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# Summer sizzlers

**We're in holiday mood and are looking for some fun, so we decided to find out what's hot and what's not in this group of £999 PCs**

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**T**he summer is not the season to be sitting in front of a PC, especially when the prospect of spending lazy days on holiday weighs heavily in the air. But what happens when you come back from your holiday to a place where the sun has decided to call it a day and the gloomy clouds have returned with a vengeance? Buy a PC of course, to help stave off those post-holiday blues. And not any old PC mind you. The machines we're after will be well suited to business applications, but also have some emphasis on fun – after all, that's what summer is all about. So we wanted to see some TV-tuner cards, video capture capabilities and decent sound combos. We weren't looking for all-out games machines, nor did we want to see pure business boxes. Rather, a system that offered a bit of everything, all wrapped up into a well-balanced package.

The budget this time around was set at £999 ex VAT but including delivery and any credit card surcharge if applicable. As ever, there was a minimum specification, but we welcomed any systems that exceeded this. We wanted at least a 1GHz processor, 256MB of memory, a good sized hard disk with 30GB or more, a sound card and speaker system, Windows Me, a CD or DVD-ROM drive, a 17in monitor, a 32MB graphics card and a modem – all covered by a three-year parts and labour warranty.

Now be prepared, as what follows is a group of systems that in most cases offer some excellent components for the money, truly geared to brightening up the days to come. >

## Advent 3944

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Advent 08705 464 464

**PROS** Monitor; sound system; TV-tuner; CD-RW **CONS** No TV-out option

**OVERALL** A close contender for an award but not quite as complete as the winners

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

It's been a while since we've seen a PC from Advent and this is a capable system. It is based on a 1.33GHz AMD Athlon processor and 256MB of PC2100 DDR SDRAM. This has been fitted to revision 4.0 of Gigabyte's GA-7DX motherboard, which was very stable in our tests.

The graphics card is 3D Power's 64MB nVidia GeForce2 MX 400-based solution. This has been fitted with a fan for extra cooling, but lacks any TV-out ports. Advent has also installed a SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 sound card and a set of Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 speakers.

An ATI TV-Wonder TV-tuner card offers composite video input. Finally, there is a 56K V.90 PCI modem. Storage comes in the form of a 40GB hard drive from Maxtor and a Teac CD-W58E CD-RW that is capable of writing CD-Rs and CD-RWs at eight speed. The DVD drive is a Toshiba SD-M1502 that reads DVD media at 16-speed.

Sony's 17in monitor makes fine use of the company's FD Trinitron tube, packaged in a unit called the Multiscan CPD-E220. This is a lower-end model but is still very capable. The picture is stable, with excellent contrast, and is good for resolutions up to an eye-squinting 1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz.

The keyboard and mouse are both from Microsoft and of decent enough quality to keep you happy for extended periods of use. Our only complaint is that the mouse does not feature the new optical technology Microsoft uses in its higher-end models.

A good software bundle is supplied, including four games and Microsoft Works Suite 2000. Although this is getting a bit old now, it does give you a full version of Word 2000.

Overall, this is not a bad system from Advent, but as it lacks video-out it misses our target a little bit and it doesn't quite offer the same value for money as our winners.



## Atlas/HiGrade Meridian A1400

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Atlas/HiGrade 020 8532 6515

**PROS** 1.4GHz Athlon; TV-tuner; sound combo; monitor **CONS** Slow optical drives

**OVERALL** For top-notch fun, with a great set of results, this is the one to go for

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

Atlas/HiGrade was the only manufacturer to install and, more importantly, activate Gainward's EXPERTool utility that, under warranty, allows you to overclock the graphics card's GPU (graphics processing unit) core and memory speeds. As a result, Gainward's 64MB CARDEXpert GeForce2 Pro/400 produced some excellent 3D scores, lifting the Meridian A1400 PW09 to the top of the 3DMark charts. This bodes well for hardcore gamers, but with a 1.4GHz AMD Athlon and 256MB of top-quality Kingston PC133 memory sitting in the Asus A7V133 motherboard, the 2D scores are just as impressive.

Performance aside, fun seekers will be pleased to find a ProLink TV-tuner card in one of the PCI slots for watching TV, as well as S-Video and composite sockets for video capture. The TV-out on the graphics card also comes in handy if you want to watch DVD movies on your TV, played back on the 12-speed Hitachi DVD drive.

Since a movie's no good without high-quality sound, Atlas has supplied Cambridge Soundworks 5.1 DTT2200 speakers and a SoundBlaster Live! 5.1, so you can expect excellent Dolby Digital surround sound over the six speakers.

For Internet junkies, there is a V.90 PCI modem and a Logitech webcam. If you have digital holiday snaps to upload, the extra two USB ports around the back will come in handy. And the 40GB Western Digital hard drive should provide enough room for photos and videos. The LG CD-RW is a bit on the slow side but will be useful when backing up your files.

The top-notch 17in PR705F monitor from CTX uses Sony's FD Trinitron aperture-grille tube so you can expect a bright, well-focused picture.

With a Logitech wheel mouse, a comfortable Acer keyboard, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium and a small games bundle, this is a well-balanced PC laced with power.

## Compute IT MediaWonder

**PRICE** £1,145.63 (£975 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Compute IT 08707 487 487

**PROS** Feature-rich graphics board; monitor; price **CONS** Speakers; memory; mouse

**OVERALL** The speakers and poor choice of mouse let Compute IT down

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

Compute IT is still quite new to *PCW*'s PC group tests, but has done well so far, winning an award in July.

This is one of seven systems this month using the 1.33GHz version of AMD's Athlon processor. This and 128MB of PC2100 DDR SDRAM has been fitted to the same EPoX EP-8K7A motherboard used by Multi-vision, although it lacks the Hi-Point EIDE RAID controller. It does, however, have diagnostic LEDs, making it easy to tell if the PC has a problem.

The 32MB ATi All-in-Wonder Radeon, an award winner in last month's graphics card test, features a TV-tuner, video in and out as well as an S/PDIF (Sony/Philips Digital Interface) connector for digital sound output from DVDs. There is also a Fire-Wire card (with cable) for video buffs with DV camcorders.

Creative's SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 sound card and a 56K V.90 modem complete the PCI configuration. The Cambridge Soundworks FPS1000

speakers don't offer 5.1 channel surround sound. There are two extra USB ports on a separate bracket, but this blocks the sixth PCI slot.

The 41GB IBM hard drive provides plenty of space for video editing. There is also a 12x 8x 32x CD-RW from LG – not the fastest around but quicker than some others here. The 12-speed DVD drive, coupled with the Radeon's hardware DVD decoder, means movies are very smooth.

NEC's 17in MultiSync 75F monitor has a vibrant display with a flicker-free resolution up to 1,152 x 864.

The only thing we don't like is the A4Tech mouse, which makes an irritating clicking noise every time you move the scroll wheel.

It's a shame there is only 128MB of memory, but this oversight has been compensated for by a slightly lower price than the others on test.

On the whole, this is a versatile system geared towards DV camcorder users.



## Elonex Webrider Pro

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Elonex 020 8452 4444

**PROS** TV/radio-tuner with remote; Philips LightFrame feature **CONS** Non-flat display

**OVERALL** Not audibly as fun, or as cutting edge as others on test

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■



At the heart of this system is a 1.3GHz AMD Athlon with a 200MHz FSB (front-side bus). 256MB of PC133 SDRAM on one module is plugged into an MSI K7T Pro2 motherboard yielding results that push the Elonex towards the bottom of the SYSmark charts. It is a respectable score, though, that would be fine for all but the most intensive applications.

To stave off post-holiday blues, the Webrider comes with Hauppauge's WinTV Theater PCI card with TV-tuner and FM radio receiver. It also sports an A/V port that can be split into five connectors; line-out audio, and four RCA leads, three for centre and rear surround channels and another for a video signal. The front stereo surround signals are output via a line-out to the sound card. An S-Video input is also on the board. A remote control is included for couch potatoes.

This card supports up to five speakers in a surround-sound setup – fine for the Cambridge Soundworks

FourPointSurround speakers. However, with a SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 sound card in one of the five dedicated PCI slots it's a shame Elonex didn't supply 5.1 Dolby Digital speakers.

Showing off Hauppauge's TV-tuner card and linked to the 64MB Gainward CARDEXpert GeForce2 Pro/400, is a Philips 107B 17in monitor, that uses a curvaceous CRT that throws up some noticeable reflections. However, this model uses Philips' Light-Frame technology that boosts brightness and sharpness on a selected region of the screen. The picture is sharp and well regulated, but some may prefer a flat screen.

The rest of the system consists of a 40GB Fujitsu hard drive, an Acer CD-RW, a 16-speed Panasonic DVD-ROM drive for DVD movie playback, and a CNR V.90 modem. Microsoft's Works Suite 2000 is also included.

The Webrider Pro has some likeable touches but is overshadowed by higher-specced machines.

## evesham.com Axis 1.4

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** evesham.com 0870 728 7070

**PROS** 1.4GHz DDR; TV-tuner; FireWire; audio; CD-RW; front USB ports **CONS** Office suite

**OVERALL** evesham.com has got just about everything right in this machine

**FEATURES**  **PERFORMANCE**

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  **OVERALL**

Inside the Axis 1.4, as the name suggests, is one of AMD's Athlon 1.4GHz processors sitting in an Asus A7M266 motherboard. This is backed up by 256MB of PC2100 memory on a single DIMM, leaving one more DIMM slot for future upgrades. This makes the Axis one of the most powerful systems on test.

The Axis includes a Hauppauge TV-tuner card carrying a composite-in port as well as Line-in and Line-out jacks. There is also an excellent sound combo in the shape of Creative's SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 sound card and Cambridge Soundworks' DT2200 Dolby Digital speakers.

With this setup DVD movies will really come alive when played on the UltraDMA66 16-speed Samsung DVD-ROM drive – plugged into the motherboard with the correct 40pin 80-conductor ribbon cable. Below this is a Teac 12x 10x 32x BurnProof CD-RW, the quickest model on test, so making copies from the spacious

40GB Maxtor hard drive should not take too long.

Graphics are processed by a 64MB nVidia GeForce2 MX 400 card, which is not the most powerful here but gives enough juice to play most of today's games. The TV-out enables you to play DVD movies on a large screen. LG's 17in monitor is one of the best here, with a crisp and flat display.

Those with FireWire-enabled DV camcorders will be able to make use of the FireWire card with three external and one internal ports. With all these PCI cards plugged in there's still one PCI slot free. The modem uses the shared AMR/PCI slot. You also have one 5.25in and two 3.5in bays lying empty, along with four USB ports – two at the front of the case.

Sun's StarOffice and BigFix are pre-installed, topping off the bundle.

This is a well thought out, well-built and powerful system that fulfils our criteria and wins a Highly Com-mended award.



## Intellect Ultra 133

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Intellect 0161 429 9911

**PROS** 2D performance; All-in-Wonder; sound **CONS** No CD-RW; old graphics chipset

**OVERALL** Not a bad system, as long as you don't play games or need to archive data

**FEATURES**  **PERFORMANCE**

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  **OVERALL**

Inside Intellect's Ultra 133 sit AMD's 1.33GHz Athlon chip and Gigabyte's GA-7DX motherboard. These are backed up by 256MB of PC2100 memory mounted on a single module, leaving one slot free for upgrades.

When it comes to 2D performance, the Ultra is no snail. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for 3D. With a graphics card based on the outdated Rage 128 Pro chipset, the Ultra failed to run our 3DMark tests and achieved a rather jerky 11fps (frames per second) in Quake III.

However, performance isn't key here and, like the other offerings from ATI, this 32MB All-in-Wonder graphics board has a built-in TV-tuner, video-in and video-out capabilities and hardware DVD decoding. Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 speakers and a Creative SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 audio card, offer Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound for a home cinema setup.

The IBM UltraDMA100 41GB hard drive offers plenty of storage, but

there is no means of removable backup apart from the age-old floppy drive. This is where the Ultra loses out as most of the others come with a CD-RW. This does leave two 5.25in bays that sit below the 12-speed LG DVD-ROM, together with two 3.5in bays for system expansion. Internally, three PCI slots and one AMR slot lie empty, with the others occupied by the sound card and Intel V.90 modem.

An LG Flatron displays a flat and vibrant picture over a 16in viewable diagonal and an impressive maximum resolution of 1,600 x 1,200, refreshing at 75Hz. The monitor also has touch-sensitive OSD controls and a USB hub with one upstream and four downstream ports.

A copy of Lotus SmartSuite Millennium is included, as well as an Intel webcam, a Microsoft Internet keyboard and optical USB mouse.

The Ultra has some fine components but is let down by the lack of a backup device and poor 3D scores.

## Mesh Matrix 1400 SD

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Mesh 020 8208 4706  
**PROS** 1.4GHz; CD-RW; office suite; dual-head graphics card **CONS** No TV-tuner  
**OVERALL** Lack of TV-tuner denies it an award  
**FEATURES**  **PERFORMANCE**   
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  **OVERALL**

Another 1.4GHz AMD Athlon makes an appearance, this time in the Socket A of an Asus A7A266 motherboard that uses the ALiMaGiK 1 chipset. This supports a 133MHz or 100MHz FSB (set here at 133MHz) as well as the UltraDMA100 standard for optimum performance from the 40GB Western Digital hard drive. The motherboard also has two DDR DIMM slots and three SDR DIMM slots for increased memory options. However, both cannot be used simultaneously.

With one 256MB module of PC2100 memory working in unison with the processor, 2D performance is up at the top with the Atlas. However, the Mesh does not include a TV-tuner, which is a shame, so we could not justify an award, even though the Creative SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 audio card and Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 speakers impressed us.

Mesh has fitted a USB board for an extra two ports, but its placement blocks a PCI slot. Mesh says this

reduces the risk of an electrical short, but we could see no evidence of this.

Gainward's 32MB GeForce2 MX TwinView graphics card has two D-SUB ports supporting a dual-display setup. It also has a socket for video in and out, although Mesh forgot to include the cable. 3D performance could have been boosted if the EXPERTool had been set to Enhanced mode.

A 17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 730 uses a Diamondtron NF aperture-grille tube for a perfectly flat and bright screen that can handle resolutions up to 1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz.

With the same nippy Teac Burn-Proof CD-RW as evesham.com's system, CD-Rs and CD-RWs won't take long to master. The 16-speed Pioneer DVD-ROM drive is an UltraDMA66 unit and Mesh has used the right 80-conductor cable to link it with the motherboard. A V.90 PCI modem tops off the hardware. Microsoft's Works Suite 2001 is also included.



## Multivision Vision DDR RAID

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Multivision 0870 066 0885  
**PROS** RAID system; audio; motherboard **CONS** DVD-ROM ribbon cable  
**OVERALL** A fine system, that came extremely close to claiming a PCW gong  
**FEATURES**  **PERFORMANCE**   
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  **OVERALL**

This system is quite a mixed bag. For starters, a 1.33GHz AMD Athlon processor and 256MB of PC2100 DDR SDRAM is fitted to an EPoX EP-8K7A+ motherboard. This is the first DDR board that we have seen from EPoX and we like it. It has an onboard EIDE RAID controller and EPoX's own diagnostic tool that warns you if something is wrong with your system through various codes shown on two LED displays on the board.

As with most other DDR motherboards based on the AMD761 chipset there are only two memory slots. The graphics card is a Gainward Hollywood/MX, which offers features such as TV and Radio-tuners as well as video-in and out capabilities.

VideoLogic's Sonic Fury card and a set of silver VideoLogic DigiTheatre LC speakers provide the sound. Multivision has also supplied a standard 56K V.90 PCI modem and two extra USB connectors, although these block the sixth PCI slot on the motherboard.

The Vision DDR impressed us with its two 20GB Seagate hard drives, striped in a RAID 0 configuration. There is also a Samsung SW-212B CD-RW, producing CD-Rs at 12-speed and CD-RWs at eight-speed.

Pioneer's DVD-116 is an UltraDMA66 drive, but Multivision has only used an UltraDMA33 cable, which could impact the drive's performance.

The monitor is the very popular LG Flatron 775FT, a respectable flat-screen unit managing a flicker-free resolution of 1,152 x 864 at 75Hz.

On the software front is a copy of Lotus SmartSuite Millennium and Ulead's Video Basic SE

This is a good system, but does not offer any real extras and 3D performance is below par. The latter could be boosted by EXPERTool, which overclocks the graphics card. If you are not bothered about playing the latest 3D games but want a well-rounded system, you could do worse than the Vision DDR RAID.



## NEC Powermate I-Select XL3

<b>PRICE</b> £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT)	<b>CONTACT</b> NEC 0870 010 6322
<b>PROS</b> Hard drive; TV-tuner; monitor; warranty	<b>CONS</b> No CD-RW; slow processor
<b>OVERALL</b> The slow processor and lack of CD-RW let the NEC down	
<b>FEATURES</b> ■■■■■	<b>PERFORMANCE</b> ■■■■■
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ■■■■■	<b>OVERALL</b> ■■■■■

Looking outclassed here, the I-Select's 1GHz AMD Athlon can't compete with 1.4GHz processors. It does, however, have 256MB of PC2100 memory on a single module, leaving one DIMM slot free. This was not enough, though, to raise the XL3 from the bottom of the SYSmark chart.

The Gigabyte GA-7DX has turned up in several systems this month and uses a combination of AMD-761 northbridge and VIA's 686B southbridge. This is revision 3.0, which offers an UltraDMA100 channel for the largest hard drive this month – a meaty 60.5GB unit from Maxtor.

However, transporting your data is limited by the lack of a CD-RW drive that, although not stated in our specs, was included in the majority of systems on test. A 16-speed NEC DVD-ROM drive is included.

NEC has bundled a TV-tuner, albeit a USB external one that doesn't offer the same degree of video capture versatility as others. It only carries

two line jacks (in and out) and an S-Video socket that can be changed to a composite-in with a converter. It can be plugged into the extra USB port at the front of the case.

Unfortunately, the NEC also loses in the sound department with Labtec 2.1 speakers and a Creative Sound-Blaster Live! 1024 card (with S/PDIF) in one of the five PCI slots, above the V.90 modem, but its full potential will only be heard with 4.1 speakers.

A 32MB nVidia GeForce2 Pro card with TV-out provides all the 3D grunt you'll need and fares well in our tests. This is married to an NEC MultiSync FE750+ 17in monitor that makes great use of a Diamondtron NF tube to produce an image that's bright and sharp, with good colour registration.

The XL3 fares better on the software front, coming with Microsoft Works Suite 2000, CorelDraw7, and a decent multimedia pack. However, the NEC's good points can't compensate for its shortcomings.



## Panrix Sycron 1333

<b>PRICE</b> £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT)	<b>CONTACT</b> Panrix 0113 244 4958
<b>PROS</b> Case; USB networking; All-in-Wonder	<b>CONS</b> Audio; monitor power regulation
<b>OVERALL</b> A lovely case, and excellent video card, but speakers are disappointing	
<b>FEATURES</b> ■■■■■	<b>PERFORMANCE</b> ■■■■■
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ■■■■■	<b>OVERALL</b> ■■■■■

If system cooling is your main concern this and Poweroid.com's offerings will be high on your list. The screwless case comes with a large fan that scoops out the warm air by the 'fin'-full. Large vents also allow air to be drawn through the front of the case, thanks to a second fan behind them.

Inside is yet another AMD Athlon clocked at 1.33GHz, together with 256MB of PC2100 memory both plugged into MSI's K7T266 Pro DDR motherboard based on VIA's KT266 chipset. This supports the UltraDMA100 protocol for optimum performance from the 30.7GB IBM hard drive. However, it also supports PC-to-PC networking over the USB blanking plate that carries two ports.

The neat design of the motherboard means this plate doesn't block the shared PCI/CNR slot.

Unfortunately, the supplied speakers don't do the Creative Sound-Blaster Live! 5.1 card justice.

What the Sycron lacks in the audio department, it makes up for with the graphics. Choosing a 32MB ATI Radeon All-in-Wonder card ensures that you get decent performance, the opportunity to watch broadcast TV on your PC, ViVo capture capabilities, all the leads you'll need, excellent DVD playback and a DVI port for digital LCD monitor owners. If you don't own such a screen then the 17in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 73 boasting a Diamondtron NF CRT, provides a clear picture with rich and vibrant colours, although it is slightly let down by poor power regulation.

Completing the configuration is a 12x 8x 32x Samsung CD-RW, a 12-speed Toshiba DVD-ROM drive, a Diamond V.90 modem and space for one 5.25in and two 3.5in drives.

Microsoft Works Suite 2000, and Ulead's VideoStudio and Cool 3D SE are included on the software front. This is a fine system; it's just a shame about the speakers.



## Polar Paragon 1300

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Polar 0800 138 1238  
**PROS** TV/Radio-tuner; monitor; CD-RW **CONS** No TV-out; audio subsystem  
**OVERALL** The audio subsystem lets down an otherwise competent machine

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

The Paragon 1300 uses a 1.3GHz AMD Athlon with a 200MHz FSB, which is 66MHz slower than the 1.33GHz Athlons in this group test.

However, with one 256MB stick of PC133 SDRAM in one of the three memory slots on the Asus A7V133-C motherboard, performance is good. If you're wondering what the 'C' on the motherboard's name stands for, it describes a 'light' version of the A7V133 that lacks the Promise EIDE RAID controller.

Jetway's graphics card is based on the GeForce2 MX, but lacks the TV-out that most other cards come with. The sound card is a budget SoundBlaster Live! 1024 – a 4.1 card without an internal S/PDIF connector. The Yamaha USB YST-MS35D speakers only offer 2.1 channel sound, so they can't compete with Dolby Digital versions, even though the stereo sound quality is respectable.

Polar has, on the other hand, fitted a Hauppauge WinTV card, with built-

in TV and Radio-tuners, a composite video input and a remote control port. There is also a 56K V.92 modem, that offers slightly faster upload speeds than normal V.90 models.

A 30.7GB IBM Deskstar hard drive and an LG CED-8120B CD-RW that operates at 12x 8x 32x speeds provide storage. The DVD-ROM drive is the 12-speed Samsung SD-612F.

The 17in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 411 monitor uses Mitsubishi's vibrant aperture-grille Diamondtron Natural Flat tube to great effect. Power regulation is good, and in conjunction with the GeForce2 MX card, it's capable of resolutions up to 1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz.

Polar's bundled software is a tad thin this month, but includes a copy of Lotus SmartSuite Millennium.

This is a reasonable PC that completed our tests well, but if you take into account the 2.1 stereo speakers and the cheaper sound card, other systems seem more attractive.



## Poweroid.com 3008

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Poweroid.com 0870 220 0444  
**PROS** Lovely aluminium case; graphics card; RAID **CONS** Slower optical drives  
**OVERALL** Everything you need for video capture, gaming, listening and viewing

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■



The first thing we noticed is the brushed aluminium look of the top-quality ACTS (Active Cooling Convective System) case from Cooler Master. At around £250, this is not cheap. It's a semi-screwless affair offering rear and top-mounted fans, two front-mounted USB ports, and six 3.5in bays. That Poweroid.com has squeezed this into the £999 price, while also offering some top-quality components is impressive.

At the heart of the system is an AMD Athlon 1.2GHz processor, and 256MB of PC133 memory, making this slower than many PCs here. But speed is not the key issue. We wanted a machine that was fun to use and this is certainly true of the 3008.

The Abit KT7A-RAID motherboard allows for a RAID 0 setup, with the two 20GB Maxtor drives. This improves performance noticeably when moving large chunks of data around.

Next, we have an excellent sound

Blaster Live! 5.1 card and Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 5.1 speakers. This offers a true home cinema setup and, together with the ATI Radeon All-in-Wonder graphics card, renowned for its excellent DVD decoding, DVD-movie viewing will be enjoyable. With 32MB of DDR SDRAM onboard the All-in-Wonder performs well too, while also offering ViVo functionality and a built-in TV tuner.

All the necessary cables are provided, together with a DVI-to-D-SUB converter for hooking up the vibrant Diamondtron NF-based Iiyama Vision Master Pro 411 17in monitor.

The Samsung CD-RW and eight-speed Hitachi DVD-ROM drives are not the fastest, but both do the job well enough. A V.90 modem caters for Internet access, and a 10/100 Ethernet PCI card will interest business users and network gamers alike.

Lotus SmartSuite Millennium and Ulead VideoStudio complete a well-balanced, desirable Editor's Choice.



## Systemax A1300RV Lifestyle

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Systemax 0870 729 7366

**PROS** Graphics card; CD-RW; audio **CONS** Spec just down on the winners

**OVERALL** Close to the winners' podium, but others offer slightly better value for money

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

In virtually the same case as Compute IT, Systemax has also used a 1.33GHz AMD Athlon. This time, however, it is plugged into a Biostar M7VKD motherboard sporting VIA's KT133A chipset and 256MB of PC133 memory on a single module. This leaves two more DIMM slots free.

One 3.5in and a 5.25in bay are vacant, and of the four dedicated PCI slots, two are empty, as is the shared PCI/ISA slot. An AMR slot also lies out of harm's way above the AGP slot that houses the Asus 32MB AGP-V7100 Deluxe Combo graphics card.

This VGA board combines a TV-tuner with nVidia's GeForce2 MX chipset, as well as sporting AV-in and AV-out ports and a cable converter with composite, S-Video, and left and right audio connectors. There is also a pair of Asus 3D shutter glasses. Be warned though, they can induce headaches. 3D performance is middle of the road, with enough processing power for all mainstream games.

The Deluxe Combo drives the LG Flatron 775FT monitor, producing a fine, sharp and flat picture without the distracting damping wires found in aperture-grille CRTs.

Systemax has also done well on the audio package, using the same Creative SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 sound card and Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 speakers we have seen with many of the PCs in this test. This coupled with the 16-speed Ultra-DMA66 Pioneer DVD-ROM drive should make movie watching a pleasure.

Storage is covered by a 30GB Maxtor drive, while a Samsung CD-RW that can write at eight-speed and rewrite at four-speed, will let you make copies of your files.

A V.90 modem, a Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Ulead VideoStudio SE, and a six-game bundle are also included. Overall, Systemax is pipped to the post by evesham.com's PC, but only just.



## Time Machine 1333-7 VQ Flex

**PRICE** £1,173.83 (£999 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Time 01282 777 555

**PROS** Peripherals; 19in monitor; TV/Radio-tuner; powerful graphics **CONS** Audio setup

**OVERALL** For those after a PC bundle but who are not concerned with high-quality audio

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■



With an AMD Athlon clocked at 1.33GHz and 256MB of PC2100 memory, the VQ Flex sits near the top of the SYSmark chart. However, if you ever want to upgrade the memory, the two 128MB sticks of DDR SDRAM already fill the available DIMM slots.

Inside is another Gigabyte GA-7DX motherboard that in this case has had its integrated Creative CL5880 audio chip enabled. Although this offers 4.1 surround sound which is ideally suited to Cambridge Soundworks' FourPointSurround speakers, this can't quite match the rich audio experience you will get from a Dolby Digital 5.1 surround-sound setup.

On the graphics front, the MSI StarForce64 (MSI-8831) is based on nVidia's GeForce2 Pro chipset with a full 64MB of video memory onboard. There is a TV-out too if you'd rather play games or watch DVD movies on a larger TV screen. On the other hand, the Time-badged Samsung SyncMaster 950P is a 19in shadow-mask

monitor that provides enough room for any task and a maximum resolution of 1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz. It is also the only monitor in the group test to come with BNC connectors and a non-captive D-SUB cable.

A 40GB Seagate hard drive should offer enough room for images and video sequences, but if it's not you could always burn them to CD on the LG CD-RW drive. The 12-speed DVD-ROM drive is also from LG.

Peripherals include an Epson Stylus Color 680 inkjet printer with USB and parallel interfaces, a Saitek joystick, a USB webcam and a headset mic. There's also a Hauppauge PCI WinTV Primio with built-in TV and Radio-tuners, a composite video input and a remote control. Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, and Time's Standard & Executive packs offer some good software titles.

If you're looking for 'extras', this is a high-quality machine that comes close to an award.

## Watford Aries a410

**PRICE** £1,056.33 (£899 ex VAT) **CONTACT** Watford 0870 729 5600

**PROS** Excellent office suite; £100 cheaper than rivals **CONS** No CD-RW; low on features

**OVERALL** A below average system that doesn't fulfil our expectations

**FEATURES** ■■■■■ **PERFORMANCE** ■■■■■  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ■■■■■ **OVERALL** ■■■■■

The Aries a410 is supplied with a 1.2GHz Athlon running on a 200MHz FSB, which is plugged into the socket of an Asus A7A266 motherboard. The Asus board can support both 184pin (DDR) and 168pin (SDR) memory modules, although not at the same time. We were pleased to see that a healthy 256MB of PC2100 memory had been fitted to the Watford system on a single DIMM, leaving one 184pin DIMM slot free. Performance is nothing to write home about however, with the Aries a410 finishing second from bottom in our SYSmark tests.

Storage is handled by a 40GB Seagate hard drive and 12-speed Samsung DVD-ROM. Unfortunately, Watford has not supplied its system with a CD-RW drive, which leaves no method of backing up large files.

An nVidia GeForce2 MX-based card from 3D Power is fitted with 32MB of video memory. Apart from the standard D-SUB connector, the

card has no extra outputs and scores below average in our 3D tests.

Although not up to the high standard of some of the better 17in monitors included with other PCs in the group, the 19in monitor from AOC is a flat screen design with reasonable image quality and resolution.

A Motorola V.90 PCI modem provides a connection to the outside world. Sound comes courtesy of the Asus motherboard's onboard sound chip. The Creative FPS1500 speakers are outperformed by many of the surround-sound setups from other manufacturers this month. Microsoft Works Suite 2001 is also included.

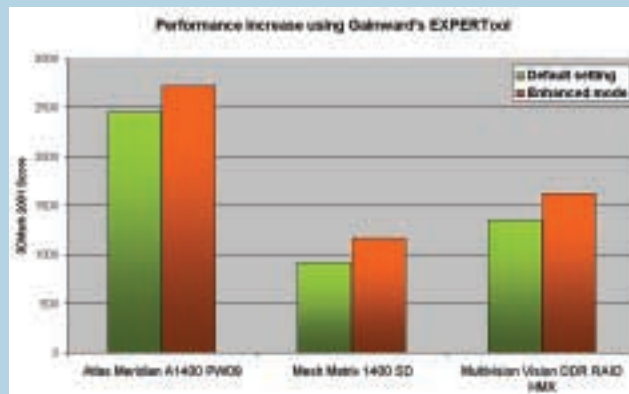
The a410 is £100 cheaper than others, so is more suited to those on a budget. However, the extra cash could have been spent on a CD-RW or a TV-tuner card, which would have given the system some added appeal. Overall the a410 is a machine that underperforms and is outshone by most other systems on test this month.



### A PERFORMANCE GAIN FROM GAINWARD

As we touched upon here in the group test, most of the PC manufacturers that opted to use a Gainward graphics card also installed the company's EXPERTool utility. Not only does this provide quick access to settings, such as the desktop size and colour, as well as info on your card model, but there is also an overclocking facility under the performance tab (see screenshot). This allows you to overclock the graphics card's GPU (graphics processing unit) and memory either in single MHz increments or to an enhanced setting that Gainward is happy to cover under warranty.

For example, the default speeds on Multivision's Gainward Hollywood/MX graphics card were set at a core clock speed of 175MHz and a memory clock speed of 166MHz. But one quick click of the Enhanced button and these are raised to 210MHz and 200MHz respectively. However, Atlas/HiGrade was the only manufacturer that had enabled this utility with its Gainward GeForce2



Pro/400. But to be fair we also 'enhanced' the other machines that came with this utility installed, but not enabled, and then re-ran 3DMark 2001.

As clearly represented in the graph above, all three machines showed a marked boost in performance with an average of 260 extra 3DMark 2001 points in each case. This is, of course, good news for end users looking for more frames per second and smoother gameplay.

So why does Gainward claim

that its VGA cards are more overclockable than other brands, and is willing to cover this under warranty? Instead of opting for regular memory chips seen in many standard nVidia-based graphics cards, Gainward incorporates faster ones rated in the region of 4ns. These memory chips are more robust when it comes to increasing the memory clock speed, while an efficient heat sink and a cooling fan also help with heat dissipation.

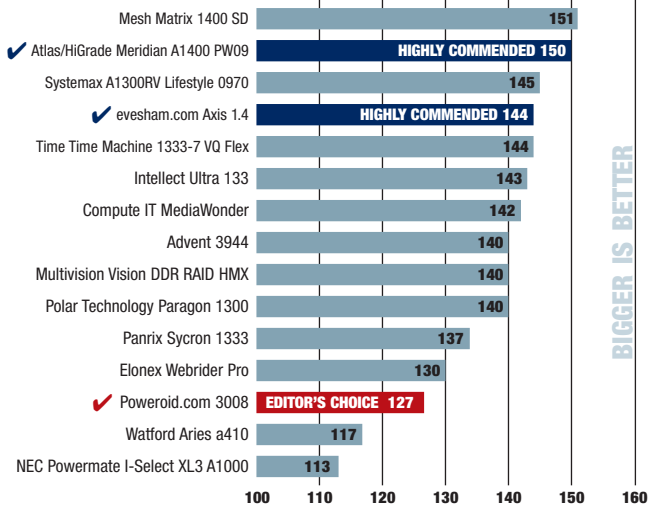
It's also worth noting that if

you've got a fast or overclocked CPU as well, you need to make sure that there's enough cooling in your system case to keep things ticking. Overheating usually results in an unstable system or some form of lock-up. It's unlikely that you'll damage any components unless you persist in running things too hot. Of course you'll probably find you can quite happily overclock almost any graphics card based on an nVidia chipset, but it's the fact that Gainward will not invalidate your warranty when you do so that makes it a bit different.

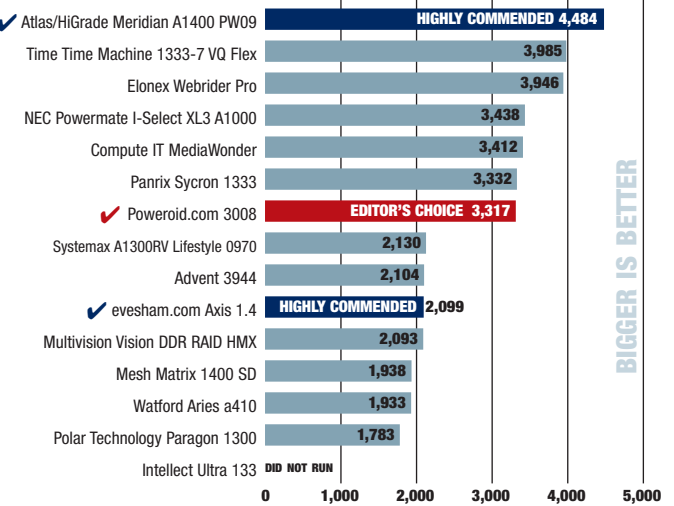


# LAB RESULTS

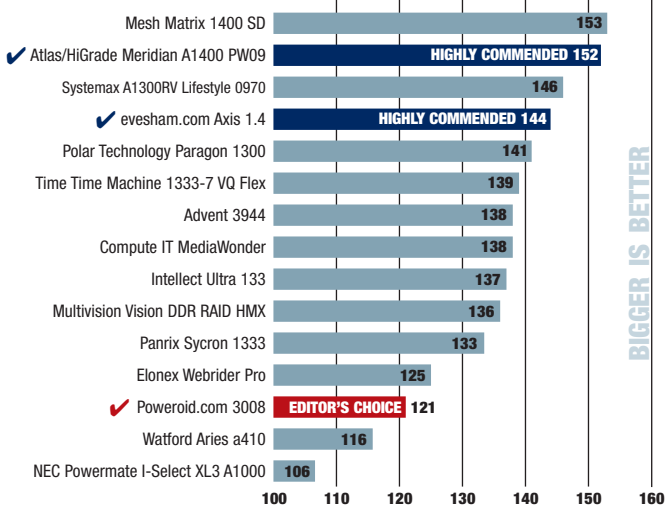
## SYSmark 2001 overall



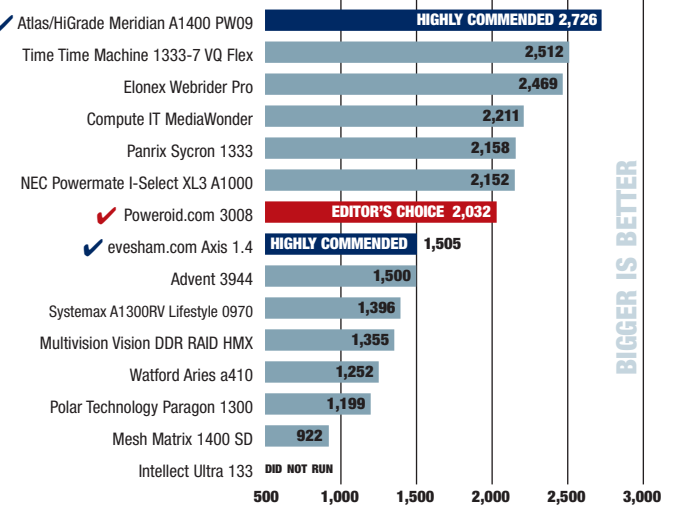
## 3DMark 2000 (1,280 x 1,024 at 32bit)



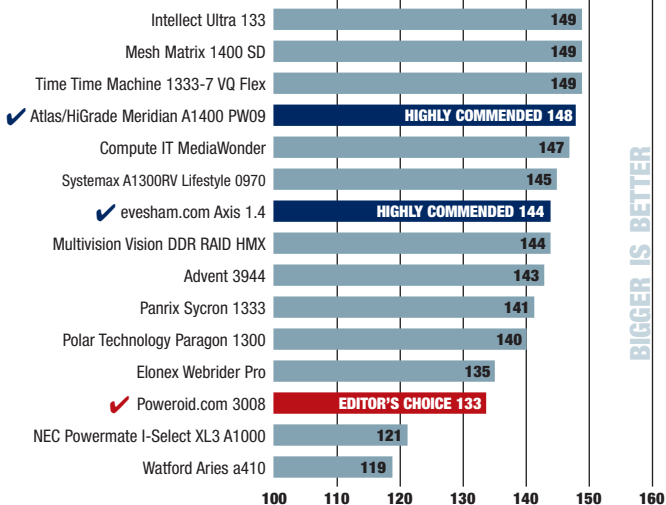
## SYSmark 2001 Internet content creation



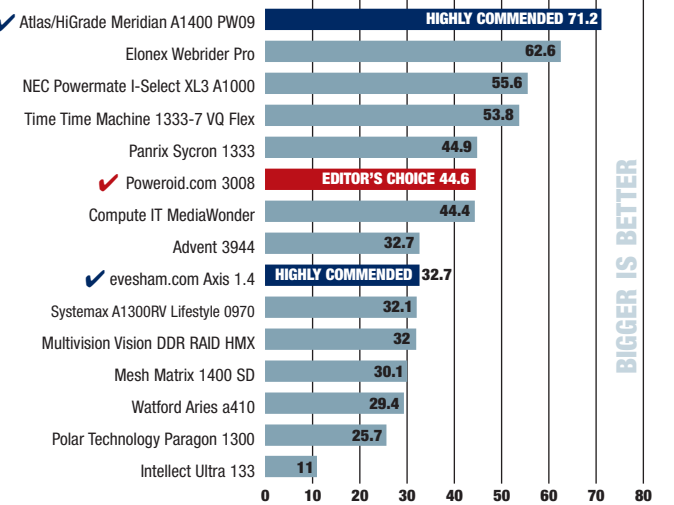
## 3DMark 2001 (1,280 x 1,024 at 32bit)



## SYSmark 2001 office productivity



## Quake III (fps) (1,280 x 1,024 at 32bit)



Please see page 48 for an explanation of how we tested the PCs

# TABLE OF FEATURES



MANUFACTURER	ADVENT	ATLAS/HIGRADE	COMPUTE IT	ELONEX	EVESHAM.COM	INTELLECT	MESH
MODEL NAME	3944	MERIDIAN A1400 PW09	MEDIAWONDER	WEBRIDER PRO	AXIS 1.4	INTELLECT ULTRA 133	MATRIX 1400 SD
Price inc VAT (ex VAT)	£1,173.83 (€999)	£1,173.83 (€999)	£1,145.63 (€975)	£1,173.83 (€999)	£1,173.83 (€999)	£1,173.83 (€999)	£1,173.83 (€999)
Sales telephone	08705 464 464	020 8532 6515	08707 487 487	020 8452 4444	08707 28 70 70	0161 429 9911	020 8208 4706
URL	<a href="http://www.pcworld.co.uk">www.pcworld.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.atlaspc.com">www.atlaspc.com</a>	<a href="http://www.it-pc.co.uk">www.it-pc.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.elonex.co.uk">www.elonex.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.evesham.com">www.evesham.com</a>	<a href="http://www.intellect.uk.com">www.intellect.uk.com</a>	<a href="http://www.meshcomputers.com">www.meshcomputers.com</a>
<b>HARDWARE SPECS</b>							
Processor	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.4GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.3GHz (200MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.4GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.4GHz (266MHz FSB)
RAM/type	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC133	128MB/PC2100	256MB/PC133	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC2100
Occupied /spare RAM slots	1/1	1/2	1/1	1/2	1/1	1/1	1/1 (DDR DIMM slots), 0/3 (SDR DIMM slots)
Max memory in this configuration	768MB	1.28GB	640MB	1.28GB	768MB	768MB	768MB
Max memory supported by motherboard	2GB	1.5GB	1GB	1.5GB	2GB	2GB	2GB DDR or 3GB SDR
Hard disk (manufacturer and model)	Maxtor 5T040H4	Western Digital WD400BB	IBM Deskstar IC35L040AVER07	Fujitsu MPG3409AH	Maxtor 5T040H4	IBM Deskstar IC35L040AVER07	Western Digital WD400BB
HD size/interface	40GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE	41GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE	41GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE
Storage drive manufacturer and model	Teac CD-W58E 8x 8x 32x	LG CED-8080B 8x 4x 32x	LG CED-8120B 12x 8x 32x	Acer 1280A CD-RW 12x 8x 32x	Teac CD-W512EB (BurnProof) 12x 10x 32x	N/A	Teac CD-W512EB x (BurnProof) 12x 10x 32x
Size of storage drive media/interface	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	N/A	650MB/EIDE
<b>MOTHERBOARD COMPONENTS</b>							
Motherboard manufacturer	Gigabyte	Asus	EPoX	MSI	Asus	Gigabyte	Asus
Model/chipset	GA-7DX/AMD-761 & VIA 686B	A7V133/VIA KT133A	EP-8K7A/AMD 761 & VIA 686B	K7T Pro2/VIA Apollo KT133A	A7M266/AMD-761 & VIA 686B	GA-7DX/AMD-761 & VIA 686B	A7A266/ALIMaGK 1
<b>EXPANSION AND I/O</b>							
No of 3.5/5.25in bays	4/3	4/3	3/3	4/3	4/3	4/3	3/3
No of free 3.5/5.25in bays	2/1	2/1	1/1	2/1	2/1	2/2	1/1
No of PCI/ISA/shared/AMR slots	5/0/0/1	4/0/1/0	6/0/0/0	5/0/1/0	4/0/1/0	5/0/0/1	4/0/1/0
No of free PCI/ISA/shared/AMR slots	2/0/0/1	2/0/0/0	3/0/0/0	3/0/0/0	1/0/0/0	3/0/0/1	2/0/1/0
No of USB/serial/parallel/PS/2	2/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	2/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	2/2/1/2	4/2/1/2
<b>MULTIMEDIA</b>							
DVD manufacturer/model	Toshiba/SD-M1502	Hitachi/GD-7500	Samsung/SD-612S	Panasonic/SR-8586	Samsung/SD-616F	LG/DRD8120B	Pioneer/DVD-116
DVD speed/interface	16x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	16x/EIDE
Sound card manufacturer	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative
Sound card model	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1
Speakers (manufacturer and model)	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks PCWorks Desktop Theatre FourPointSurround	Cambridge Soundworks PCWorks FourPointSurround	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200
Graphics card manufacturer and model	3D Power GeForce2 MX 400	Gainward CARDEXpert GeForce2 Pro/400	ATI Radeon All-in-Wonder	Gainward CARDEXpert GeForce2 Pro/400	Leadtek Winfast GeForce2 MX SH MAX	ATI All-in-Wonder 128 Pro	Gainward CARDEXpert GeForce2 MX TwinView/TV
Chipset	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 Pro	ATI Radeon	nVidia GeForce2 Pro	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	ATI Rage 128 Pro	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400
Memory and type	64MB SDRAM	64MB DDR SDRAM	32MB DDR SDRAM	64MB DDR SDRAM	64MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM
Graphics card interface	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP
Monitor manufacturer and model	Sony Multiscan CPD-E220	CTX PR705F	NEC-Mitsubishi MultiSync 75F	Philips 107B20 (LightFrame)	LG Flatron 775FT	LG Flatron 795FT Plus	Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 730
Monitor size/max viewable diagonal	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in
Maximum resolution at VESA refresh	1,600 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz
<b>OTHER INFORMATION</b>							
Modem manufacturer and model (standard, interface)	Lucent Win Modem (V.90, PCI)	Allied Data Tornado VFM56.0-PRS (V.90, PCI)	Conexant HCF V.90 56K Speakerphone (V.90, PCI)	CNR modem (V.90, PCI)	Smart Link 56K Voice Modem (V.90, PCI)	Intel HaM Dat Fax Voice (V.90, PCI)	Conexant HCF (V.90, PCI)
Misc hardware	ATI TV-Wonder	Prolink TV-tuner, Logitech QuickCam Express	FireWire PCI card (3 ext ports) plus cable	Hauppauge WinTV Theater and remote control	Hauppauge WinTV, FireWire PCI card (3 ext + 1 int ports)	Intel PC Camera ProPack	N/A
Bundled software	Microsoft Works Suite 2000, games bundle	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, games bundle	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Ulead VideoWave III	Microsoft Works Suite 2000	Sun Microsystems StarOffice 5.2	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium	Microsoft Works Suite 2001
Standard warranty (RTB = return to base, C&R = collect and return)	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB	1 year C&R, 2 years RTB	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB	2 years on-site, 3rd year RTB	3 years on-site	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB



MULTIVISION	NEC	PANRIX	POLAR TECHNOLOGY	POWEROID.COM	SYSTEMAX	TIME	WATFORD
VISION DDR RAID HMX	POWERMATE I-SELECT XL3 A1000	SYCRON 1333	PARAGON 1300	3008	A1300RV LIFESTYLE 0970	TIME MACHINE 1333-7 VQ FLEX	ARIES A410
£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,173.83 (£999)	£1,056.33 (£899)
0870 066 0885	0870 010 6329	0113 244 4958	0800 138 1238	0870 220 0444	0870 729 7366	01282 777 555	0870 729 5600
<a href="http://www.multivision.co.uk">www.multivision.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.nec-online.co.uk">www.nec-online.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.panrix.com">www.panrix.com</a>	<a href="http://www.polartechnology.com">www.polartechnology.com</a>	<a href="http://www.poweroid.com">www.poweroid.com</a>	<a href="http://www.systemaxpc.co.uk">www.systemaxpc.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.timecomputers.com">www.timecomputers.com</a>	<a href="http://www.watford.co.uk">www.watford.co.uk</a>
AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1GHz (200MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.3GHz (200MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.2GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.33GHz (266MHz FSB)	AMD Athlon 1.2GHz (200MHz FSB)
256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC133	256MB/PC133	256MB/PC133	256MB/PC2100	256MB/PC2100
1/1	1/1	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2/0	1/1 (DDR DIMM slots), 0/3 (SDR DIMM slots)
768MB	768MB	768MB	1.28GB	1.28GB	768MB	256MB	768MB
1GB	2GB	3GB	1.5GB	1.5GB	768MB	2GB	2GB DDR or 3GB SDR
Seagate ST320414A	Maxtor 5T060H6	IBM Deskstar DTLA-307030	IBM Deskstar DTLA-307030	Maxtor 5T020H2	Maxtor 5T030H3	Seagate ST340824A	Seagate U Series 5 ST340823A
2 x 20GB/EIDE (mobo RAID 0)	60.5GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	30.7GB/EIDE	2 x 20GB/EIDE (mobo RAID 0)	30GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE	40GB/EIDE
Samsung SW-212B 12x 8x 32x	N/A	Samsung SW-212B 12x 8x 32x	LG CED-8120B 12x 8x 32x	Samsung SW-408B 8x 8x 32x	Samsung SW-208B 8x 4x 32x	LG CED-8080B 8x 4x 32x	N/A
650MB/EIDE	N/A	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	650MB/EIDE	N/A
EPoX	Gigabyte	MSI	Asus	Abit	Biostar	Gigabyte	Asus
EP-8K7A+/AMD 761 & VIA 686B	GA-7DX/AMD-761 & VIA 686B	KT7266 PRO /VIA KT266	A7V133-C/VIA KT133A	KT7A-RAID/MA KT133A	M7VKD/VIA KT133A	GA-7DX/AMD-761 & VIA 686B	A7A266/ALIMaGik 1
4/4	5/2	4/3	5/2	6/4	3/3	4/3	3/3
1/2	3/1	2/1	3/0	3/2	1/1	2/1	1/3
6/0/0/0	5/0/0/1	4/0/1/0	4/0/1/0	5/0/1/0	4/0/1/1	5/0/0/1	4/0/1/0
4/0/0/0	3/0/0/1	2/0/1/0	2/0/0/0	2/0/1/0	2/0/1/1	3/0/0/1	3/0/1/0
4/2/1/2	3/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	4/2/1/2	2/2/1/2	2/2/1/2	4/2/1/2
Pioneer/DVD-116	NEC/DV5800A	Toshiba/SD-M1402	Samsung/SD-612F	Hitachi/GD-7000	Pioneer/DVD-116	LG/DRD-8120B	Samsung/SD-612S
16x/EIDE	16x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	8x/DVD	16x/EIDE	12x/EIDE	12x/EIDE
VideoLogic	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	Creative	C-Media
Sonic Fury	SoundBlaster Live! 1024 (with S/PDIF)	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 1024 (no S/PDIF)	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	SoundBlaster Live! 5.1	CL5880 Integrated	CM1-8738 (Onboard)
VideoLogic DigiTheatre LC (Silver)	Labtec LCS-2414	DAHU DH-350 (Panrix badged)	Yamaha YST-MS35D (USB)	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theatre 5.1 DTT2200	Cambridge Soundworks PCWorks FourPointSurround 5.1 DTT2200	Creative FPS1500
Gainward CARDEXpert Hollywood/MX	nVidia GeForce2 Pro	ATI Radeon All-in-Wonder	Jetway W6000	ATI Radeon All-in-Wonder	Asus AGP-V7100 Deluxe Combo	MSI StarForce64 (MSI-8831)	3D Power GeForce2 MX
nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 Pro	ATI Radeon	nVidia GeForce2 MX	ATI Radeon	nVidia GeForce2 MX	nVidia GeForce2 Pro	nVidia GeForce2 MX
32MB SDRAM	32MB DDR SDRAM	32MB DDR SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB DDR SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	64MB SDRAM	32MB
AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP	AGP
LG Flatron 775FT	NEC MultiSync FE750+	Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 73	Iiyama Vision Master Pro 411	Iiyama Vision Master Pro 411	LG Flatron 775FT	Time-badged Samsung SyncMaster 950P	AOC Spectrum 9Klr
17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/16in	17in/15.9in	17in/15.9in	17in/16in	19/18in	19/18in
1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,024 x 768 at 85Hz	1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,280 x 1,024 at 75Hz	1,152 x 864 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz	1,600 x 1,200 at 75Hz
Intel HaM Dat Fax Voice (V.90, PCI)	MSP3880 - W 56K (V.90, PCI)	Diamond SupraExpress 56i Pro VCC (V.90, PCI)	Hayes PCI fax-modem (V.92, PCI)	MR56PVS-RH1 56K (V.90, PCI)	Conexant 56K Smart HCF int modem (V.90, PCI)	Askey HSP56 Modem	Motorola SM56 Speakerphone (V.90, PCI)
N/A	Hauppauge WinTV-USB (external)	USB cable	Hauppauge WinTV	10/100 Ethernet Network PCI card	Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad, Asus 3D glasses	Hauppauge Win-TV Primio, colour printer, gamepad, camera, headset mic	N/A
Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Ulead Video Basic SE	Microsoft Works Suite 2000, CorelDraw7, multimedia pack	Microsoft Works Suite 2000, Ulead VideoStudio & Cool 3D SE	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Ulead VideoStudio	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Ulead VideoStudio SE, games bundle	Lotus SmartSuite Millennium, Time Standard & Exec packs	Microsoft Works Suite 2001
3 years C&R	3 years on-site	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB	1 year C&R, 2 years RTB	3 years on-site	3 years C&R	1 year on-site, 2 years RTB

## Editor's Choice

Over the past few months, AMD, with its Athlon line of CPUs, has dominated our PC group tests, and this month is no exception, with all the PCs built with an AMD processor of some sort, including the company's latest CPU clocked at a beefy 1.4GHz. The current crop of AMD processors offers comparable performance with Intel's products at a lower price point.

It was good to see that many of the manufacturers had read our invitation closely and bundled TV-tuners either on separate PCI boards or as part of the graphics cards. Most PCs offer video capture capabilities too, as well as some excellent sound systems, with Creative/Cambridge Soundworks clearly stealing the show with its Dolby Digital 5.1 combo, consisting of the DTT2200 speakers and SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 PCI audio card. Some manufacturers even supplied two identical hard drives for a RAID setup, and a CD-RW drive for backing up important files or digital images. Our awards were also not entirely based on performance; other important factors, such as quality of construction and extra features, were taken into account too.

### The winners

The **Editor's Choice** goes to the **Poweroid.com 3008**, for a very well-rounded set of components all housed in a sexy brushed aluminium case from Cooler Master. This box offers a high degree of expansion, a great cooling system and two front-mounted USB ports for peripherals. With its 1.2GHz AMD Athlon, it may not be the fastest CPU on test but, combined with Abit's KT7A-RAID motherboard and the RAID-enabled hard drives offering 40GB of storage, data can be shifted about smoothly.

The Dolby Digital 5.1 audio setup from Creative gives you a true home cinema experience, especially combined with ATI's 32MB Radeon All-in Wonder graphics card with onboard hardware DVD decoding. This card, which fared well in our 3D tests, has a built-in TV-tuner and all the ViVo ports and cables you're ever likely to need, especially if you're into video capture and editing. Furthermore, the 17in Iiyama monitor is one of the best CRTs on test, plus you get a CD-RW, a network card for LAN gamers or business users, as well as Lotus'

SmartSuite Millennium and Ulead's VideoStudio. An optical USB Microsoft mouse and Internet Pro keyboard with USB hub add a finishing touch to a system that is second to none.

The first **Highly Commended** award goes to **evesham.com's Axis 1.4**. This is one of only three PCs this month to use a 1.4GHz Athlon processor. It is a full DDR system, too, with 256MB of PC2100 SDRAM plugged into an Asus A7M266, so you will not be short of power. As for post-summer holiday fun, a Hauppauge TV-tuner card with composite port lets you watch TV on your PC. With the same Creative sound setup as the Poweroid.com system, watching television and DVD movies will be greatly enhanced. The Pioneer DVD-ROM is one of the quickest around and is set up with the correct UltraDMA66 ribbon cable. You also get a 40GB hard drive, a BurnProof CD-RW and a FireWire card with three external and one internal ports – ideal for DV camera connectivity. A 64MB nVidia GeForce2 MX 400 card provides enough punch for mainstream gaming and LG's 17in flat-screen monitor offers a good picture.

The recipient of our second **Highly Commended** award is **Atlas** with its **Meridian A1400 PW09**, a PC for speed junkies. Another 1.4GHz Athlon CPU makes an appearance here, also backed by 256MB of PC133 memory on an Asus A7V133 motherboard. With a 64MB nVidia GeForce2-based graphics card overclocked under warranty, the 3D scores will make gamers smile. Speed is one thing, but the Meridian also comes with a TV-tuner card with a good selection of ports for video capture. A Hitachi DVD-ROM offers DVD movie playback, while the CTX 17in monitor uses an FD Trinitron CRT for a rich picture. The sound system is the successful combination of Creative/Cambridge Soundworks DTT2200 speakers and SoundBlaster Live! 5.1 audio card for first-rate Dolby Digital surround sound. An LG CD-RW and 40GB Western Digital hard drive cater for storage.

We should also mention Multivision, which impressed us with a RAID 0 hard drive setup and good audio configuration, but just lost out due to a lack of attention to detail; and Systemax, which offered good audio and video capture features, but the winners offer that bit more in way of specification. That said, both are worth considering.

**A sexy brushed aluminium case offers a high degree of expansion**



**Poweroid.com 3008**



**evesham.com Axis 1.4**



**Atlas Meridian A1400 PW09**