best buys

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 our most recent group tests.

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 our buying advice page. And don't forget to use the *PCW* Order Form.

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 a non-Intel processor such as an AMD K6-2 or K6-III. 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 later to a PIII. 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 'Slocket' combination with 100MHz of RAM to maximise the upgrade potential. Look at September's group test for £699 (inc VAT) PCs.

We would recommend the following specification:
• **AMD K6-2 400 or Intel Celeron 400 processor**
• **64MB RAM**
• **6.4GB hard drive**
• **Graphics card with 8MB video RAM**
• **15in monitor**
• **CD-ROM drive, speakers, modem.**

Expect to pay around **£599 (ex VAT)** for this configuration, but you may have to pay extra for a sound card, 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**
• **128MB RAM**
• **12GB hard disk**
• **Good 3D graphics card with 16MB video RAM**
• **17in monitor**
• **DVD-ROM drive**
• **Sound card, speakers, 56K modem.**
For machines aimed at the novice user – costing no more than £999 ex VAT – see this month's PC group test.

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**
• **20GB hard drive**
• **Good 3D graphics card with 32MB video RAM**
• **19in monitor**
• **DVD-ROM drive**
• **Sound card, speakers, 56K modem**
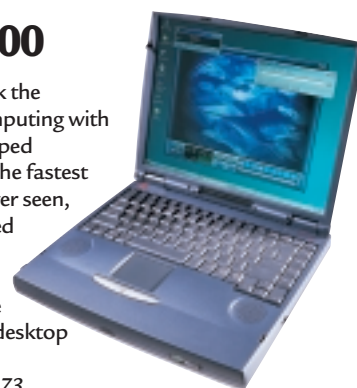• **Bundled office suite**

All product prices are inclusive of VAT and correct at time of going to press

HIGH-END NOTEBOOK

Hi-Grade
Notino AS7400

Hi-Grade has pushed back the boundaries of mobile computing with the first Pentium III-equipped notebook. Besides being the fastest mobile computer we've ever seen, the AS7400 is fully featured with 160MB of RAM, a 10GB hard disk and a DVD-ROM drive. If you're looking for a high-power desktop replacement, this is it.
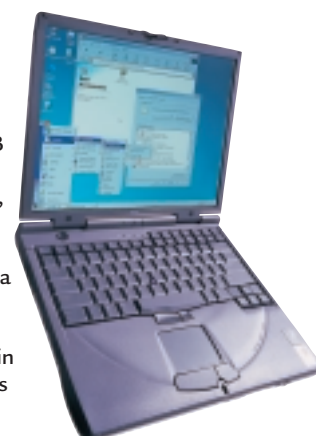➡ *PCW December 1999, p73*

Price *£2,113.82* **Contact** *Hi-Grade 020 8532 6100* www.higrade.com

MID-RANGE NOTEBOOK

Dell
Inspiron 3700

The Dell Inspiron 3700 – with its Celeron 466MHz processor, 128MB of RAM and excellent 14.1in active matrix LCD screen – is not only light, it's also pleasing to the eye. The bundled Margi DVD-to-Go PC card even lets you watch DVD movies on a standard television, while Dell's exclusive ExpressCharge cuts the Lithium Ion battery's charging time in half, with no detrimental effect on its operational life.
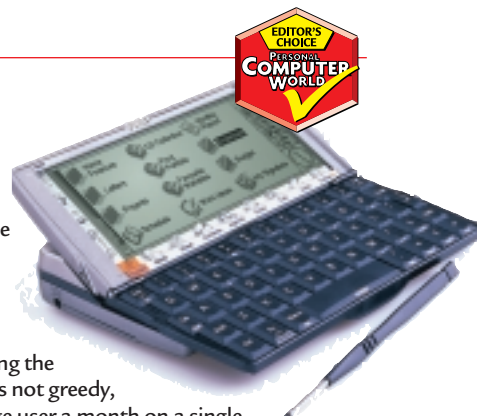➡ *PCW January 2000, p77*

Price *£1,702.57* **Contact** *Dell 0870 907 5681* www.dell.com

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 1999, p92*

Price *£429.99* **Contact** *Psion 0990 1430503* www.psion.com

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 1999, p177*

Price *£233.82* **Contact** *Hewlett-Packard 0990 474747 www.europe.hp.com*

COLOUR PHOTO PRINTER

Epson
Stylus Photo 750

Easy installation, a five-colour cartridge for photo printing and feature-rich software 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 1999, p180*

Price *£198* **Contact** *Epson 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk*

BUDGET LASER PRINTER

Brother
HL-1250

This compact machine has everything you could reasonably ask for at the price, but Brother has gone one step further with the inclusion of both parallel and USB ports. Overall this is an excellent printer with a low running cost – a great buy at the low end of the spectrum and it's even easy to set up.

➡ *See this month's printer group test*

Price *£245.58 (£209 ex VAT)* **Contact** *Simply 08707 297 366 www.brother.com*

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 the LaserJet 4050TN. Its 1,200dpi resolution is outstanding, and with a 133MHz NEC processor combined with 16MB of RAM it can turn out an impressive 16ppm. On top of all that, it comes network-ready as standard.

➡ *PCW September 1999, p96*

Price *£1,580.38* **Contact** *HP 0990 474747 www.europe.hp.com*

MULTIFUNCTION DEVICE

Hewlett-Packard
Office Jet R45

The Office Jet R45 is an excellent colour multifunction device. It has a colour inkjet printer, with a resolution of 600dpi, a colour scanner and a fax all in one. Its colour output is impressively rich and vibrant. The 30bit scanner supports a maximum optical resolution of 600 x 2,400dpi and is fast, easy to use, and rendered excellent results.

➡ *PCW November 1999, p96*

Price *£407* **Contact** *Hewlett-Packard 0990 474747 www.europe.hp.com*

FLATBED SCANNER

Epson
GT-7000 USB

This 600dpi scanner performed excellently in all of our tests, with good colour accuracy, text reproduction and picture quality. USB installation is a breeze and we were impressed with the robust build quality. The hinged lid will close flat to accommodate thick targets – all in all a great unit.

➡ *PCW November 1999, p191*

Price *£148* **Contact** *Epson 0800 220 546 www.epson.co.uk*

best buys

DIGITAL CAMERA

Nikon
Coolpix 700

Both physical controls and the on-screen menu system of the Coolpix 700 are well laid out, so the powerful feature set is a boon rather than a barrier between you and the shots you want. The results from the Coolpix's 2.1 megapixel CCD are truly impressive. The camera produced wonderfully clean, detailed, natural-looking images at 1,600 x 1,200.
➤ *PCW January 2000, p175*

Price *£499 (£425 ex VAT)* **Contact** *Nikon 0800 230 220* *www.nikon.co.uk*

MONITOR

Taxan
Ergovision 980

The Taxan Ergovision 980 is based on the 19in Mitsubishi Natural Flat Diamondtron tube. It sports superb image quality and the array of OSD controls is intuitive and comprehensive. There's a built-in USB hub, with two ports on the left and right sides of the base, making it easy to connect peripherals.
➤ *PCW November 1999, p208*

Price *£586.32* **Contact** *Taxan 01344 484646* *www.taxan.co.uk*

MODEM

3Com
56K Professional Message Modem

This excellent self-memory modem is flash-upgradable to V.90. It has 2MB of memory – enough for either 20 minutes of voice messages or 50 fax sheets, or a combination of both – and this is upgradable to 4MB. You can retrieve the voice messages remotely using a PIN and the modem is easy to set up.
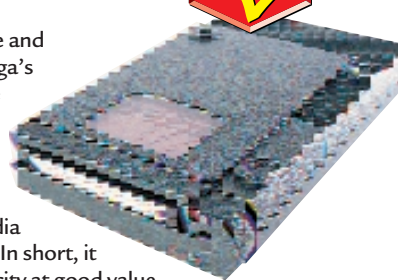➤ *PCW August 1999, p191*

Price *£129* **Contact** *3Com UK 0800 225 252* *www.3com.co.uk*

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 and it is fully compatible with 1GB cartridges, while the Jaz media feels more solid than most . In short, it provides large storage capacity at good value.
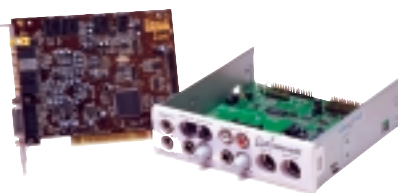➤ *PCW June 1999, p168*

Price *£299* **Contact** *Iomega 0800 973194* *www.iomega.com*

SOUND CARD

Creative Labs
SB Live! Platinum

The SoundBlaster Live! Platinum is exactly what gamers and budding PC musicians have been asking for – great sound quality and excellent bundled software make this one a winner. The inclusion of the LiveBay front panel makes fumbling around the back of your PC for the right connection a thing of the past. We think it's the best sound product ever.
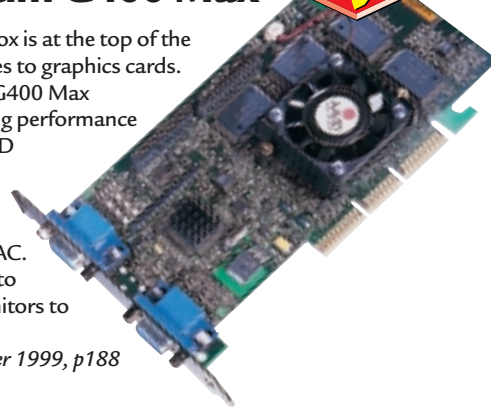➤ *See this month's reviews*

Price *£151.58* **Contact** *Creative Labs 01189 344744* *www.soundblaster.com*

GRAPHICS CARD

Matrox
Millennium G400 Max

Once again Matrox is at the top of the tree when it comes to graphics cards. The Millennium G400 Max produces stunning performance in both 2D and 3D environments. It has 32MB of SGRAM and a 360MHz RAMDAC. It's also possible to connect two monitors to the card.
➤ *PCW December 1999, p188*

Price *£186.82* **Contact** *Matrox 01753 665500* *www.matrox.com*

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 32bit incarnation. It even monitors company performance and sounds the alarm should you fall behind.
➥ *PCW November 1999, p174*

Price *£199 (Pro version)* **Contact** *Intuit 0800 585058* *www.intuit.com*

PERSONAL FINANCE

Microsoft
Money 2000

Money 2000 is an excellent product, which is easy to use and includes best-of-breed support for online banking. The inclusion of Money Express – which warns of any forthcoming bills when you switch on the computer – is an added bonus.
➥ *See this month's reviews*

Price *£29.99* **Contact** *Microsoft 0345 002000* *www.microsoft.com*

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.
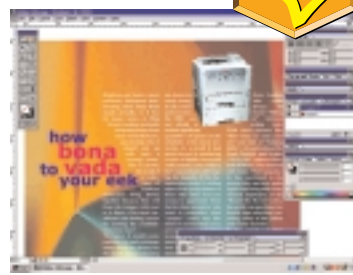➥ *See this month's Database grouptest*

Price *£326* **Contact** *Microsoft 0345 002000* *www.microsoft.com*

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.
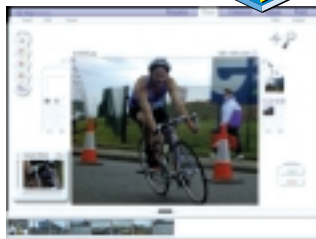➥ *PCW August 1999, p87*

Price *£468.83* **Contact** *Adobe 020 8606 4000* *www.adobe.com*

IMAGE EDITING

Kai's
Photo Soap 2

Kai's Photo Soap 2 not only looks fantastic, but it also offers great tools for organising, viewing and sharing photo albums – something that digital camera users will come to appreciate as their archives expand. All of the built-in tools are not only effective, but a pleasure to use – especially the enhance filters, which produce consistently good results with a range of images.
➥ *PCW January 2000, p198*

Price *£29.99* **Contact** *Software Warehouse 0800 0355 355*

DRAWING

Adobe
Illustrator 8

Illustrator has once again taken the top spot among 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.
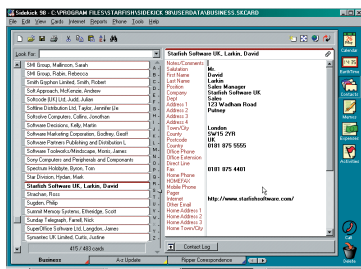➥ *PCW September 1999, p165*

Price *£257.32* **Contact** *Adobe 020 8606 4001* *www.adobe.com*

best buys

INFORMATION MANAGERS

Starfish
SideKick 99

SideKick is flexible enough to store information about almost anything, yet it remains true to its diary and contact management roots. Its shallow learning curve and affordable price make it an excellent choice for newcomers.
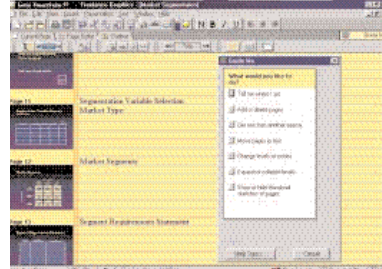➥ *PCW August 1999, p176*

Price £39.99 **Contact** *Starfish 020 8875 4444* www.starfish.com

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 1998, p200*

Price £49.35 **Contact** *Lotus 01784 445808* www.lotus.com

OFFICE SUITES

Microsoft
Office 2000 Standard Edition

With the 2000 release, Microsoft upgraded its all-conquering office suite to offer more in the way of web and intranet integration. Simply because it offers the full selection of the most widely-used apps, it's hard to turn away from Office, even in the face of stiff price-cutting competition from Lotus and Corel.
➥ *PCW June 1999, p112*

Price £475.21 **Contact** *Microsoft 0345 002000* www.microsoft.com

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.
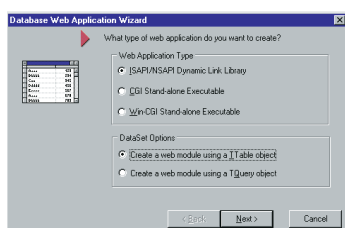➥ *PCW December 1999, p203*

Price £269.70 **Contact** *Computers Unlimited 020 8358 5857*

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.
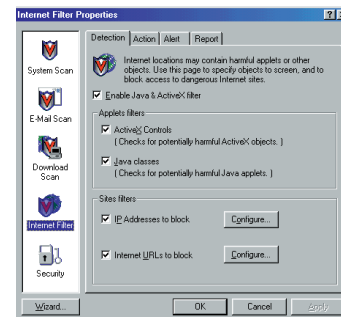➥ *PCW April 1999, p198*

Price *from £99 to £1,999* **Contact** *Inprise 0118 932 0022* www.inprise.com

ANTI-VIRUS

McAfee
VirusScan Platinum

The background scanning in McAfee VirusScan Platinum checks mail attachments, Internet downloads and even ActiveX and Java applets for comprehensive protection.
➥ *PCW July 1999, p86*

Price £59.95 **Contact** *Network Associates 01753 827500* www.nai.com