

DESKTOP PCs

Due to the fast-moving nature of the PC industry, we can only recommend particular PCs in the month we have seen them. Prices change almost weekly, as component prices from third-party suppliers fluctuate according to availability. So, for the best current PC buy, for instance, look at last month's group test on page 134.

It always pays to take a little care when buying a PC or in fact any hardware or software. For PCW's guide to buying direct, see page 285. And don't forget to use the PCW Order Form [page 286].

Everyone's ideal PC will have a different mix of components, with gamers needing a very good 3D graphics card, probably a 3D sound card and excellent speakers, while business users will need a good monitor and plenty of RAM.

ENTRY-LEVEL PCs

Budget-conscious buyers might consider choosing a non-Intel processor like an AMD. But be aware that if you choose a Socket 7 chip, you'll only be able to upgrade to an AMD processor in future. Most Celerons are only being sold in Socket 370 format rather than in Slot 1 format, so if you get a Socket 370 processor you won't be able to upgrade it to a PIII at a later date. Check what processor format you will get when you order. If you are only offered a Socket 370 processor, insist on a Slot 1 board and 'Slotlet' combination with 100MHz RAM to maximise the upgrade potential. Look at last month's group test for £699 (inc VAT) PCs.

We would recommend the following specification:

- AMD K6-2 400 or Intel Celeron 400 processor
- 32Mb RAM
- 4Gb hard drive
- Graphics card with 8Mb video RAM
- 15in monitor
- CD-ROM drive

Expect to pay around £599 (ex VAT) for this configuration, but you may have to pay extra for a sound card and speakers or a modem.

MID-RANGE PCs

In the mid-range, around £1,000 (ex VAT) will get you a good all-round PC. The introduction of higher-speed PIIIs has meant the slower PIIIs have dropped in price, bringing them into this mid-range category. However, the stunning result of the K6-III, and its low price, make it worth serious consideration. Look for a minimum of:

- Intel PIII or AMD K6-III 500MHz processor
- 64Mb RAM
- 8Gb hard disk
- Good 3D graphics card with 16Mb video RAM
- 17in monitor
- CD-ROM drive
- Sound card, speakers, 56K modem

For an in-depth look at the K6-III, see the PC group test in our July '99 issue.

HIGH-END PCs

If you're after a state-of-the-art machine, be prepared to spend around £1,500 to £2,000 (ex VAT). What you require at this price will be specific to your needs, depending on how you intend to use the machine. However, as a basic specification we would want:

- PIII 600 or Athlon 600MHz
- 128Mb 100MHz RAM
- 16Gb hard drive
- Good 3D graphics card with 32Mb video RAM
- 19in monitor
- DVD drive
- Sound card, speakers, 56K modem
- Bundled office suite

For a close look at Athlon, see this month's group test.

HIGH-END NOTEBOOK

Sony Vaio PCG F190

Designed to replace your desktop PC, Sony's Vaio F190 features a deliberately large keyboard and 14.1in TFT display. As standard it boasts built-in DVD-ROM and floppy drive, DV editing facilities and the muscle of a mobile 366MHz Intel Pentium II. Measuring 324 x 40 x 265mm and weighing 3.1kg, it excels as a power portable.

► PCW May '99, p84



Price £2,501.57 Contact Sony 0990 424424

Also Recommended Dell Inspiron 7000 A366LT (PCW April '99)

Price £1,820.08 Contact 0870 152 4850 • Compaq Armada 7800, (PCW March '99) Price £3,461.55 Contact 0181 332 3000

MID-RANGE NOTEBOOK

Dell Inspiron 3500

The Dell Inspiron 3500, with its Mobile Celeron 366, 64Mb of RAM and 4.8Gb hard disk is not only well specified, but also has an outstanding build quality. The screen has an even luminescence and vivid colours and it also comes with a very good software bundle.

► PCW September '99, p181



Price £1,643.83 Contact Dell 0870 152 4850 www.dell.co.uk

Also Recommended Esprit Tycoon Price £1,468.75 Contact Esprit 01670 737888 (PCW September '99) • Sharp PC-A150 Price £2,109.13 Contact Sharp 0800 262958 (PCW March '99)

PDA

Psion Series 5mx

Retaining the Series 5's good looks, Psion has doubled the memory size and processor speed to 16Mb and 37MHz respectively, and built email software into the ROM as well as improving the screen and backlight. It's not greedy, either, lasting the average user a month on a single pair of AA batteries.

► PCW August '99, p92



Price £429.95 Contact Psion 0990143050 www.psion.com Also

Recommended Hewlett Packard Jornada 820e Price £945.88 Contact HP 0990 474747 • 3Com Palm V Price £349.99 Contact 3Com 0800 731 1064 (both PCW July '99)

COLOUR INKJET

Hewlett-Packard DeskJet 895CXi

For all-round excellence you can't do better than the HP 895CXi. The quality of its output for both text and graphics is impressive given the swift speed at which they are produced. Even its 'econofast' mode could be used for vital documents, saving both time and ink. It takes a huge range of papers and replacing ink cartridges is a breeze.

PCW October '99, p177



Price £292.58 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 **Also Recommended** Epson Stylus Colour 740 **Price** £179 **Contact** 0800 220546 ♦ Epson Stylus Colour 850 **Price** £199 **Contact** 0800 220546 (both PCW February '99)

COLOUR PHOTO PRINTER

Epson Stylus Photo 750

Easy installation, a five-colour cartridge for photo printing and an extensive driver make this printer an attractive proposition. Its photo reproduction could not be faulted and its job turnaround is impressively fast, too. Black text on photocopy paper was a little disappointing, but the price should suit most pockets.

PCW October '99, p180



Price £239 **Contact** Epson 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk
Also recommended: Lexmark Z51 **Price** £211.50 **Contact** Lexmark 01628 481500

BUDGET LASER PRINTER

Kyocera FS-680

In a chassis designed by Porsche, the FS-680 is a speedy little printer, churning out 9ppm. It is aimed at small workgroups and you can buy an optional Ethernet adaptor to include it on the network. It also comes equipped with a 50MHz PowerPC processor and 4Mb of RAM, upgradable to 36Mb.

PCW September '99 p96



Price £351.33 **Contact** Kyocera 0345 103104 www.kyocera.de
Also recommended Samsung ML-5100A **Price** £292.58 **Contact** Samsung 0800 521652 (PCW July '99 p98)

BUSINESS LASER PRINTER

Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 4050TN

Hewlett-Packard dominates the laser printer market and it's easy to understand why when you see the output from this printer. Its 1,200dpi resolution is outstanding, and with a 133MHz NEC processor and 16Mb of RAM it can turn out an impressive 16ppm. On top of all that it comes network ready.

PCW September '99 p96



Price £1,580.38 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 www.europe.hp.com
Also recommended Lexmark Optra K1220 **Price** £658 **Contact** Lexmark 01628 481500 (PCW February '99 p201)

MULTIFUNCTION DEVICE

Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 3100

This quiet machine produced good quality laser prints. It's intelligent enough to detect a document dropped into its feeder and then launches an idiot-proof menu for copying, scanning and emailing. Fast, accurate OCR, and 2Mb memory for incoming faxes when the paper runs out, make the 3100 an ideal multifunction device.

PCW June '98, p83



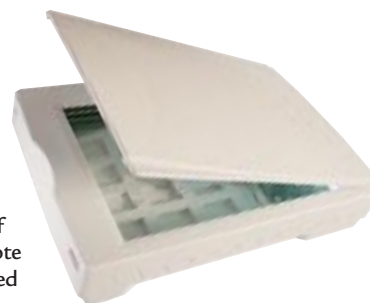
Price £722.63 **Contact** HP 0990 474747
Also Recommended Canon MultiPASS MPC20 **Price** £527.58
Contact Canon 0181 773 6000 (PCW January '98)

FLATBED SCANNER

Umax Astra 610P

Once again, the Umax Astra 610P parallel-port scanner has won our budget flatbed-scanner group test, boasting an unbeatable combination of performance and value. Note that our three recommended scanners require enhanced parallel ports found only on modern PCs, so users wanting top performance, or those with older systems, should stick to SCSI.

PCW September '98, p229



Price £69.33 **Contact** Umax 01344 871329 **Also Recommended** Agfa SnapScan 310P **Price** £116.50 **Contact** Agfa 0181 231 4200 ♦ Microtek Phantom 330CX **Price** £75.95 **Contact** Microtek 01908 317797 (both PCW September '98)

DIGITAL CAMERA

Canon Powershot Pro70

This good-looking camera takes amazingly natural-looking pictures and has enough features to keep any user happy. Its dual Compact Flash slots make for extended periods without having to download, while its 1,536 x 1,024 pixel resolution will give you superb prints.

PCW May '99, p199



Price £1,173.83 **Contact** Canon 0121 666 6262 **Also Recommended** Ricoh RDC-4200 **Price** £500 **Contact** Johnson's Photopia 01782 753355 ♦ Olympus C-900 Zoom **Price** £650 **Contact** Olympus 0171 253 0513 (both PCW May '99)

MONITOR

CTX PR710T

Not only does the 17in PR710T look gorgeous, its performance is stunning. It sports a genuine Sony Trinitron tube, which is always a good sign. Power regulation, resolution, colour alignment and colour purity are all of the highest order, leading to a display that you can see is special straight away.

PCW April '99, p182



Price £276.13 **Contact** CTX 01923 810800 **Also Recommended** ADI MicroScan GT56 **Price** £363.08 **Contact** ADI 0181 327 1900 (PCW April '99)

MODEM

Pace 56 Solo

The 56K modem not only performed well in our speed tests, but also has some of the best features we have seen on this type of product. It can work as a standalone answering machine and will also store faxes when your PC is switched off. The memory is upgradable to 6Mb and it can even phone you back at a remote location.

PCW August '99, p191



Price £164.50 **Contact** Pace Communication UK Tel 0990 561001 **Also Recommended** 3Com Professional Message Modem **Price** £149 **Contact** 3Com UK 0800 225 252 ♦ Diamond Multimedia Supra Express 56e Memory **Price** £99 **Contact** Diamond Multimedia UK 0118 944 4444 (both PCW August '99)

REMOVABLE STORAGE

Iomega Jaz 2

If you need top performance and storage capacity, then Iomega's 2Gb Jaz drive is the only one to go for. Its speed makes it ideal for a wide range of applications, while the Jaz media feels more solid than most and is fully compatible with 1Gb cartridges. In short, it represents good value for large storage capacity.

PCW June '99, p168



Price £299 **Contact** Iomega 0800 973194 **Also Recommended** Panasonic LF-D101 **Price** £351 **Contact** Panasonic 0800 444220 (PCW Oct '98)

SOUND CARD

Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live!

SoundBlaster cards have long been the best choice for non-professional users. The SoundBlaster Live! ups the ante, providing near-professional quality sound at a bargain price. And it comes with an impressive bundle of dedicated digital I/O daughtercard, speakers, subwoofer and games.

PCW December '98, p92



Price £149 **Contact** Creative Labs 01189 344744 **Also Recommended** Terratec EWS64 S **Price** £149.23 **Contact** Terratec 01600 772111 (PCW July '98)

GRAPHICS CARD

ATI All In Wonder 128

Using ATI's Rage 128 chipset, the All In Wonder 128 provides the ultimate video solution for your PC. Besides sporting a fast processor with 32-bit colour in 2D and 3D applications, there's also motion compensation support for smooth MPEG2 decompression and the ability to capture video. But most impressive is the built-in TV tuner that allows you to watch TV while you're word processing.

PCW July '99, p78



Price £146.88 **Contact** ATI 01628 533115 www.atitech.com **Also Recommended** ATI Rage Fury **Price** £123.38 **Contact** ATI 01628 533115 www.atitech.com (PCW May '99) ♦ Matrox Millennium G400 32Mb **Max Price** £186.82 **Contact** Matrox 01753 665300 (PCW August '99)

ACCOUNTING

Intuit Quickbooks 6

Touted as the easiest accounting package for small businesses, QuickBooks has a long history and a large user base. Version 6 is the first 32-bit incarnation. It even monitors company performance and sounds the alarm should you fall behind.

PCW March '99, p92



Price £199 (Pro version) **Contact** Intuit 0800 585058 **Also Recommended** MYOB **Price** £229.13 **Contact** Bestware 01752 201901 ♦ TAS Books **Price** £116.33 **Contact** Megatech 01372 727274 (both PCW June '98)

PERSONAL FINANCE

Microsoft Money Financial Suite 99

Microsoft Money Financial Suite 99 is our choice for personal finance. It offers online banking and updating facilities, as well as Sage compatibility, all at a bargain price.

PCW February '99, p80



Price £49.99 **Contact** Microsoft 0345 002000 **Also Recommended** Quicken 98 **Price** £39.99 **Contact** Intuit 0181 990 5500 (PCW June '98)

DATABASE

Microsoft Access 2000

This industry-standard database application is also the best. With its wizards, infamous Office Assistants and standard Windows interface, Access 2000 is relatively easy for the novice. And its powerful relational features and VBA integration make it suitable for developers, too.

PCW November '98, p220



Price £299 **Contact** Microsoft 0345 002000 **Also Recommended** FileMaker Pro 4 **Price** £169 **Contact** FileMaker 0845 603 9100 (PCW November '98)

DTP

Adobe InDesign

Seamless integration with Photoshop and Illustrator, as well as multi-line text formatting, make InDesign a serious contender to knock QuarkXPress off its professional DTP throne. Time-saving features and a competitive price make it an attractive proposition.

PCW August '99, p87



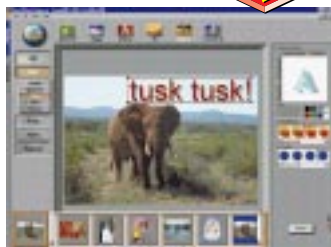
Price £468.83 (£399 ex VAT) **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4000 **Also Recommended** QuarkXPress 4.0 **Price** £816.62 **Contact** Quark 01483 451818 (PCW June '99) ♦ Adobe PageMaker 6.5 Plus **Price** £351.33 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4000 (PCW August '99)

IMAGE EDITING

Ulead PhotoExpress 2.0

Ulead has succeeded in removing the frustration factor often involved in getting to grips with digital pictures. PhotoExpress 2.0 is a pleasure to use, with a clearly structured interface and fast, in-depth tools. It has pre-set editing modes for the novice and custom adjustments for each editing function, so the power user will be kept happy, too.

PCW January '99, p202



Price £34.95 **Contact** BIT 01420 83811 **Also Recommended** Adobe PhotoDeluxe 3 **Price** £45.83 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4001 ♦ Paint Shop Pro 5 **Price** £69.95 **Contact** Digital Workshop 01295 258335 (both PCW January '99)

DRAWING

Adobe Illustrator 8

Illustrator has once again gained the top spot amongst drawing packages through its introduction of bold creative tools like the new Pencil Tool, Art Brushes and the Gradient Mesh Tool, to name but a few.

If Adobe's new page layout application, InDesign, takes off, the productivity gains from interoperability between InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator will be hard to resist.

PCW September '99, p165



Price £257.32 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4001 www.adobe.com **Also Recommended** CorelDraw 9 **Price** £327.82 **Contact** Corel 0800 581028 ♦ Sierra Windows Draw 7 **Price** £39.95 **Contact** 0118 920 9100 www.sierrahome.com (both PCW September '99)

INFORMATION MANAGERS

Starfish Sidekick 99



The best personal information manager boasts wide customisation abilities as its greatest strength. However, if you need heavyweight contact management, look no further than Goldmine 4 (see the details panel, below).



PCW August '99, p176

Price £39.99 **Contact** Starfish 0181 875 4455
Also Recommended Goldmine 4 **Price** £229 **Contact** AVG 0171 335 2222
 (PCW August '99)

REMOTE ACCESS

Traveling Software LapLink Professional

The high-end version of this extremely versatile product, LapLink Professional, has all the features of the standard version but also lets you print from the host machine onto a remote printer, or vice versa, and talk to whoever is using the host machine. It includes anti-virus and hard-disk cloning utilities.



PCW October '99, p134

Price £176.19 **Contact** Traveling Software 0800 374849
Also Recommended Symantec pcAnywhere **Price** £169.20
Contact Symantec 0171 616 5600 (PCW October '99)

PROGRAMMING TOOL

Inprise Delphi 4



Delphi is not a cross-platform product, but does let you build browser-independent web applications. It reaches all the way from RAD business applications to fast graphics using DirectX. It beats Visual C++ on ease of use, and Visual Basic on performance.



PCW April '99, p198

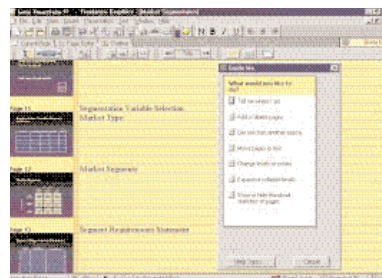
Price from £92 to £1,845 **Contact** Inprise 0118 932 0022
Also Recommended Symantec Visual Cafe **Price** £217 or £580
Contact Symantec 0181 317 7777 (PCW April '99)

PRESENTATION GRAPHICS

Lotus Freelance Graphics



Lotus' offering is our choice for electronic presentations. However, your decision may rest on which office suite you own or are considering, and as part of Office 97, PowerPoint won't let you down.



PCW March '98, p200

Price £49.35 **Contact** Lotus 01784 445808
Also Recommended Microsoft PowerPoint 97 **Price** £325.47
Contact Microsoft 0345 002000 (PCW March '98)

WEB DESIGN

Macromedia Dreamweaver 2



An attractive and easy-to-use interface makes this great for those looking for something with a little more power. Good table handling and extensive formatting options on a single, centralised property inspector, make it a joy to use.



PCW April '99, p103

Price £229 **Contact** Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5857
Also Recommended Adobe PageMill 3.0 **Price** £92.83
Contact Adobe 0181 606 4000 (PCW March '99)

ANTI-VIRUS

McAfee VirusScan Platinum

McAfee VirusScan Platinum's background scanning checks mail attachments, internet downloads and even ActiveX and Java applets for comprehensive protection.



PCW July '99, p86

Price £59.95 **Contact** Network Associates 01753 827500
Also Recommended Dr Solomon's HomeGuard **Price** £29
Contact Dr Solomon's 01296 318700 (PCW April '99)