTV TV tuner card and a Rockwell modem sit in the occupied PCI slots. The sound card pipes out to a set of

FPS1000 speakers.

For low-cost fast graphics, the 3D Power GeForce2 MX card is an ideal solution, although in this system the scores don't reflect that. The excellent CTX PR705F monitor has vibrant colours and a good crisp image. Even without the 4-in-1 drivers, a quick game of Quake III at 1,280 x 1,024 soon shows you that this is a good machine.

The hard disk is a 30.7GB Maxtor, which will be sufficient for most users.

As for optical drives, a slot-loading Pioneer DVD-105S sits in the uppermost bay, with an Iomega ZipCD below. This isn't the fastest writer on the market, (with eight-speed writing, four-speed rewriting and 32-speed reading), but it is adequate. Ten blank CD-Rs are also bundled.

With a Umax scanner and a Xerox printer included, this system is ideal for someone looking for a complete setup. It also has a SideWinder gamepad and a games bundle that includes the excellent Homeworld. Lotus SmartSuite covers work needs too. It's not leading edge, but if you picked up one of these in the sales, you wouldn't be disappointed.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,408.83 (1,199 ex VAT)

CONTACT Systemax

08707 297 366 www.simply.co.uk

PROS Good all-round system with an excellent monitor

CONS 4-in-1 drivers not installed

OVERALL With the 4-in-1 drivers installed, this system will be an excellent all-round purchase for the novice PC user

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★

OVERALL RATING ★★★★★



Time Machine 1100-7s VQ Pro



slots is a 128MB PC133 module helping the Time to reach the top spot in our SYSmark results with a score of 178. This could have been higher but the memory was configured to run at 100MHz rather than 133MHz.

In terms of expansion, two free PCI slots are available for upgrade, along with another that's shared with the AMR. Two 3.5in and one 5.25in bays are also empty for upgrade and with the potential to add a further five drives to the EIDE

ONE OF TWO MACHINES sporting AMD's 1.1GHz processor, Time's entry is also one of the speediest in the test. Its A7V motherboard is also considered by many to be one of the best around. It comes with four EIDE channels, two of which are UltraDMA100 compatible, although surprisingly Time has connected the hard drive to one of the standard EIDE channels, even though the Fujitsu drive supports UltraDMA100.

Plugged into one of the three DIMM

channels your options are not limited. Time has used the extra USB backplate on the motherboard to supply three more USB ports. However, the third port was not connected.

A Hercules GeForce2 GTS 32MB graphics card together with its iridescent memory heatsinks, is connected to an LG Flatron 775FT 17in monitor. This card is no slouch as its scores of 77fps in Quake III, and 5,049 3DMarks show. The Flatron is a slotted mask model, but

doesn't have damping wires. It provides an image that's bright and in focus across the screen.

A Teac CD-RW can also be used to make backups from Pioneer's 10-speed slot-loading DVD drive.

Audio comes courtesy of Creative's SoundBlaster Live! 1024 pumping sounds out to the retail boxed FPS1000 speakers, also from Creative. An adjustable Saitek Cyborg 3D joystick is thrown in for gamers.

Time has brought together a quality range of components in a quick PC. A candidate for the Editor's Choice, Time instead gains a Highly Commended award due to some small oversights.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,410 (£1,200 ex VAT)

CONTACT Time 01282 777 555

www.timecomputers.com

PROS Fast processor and graphics card; room for expansion

CONS Not configured to its full potential

OVERALL An excellent performer with the added bonus of upgradability, but it could have been even better

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

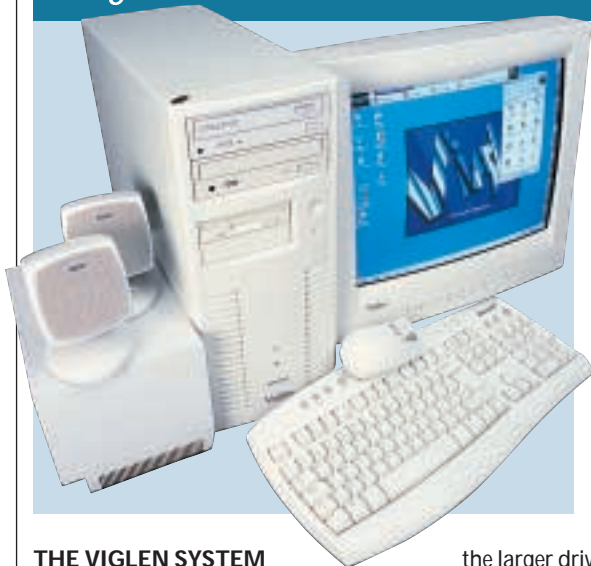
VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING



★★★★
★★★★★
★★★★
★★★★

Viglen HomePro P3-800 FWR



support 512MB of memory, so the limiting factor is not the slots, but the motherboard's capabilities. The board has five PCI slots, of which two are occupied. There are also two free 3.5in bays.

Installed in the PCI slots are a SoundBlaster Live! Value sound card and a Diamond Supra modem. The sound card pumps out to a set of Altec Lansing ACS33 speakers.

The 40GB Western Digital hard disk is one of

the larger drives in the test. A Creative RW8435E CD-RW is installed in the top 5.25in bay and a Pioneer DVD-115 below it provides 16-speed DVD and 40-speed CD reading.

The graphics card is an ATI Radeon with Video In and Out. This 64MB card is ideal for the video enthusiast and for those who want to watch DVD movies. This is due to the Radeon being the best non-dedicated card for processing DVD decoding, which along with the Pioneer

THE VIGLEN SYSTEM

has a Pentium III processor driving it along at 800MHz. This is not the fastest-clocked processor in the tests and it sees the HomePro sitting second from bottom in the SYSmark table with a score of 147, some 31 points below the leading system. A single 128MB bank of PC133 memory is included. There are two free DIMM slots available for memory upgrades, although the 815E-based Intel motherboard can only

DVD drive makes a fine combination. Also, with the connectivity options to the rear, a cable can be connected up to a TV for viewing DVDs – and there are loads of cables included to help you hook things up.

A Viglen-branded 17in monitor gives a screen image that is largely OK, although on our test unit the focus in the corners wasn't magnificent. The colour representation was a bit dull too.

If you want to link PCs together, the motherboard has onboard networking. Microsoft Works Suite 2000 is included, but apart from the networking aspect, this system is unremarkable.

DETAILS

PRICE £1,410 (1,200 ex VAT)

CONTACT Viglen 020 8758 7000

www.viglen.co.uk

PROS ATI Radeon card and cables provide video versatility

CONS Monitor wasn't wonderful quality in our test unit

OVERALL The system is aimed more at the working than the home environment with its onboard network capabilities

FEATURES

PERFORMANCE

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL RATING

★★★★
★★★★
★★★★
★★★★





How we did the tests

SYSmark 2000

This comprises 12 application workloads and a management program. The workloads are divided into two categories: office productivity and Internet content creation. We run the benchmark at a resolution of 1,024 x 768 in 16bit colour. It loops three times, rebooting between each workload.

It then assigns the system a performance rating for each application, based on a comparison of workload runtimes between the system being tested and a fixed calibration platform. A rating of 100 indicates the test system has performance equal to that of the calibration platform, 200 indicates twice the performance and so on. The calibration platform is based on a Pentium III 450MHz processor, an Intel 440BX chipset motherboard, 128MB of SDRAM, a 32MB Diamond Viper V770 Ultra graphics card, an IBM DJNA 371800 and Windows 98 SE.

Each category rating is a geometric mean of the workload ratings in that category. The overall rating is a weighted geometric mean of the category ratings.

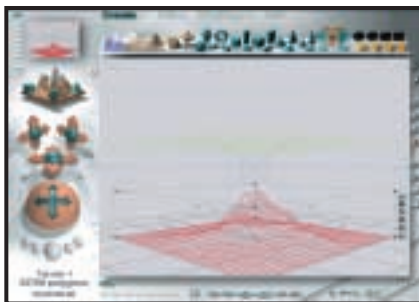
Office productivity

Corel CorelDraw 9.0

This script first takes an abstract design, applies an Art Stroke to it and runs various filter effects. It creates and manipulates a scene composed of vector graphics. Next, it takes a raster image and applies effects. It creates several 3D objects and performs 3D manipulations.

Corel Paradox 9.0

This performs SQL-style queries on a database table and runs a 'find duplicates' query. It imports other text files, formatting and exporting each to HTML. Then it opens up query forms, enters



Bryce 4 script manipulates a wire frame scene and renders it

charts, applying graphics and sound effects, and adding movie files.

additional data and produces reports based on queries.

Microsoft Word 2000

This workload invokes word processing functions, including editing, spell checking, search and replace, font change, copy and paste, print preview, mail merge fields, insert hyperlinks, background and table formatting plus opening and viewing HTML pages.

Microsoft Excel 2000

Operations include closing and opening spreadsheets, HTML pages and data in text files, spell checks, formula calculation, plotting data, formatting charts and cells, analysing data in pivot tables, naming a cell and inserting hyperlinks.

Microsoft PowerPoint 2000

Operations include spell checks, editing, formatting and moving pictures, applying templates, formatting tables in slides, inserting hyperlinks, applying header and footer data, formatting

3DMark 2000 tests each system's DirectX performance (above) and OpenGL performance is tested via Quake III: Arena (right)

Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred 4.0

The script plays a pre-recorded wav file into NaturallySpeaking, which then converts the wav file to text.

Netscape

Communicator 4.61

This opens a website of plays by Shakespeare and selects and loads the texts several times. Then it loads a page consisting of large tables, thumbnails and images and cycles through viewing the images.

Internet content creation

Adobe Premiere 5.1

This creates an animation of about 16 bmp files and other avi clips and puts transitions between them. It superimposes two audio tracks and runs the audio through filters.

Adobe Photoshop 5.5

The script loads, resizes, zooms out of images, applies filters to the images, changes mode and colour settings, adjusts image brightness and contrast and saves the image to a jpeg file.

Avid Elastic Reality 3.1

The workload sets up and renders a morph between two MPEG2-sized images (720 x 480 pixels, roughly 750KB).

MetaCreations Bryce 4

This script opens an assembled wire frame scene and renders it to the final image. Then a new image is opened and saved in Metastream format. Another image is opened and saved in an HTML-compatible format.

Microsoft Windows Media Encoder 4.0

The input file is an avi clip that is encoded using the MPEG4 Video Codec.

3DMark 2000

Remedy Entertainment's MAX-FX is used to test the DirectX performance of a system. It runs two specially coded games at low, medium and high resolutions. We ran the benchmark at 1,280 x 1,024 in 16bit colour, with each game set to loop three times. The 3DMark is calculated by adding the frames per second for each game together and multiplying the result by 12.

Quake III

We tested each system's OpenGL performance with Quake III: Arena (1.11).

The settings were: video mode - 1,280 x 1,024, colour depth - 16bit, full screen, highest texture detail, texture quality - 16bit, texture filter - bilinear, lighting and lightmap.

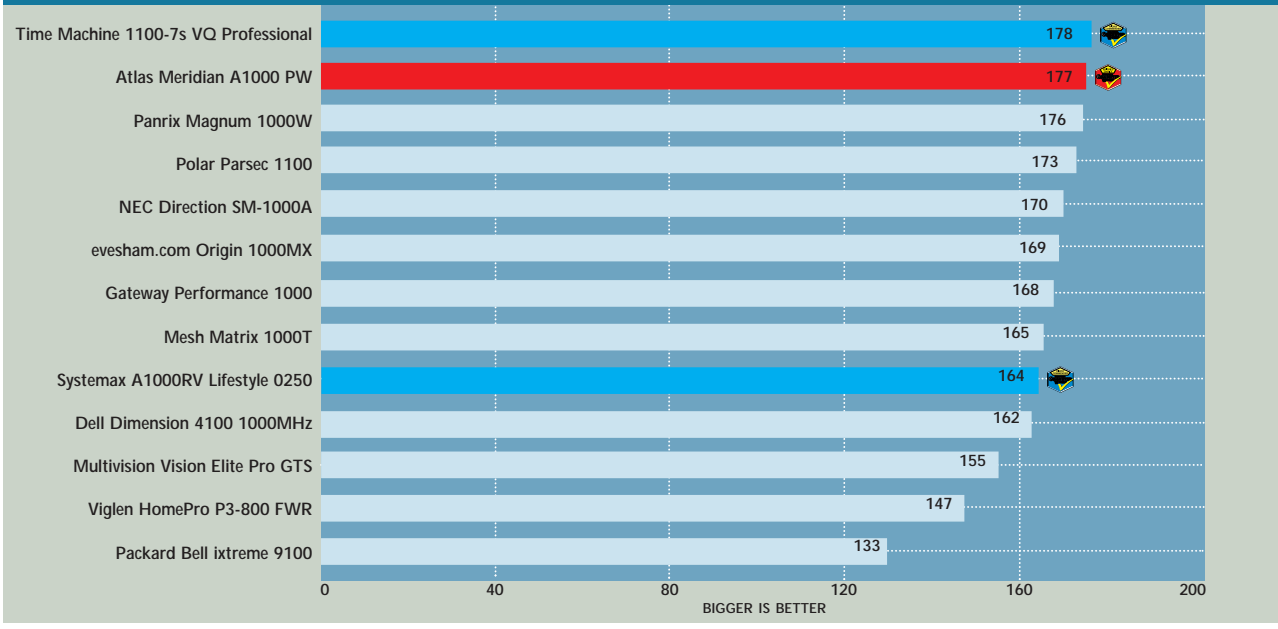
At command prompt we typed:

```
timedemo 1
demo demo001
```

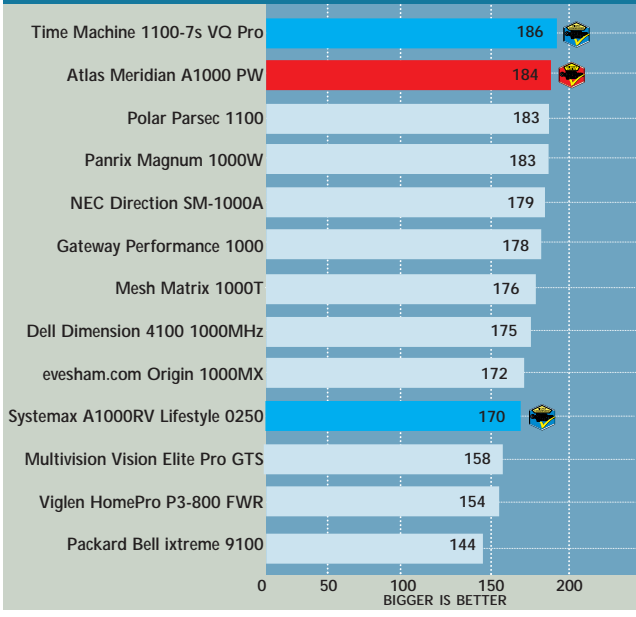
This runs demo 1 and records the frames per second.



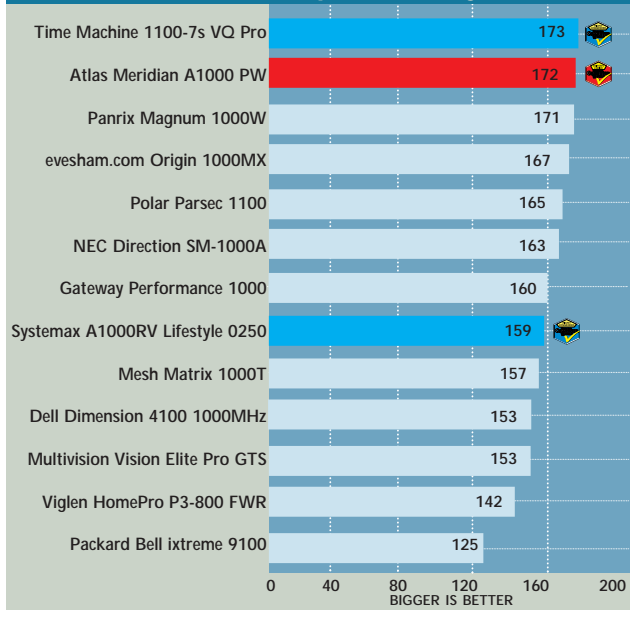
SYSmark 2000 overall



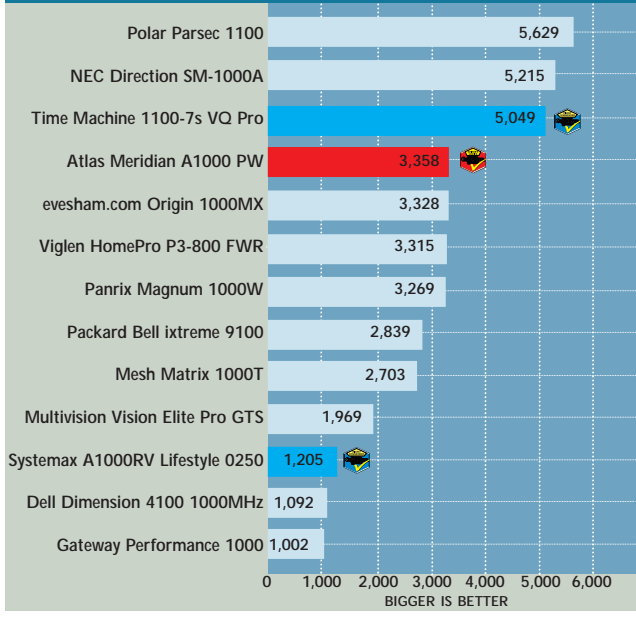
SYSmark 2000 Internet content creation



SYSmark 2000 office productivity



3DMark 2000 (1,280 x 1,024 at 16bit)



Quake III (fps) (1,280 x 1,024 at 16bit)

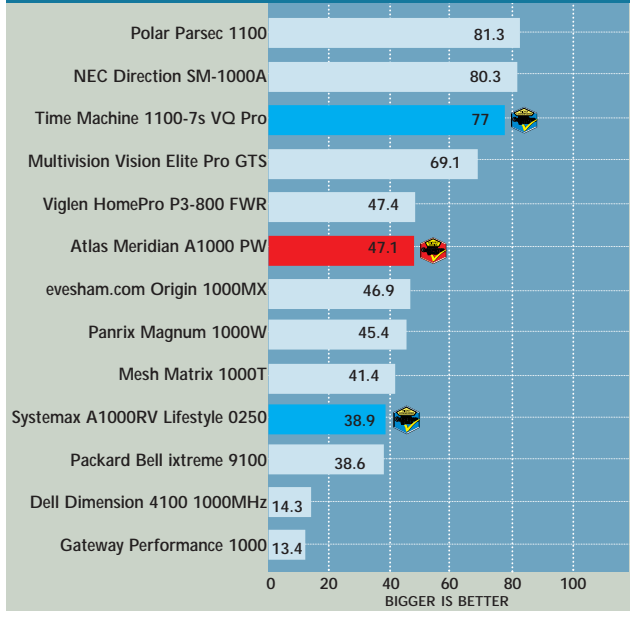


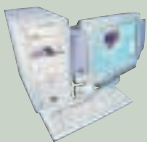







Table of features



MANUFACTURER	ATLAS	DELL	EVESHAM.COM	GATEWAY	MESH
MODEL NAME	MERIDIAN A1000 PW	DIMENSION 4100 1000MHz	ORIGIN 1000MX	PERFORMANCE 1000	MATRIX 1000T
Price inc VAT (ex VAT)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,432 (£1,219)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)
Telephone	07000 285 275	0870 907 5664	0800 038 0800	0800 552 000	020 8208 4706
URL	www.atlasplc.com	www.dell.co.uk	www.evesham.com	www.gateway.com/uk	www.meshcomputers.com
HARDWARE SPECS					
Processor	Athlon 1GHz	Pentium III 1GHz	Athlon 1GHz	Pentium III 1GHz	Athlon 1GHz
RAM/type	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133
Occupied RAM slots/spare RAM slots	1/2	1/1	1/2	1/2	1/2
Max memory in this configuration (without removing existing memory)	1.15GB	512MB	1.15GB	512MB	1.15GB
Maximum memory supported by motherboard	1.5GB	512MB	1.5GB	512MB	1.5GB
Hard disk (manufacturer and model)	IBM Deskstar DTLA 307030	Western Digital WD200	Maxtor Draco	Western Digital WD200	IBM Deskstar DTLA 307030
HD size/interface	30.7GB/EIDE	20GB/EIDE	30GB/EIDE	20GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE
Storage drive manufacturer and model	Teac CD-W54E	LG CED-8080B	Panasonic CD-RW CW-7585	Philips CDD 4801	Teac CD-W54E
Size of storage drive media	650MB (1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW inc)	650MB (1 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW inc)	650MB	650MB (2 x CD-R, 1 x CD-RW inc)	650MB
MOTHERBOARD COMPONENTS					
Motherboard manufacturer	Asus	Dell	Chaintech	Intel	Asus
Model/chipset	A7V/VIA KT133	Intel/i815E	7AJA0/VIA KT133	Feodora/815E	A7V/VIA KT133
EXPANSION AND I/O					
No of 3.5/5.25in bays	4/3	5/2	3/2	5/2	3/3
No of free 3.5/5.25in bays	2/1	3/0	1/0	3/0	1/1
No of PCI/ISA/shared/AMR slots	4/0/1/0	5/0/0/0	4/0/1/1	4/0/1/0	4/0/1/0
No of free PCI/ISA/shared/AMR slots	3/0/0/0	3/0/0/0	4/0/0/0	3/0/0/0	2/0/1/0
No of USB/serial/parallel/PS2	2/2/1/2	2/1/1/2	2/2/1/2	4/1/1/2	5/2/1/2
MULTIMEDIA					
DVD manufacturer/model	Hitachi/GD-7500	NEC/DV-5700A	Pioneer/DVD-115	Panasonic/SR-8586	Pioneer/DVD-115
DVD speed/interface	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	16x/EIDE
Sound card manufacturer	VideoLogic	Turtle Beach	Creative	Creative	Creative
Sound card model	SonicFury	Santa Cruz	SB Live! Value	SB Audio PCI 128D	SB Live! Value
Speakers (manufacturer and model)	VideoLogic DigiTheatre LC	Altec Lansing ACS 340	Creative FPS1000	Boston Acoustics BA265	Creative FPS1000
Graphics card manufacturer and model	Leadtek WinFast GeForce2 MX	nVidia TNT2 M64	3DPower GeForce2 MX	nVidia TNT2 M64	Hercules 3D Prophet II MX
Chipset	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia TNT2 M64	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia TNT2 M64	nVidia GeForce2 MX
RAM and type	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM
Monitor manufacturer and model	CTX PR705F	Dell E770P	Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 73	Gateway EV700	Iiyama S900
Monitor size/max viewable diagonal	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	19in/18in
Maximum resolution at VESA refresh	1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,024 x 768 at 85Hz	1,024 x 768 at 85Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz
OTHER INFORMATION					
Misc hardware	Genius Flight 2000 Joystick, Umax Astra 3400 scanner, Lexmark Z12, ProLink TV tuner	HP DeskJet 610C, printer cable		Microphone	
Bundled software	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, games bundle	MS Works Suite 2000	MS Works Suite 2000	MS Works Suite 2000	MS Works Suite 2000

							
MULTIVISION	NEC	PACKARD BELL	PANRIX	POLAR	SYSTEMAX	TIME	VIGLEN
VISION ELITE PRO GTS	DIRECTION SM-1000A	XTREME 9100	MAGNUM 1000W	PARSEC 1100	A1000RV LIFESTYLE 0250	TIME MACHINE 1100-7s VQ PRO	HOMEPRO P3-800 FWR
£1,526.33 (£1,299)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,499 (£1,275.74)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,410 (£1,200)	£1,408.83 (£1,199)	£1,410 (£1,200)	£1,410 (£1,200)
0121 550 8000	0870 010 6322	01628 508 200	0113 244 4958	0161 482 7000	08707 297 366	01282 777 555	020 8758 7000
www.multivision.co.uk	www.nec-online.co.uk	www.packardbell.co.uk	www.panrix.com	www.polar-technology.com	www.simply.co.uk	www.time-computers.com	www.viglen.co.uk
Athlon 900MHz	Athlon 1GHz	Pentium III 800MHz	Athlon 1GHz	Athlon 1.1GHz	Athlon 1GHz	Athlon 1.1GHz	Pentium III 800MHz
128MB/PC100	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC100	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133	128MB/PC133
1/2	1/1	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2
1.15GB	640MB	1.15GB	1.15GB	1.15GB	1.15GB	1.15GB	512MB
1.5GB	1.2GB	1.5GB	1.5GB	1.5GB	1.5GB	1.5GB	512MB
IBM Deskstar DTLA 307030	Quantum Fireball LM30	NEC (IBM) DTLA-305030	IBM Deskstar DTLA 307030	IBM Deskstar DTLA 307030	Maxtor 53073H6	Fujitsu MPG 3307AT	Western Digital WD40 OBB
30.7GB/EIDE	30GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	30GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE
Mirai CRD-BP1300P BurnProof	LG-CED 8080B	Philips CDD 4801	Acer CDRW 8432	Sony CRX140E	lomega ZipCD	Teac CD-W54E	Creative RW8435E
650MB	650MB	650MB	650MB (1 x CD-RW inc)	650MB	650MB (10 x CD-R inc)	650MB	650MB
EPoX	MSI	MSI	Asus	Jetway	Biostar	Asus	Viglen OEM
EP-8KTA2/ VIA KT133A	MS-6340/KT133	MS-6309/ Apollo Pro 133A	A7V/VIA KT133	663AS/ VIA KT133	M7VKB/3 VIA KT13	A7V/VIA KT133	Intel/815E
4/3	5/2	3/3	4/3	5/2	3/3	4/3	4/2
2/1	3/0	1/1	2/1	3/0	1/1	2/1	2/0
5/0/1/0	2/0/1/0	5/0/0/1	4/0/1/0	4/0/1/1	4/0/1/1	4/0/1/0	5/0/0/0
3/0/1/0	0/0/1/0	5/0/0/1	2/0/1/0	3/0/1/1	1/0/1/1	2/0/1/0	3/0/0/0
4/2/1/2	3/2/1/2	4/2/1/1	5/2/1/2	2/1/1/2	2/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	2/1/1/2
Hitachi/GD-7500	Pioneer/DVD-115	NEC/DV-5700A	Hitachi/GD-7500	Hitachi/GD7500	Pioneer/DVD-105S	Pioneer/DVD-104S	Pioneer/DVD-115
12x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	10x/EIDE	16x/EIDE
Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	VIA	Creative	Creative	Creative
SB Live! 5.1	SB Live! Value	SB Live! Value	SB Live! 1024	Onboard AC'97	SB Live! Value	SB Live! 1024	SB Live! Value
VideoLogic DigiTheatre LC	Labtek LCS-2414	Diamond Multimedia	Creative FPS1000	Yamaha M20 + MSW5	Creative FPS1000	Creative FPS1000	Altec Lansing ACS33
Hercules 3D Prophet II Pro	Leadtek WinFast GeForce2 GTS	OEM nVidia GeForce2 MX	Hercules 3D Prophet II MX	Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS	3D Power GeForce2 MX	Hercules 3D Prophet II GTS	ATI Radeon VIVO
nVidia GeForce2 Pro	nVidia GeForce2 GTS	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 GTS	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 GTS	ATI Radeon
64MB DDR SDRAM	32MB DDR SGRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	64MB DDR SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB DDR SGRAM	64MB DDR SDRAM
Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 720	NEC VR19	Packard Bell A726	Hansol 900P	Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 720	CTX PR705F	LG Flatron 775FT	Viglen Envy 17CP
17in/16in	19in/18in	17in/16in	19in/18in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in
1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,600x1,200 at 85Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz
	Logitech Quickcam, stereo headset	Hauppauge WinTV, FireWire host controller PCI card	Gravis BlackHawk Joystick		Umax Astra 2100U scanner, MS gamepad, Hauppauge WinTV Go, Xerox printer & cable	Saitek Cyborg 3D joystick, PC microphone	Onboard network Intel Pro/100VE
Lotus SmartSuite Millennium	MS Works 2000 & MS Word 2000, multimedia software	Small games bundle and DVD film	MS Works 2000, games bundle	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Systemax 6 games bundle	MS Works 2000, Standard & Exec software packs	MS Works Suite 2000



Editor's Choice

With the January sales in full flow, we decided to challenge manufacturers to submit a machine they deemed excellent value for money. With a price limit of £1,200 excluding VAT, the choice of systems submitted is pretty varied. Some included middle of the road graphics cards and cheaper monitors giving a bit of breathing space to throw in a range of peripherals. In contrast other manufacturers went down the speed road at the expense of certain extras. As a result picking the winners was not an easy process and it ultimately came down to finding a balance between performance, features and price.

So if you're in the market to get your hands on a brand spanking new PC, then check out the following three systems for a recommended buy.

The winners

By taking all the components that came with each PC and comparing them against the system's performance and price, the **Editor's Choice** goes to **Atlas' Meridian A1000 PW**. While it wasn't the quickest PC in the group test, we felt it struck the best balance between cost and features.

One thing we always like to see is a quality monitor as this can make a world of difference to how you feel towards your machine. The 17in CTX model here uses a Sony FD Trinitron tube, resulting in a picture that is a pleasure to view. The audio solution is of a similar high quality and if you're into games or watching movies on your PC, the DigiTheatre LC

surround-sound speakers and the VideoLogic SonicFury sound card are more than capable.

Inside, you can't do much better than the Asus A7V motherboard. With a 1GHz Athlon and 128MB of memory on board the Atlas is no slouch. It also has four separate EIDE channels and you can connect up to eight drives, four of which could take advantage of the UltraDMA100 standard. Unlike some of the other manufacturers in this group test, Atlas has used this feature and hooked up the ample 30.7GB UltraDMA hard drive for maximum performance.

The GeForce2 MX graphics card is not the most expensive around, but you do get decent 3D performance. This leaves some room in the budget to splash out on the peripherals and Atlas has included a TV tuner card for your viewing pleasure. In addition, a printer, scanner, and a joystick are included. In short, the Atlas entry ensures you get a lot of PC for your money.

Deciding on the runners up was equally difficult and it turned out to be a closely fought contest between several manufacturers. Polar, Panrix, Mesh and Multivision all submitted impressive systems, but there were two others that really stood out. Our first **Highly Commended** award goes to **Systemax's A1000RV Lifestyle 0250**. Taking the same stance as Atlas, Systemax included a range of peripherals that tipped the balance in its favour in terms of value for money. With a Umax scanner, Xerox printer, a gamepad, and a Hauppauge TV-tuner,

this system lends itself well to the first-time buyer.

It's not only the peripherals that count, though, and the A1000RV also comes with a 1GHz Athlon processor, 128MB of PC133 memory and the same quality CTX monitor submitted with the Atlas system. A 30.7GB hard drive together with Iomega's ZipCD CD-RW caters for most users' backup and removable storage needs. Ten blank CD-Rs are also thrown in to get you burning away. As for software Lotus SmartSuite Millennium has everything you need for general work, and is topped off with a decent games bundle. The performance is not at its optimum but it's nonetheless high enough for the demands of everyday computing tasks. Another well-rounded system.

Our second **Highly Commended** accolade goes to the **Time Machine 1100-7s VQ Professional** for its sheer performance. It came top in all our SYSmark charts thanks to the processing power of its 1.1GHz Athlon CPU, and an honourable third in the 3D performance ratings, courtesy of the 32MB nVidia GeForce2 GTS powered graphics card. It was a close run race between this and the 1.1GHz Polar, but the Time clinched it. Unlike the Polar with its PC100 memory, Time's entry has 128MB of PC133 rated memory, while its Asus A7V motherboard just has that bit more potential in terms of connectivity and UltraDMA100 support than Polar's Jetway motherboard. The Time also comes with a good 17in LG Flatron monitor, a joystick and a generous software bundle.



Atlas' Meridian struck the best balance between cost and features



The Systemax A1000RV Lifestyle's range of peripherals gave it an award



Time's system came close to an Editor's Choice award