

PCs for work & play

Buying a PC suitable for small or home office use is a considerable investment, so it's essential to ensure your purchase is future-proof. We test a selection of systems to help you find one which will suit your wallet and match your business needs

A few years ago, if you said you were a 'Soho user' and wanted a computer to suit, you would have been on the receiving end of some very peculiar looks. These days, however, the acronym Soho has an altogether less suggestive meaning, at least as far as PCs are concerned. It is now taken to mean small office/home office and Soho users are people who use a computer, rather unsurprisingly, in a small or home office.

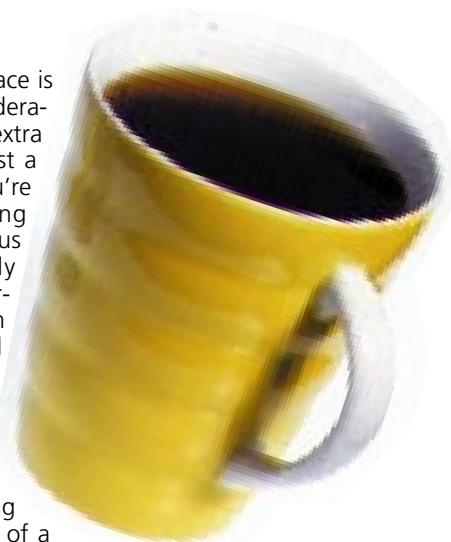
A small office is one that has one or two PCs but doesn't rely on them completely for day-to-day operation. Rather, they are used for such tasks as producing letters with a word processor or managing financial information using a spreadsheet. A home office, on the other hand, is one where a PC is used for finishing off work in the evenings or weekends, or is perhaps used to run home finances or even a home-based business.

For most people, the price of a PC makes it an investment, whether or not it's used for business purposes. When making any investment, it makes sense to go for something that is going to hold its value. In PC terms, this means buying a machine that is not going to be out of date and underpowered in three years' time.

At the moment, if you want to balance price and performance and protect your investment, a machine with at least a Pentium 100 processor is the wisest choice. Sixteen megabytes of Ram is a must, as is a 15in monitor.

Adequate storage space is also an important consideration. It's difficult to add extra later so you need at least a 1Gb hard disk. Even if you're not interested in playing games, the fact that serious software is increasingly being supplied in CD format means that a CD-Rom drive is also essential and it should be at least quad-speed. CDs also take up much less space and are more sturdy than floppy disks, which is useful when it comes to digging them out of the bottom of a filing cabinet if something needs to be reinstalled. What else you buy as part of a PC system depends on your needs. For example, a modem can double up as an occasional fax machine and is essential for e-mail and accessing the Internet.

If your PC contains important information then it should be backed up regularly – forget floppy disks and go for some kind of tape streamer. Finally, you should make sure you get a good warranty. Most manufacturers offer 12 months on-site maintenance, with the option of extending this by another couple of years. If your PC is important to your business then this is worth considering – the last thing you want is to wait for a week while it is sent away for repair.



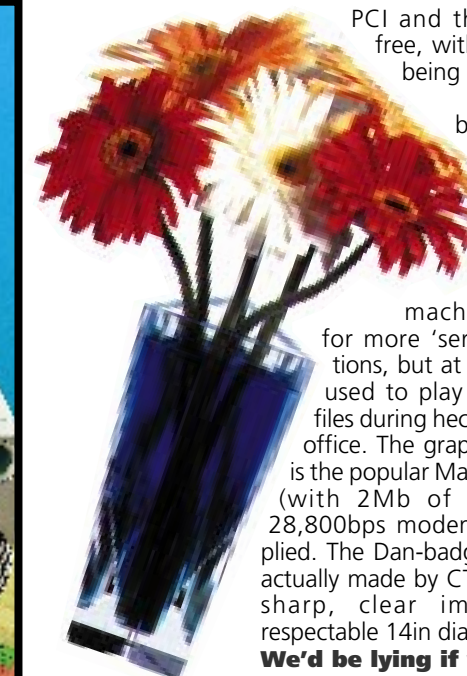
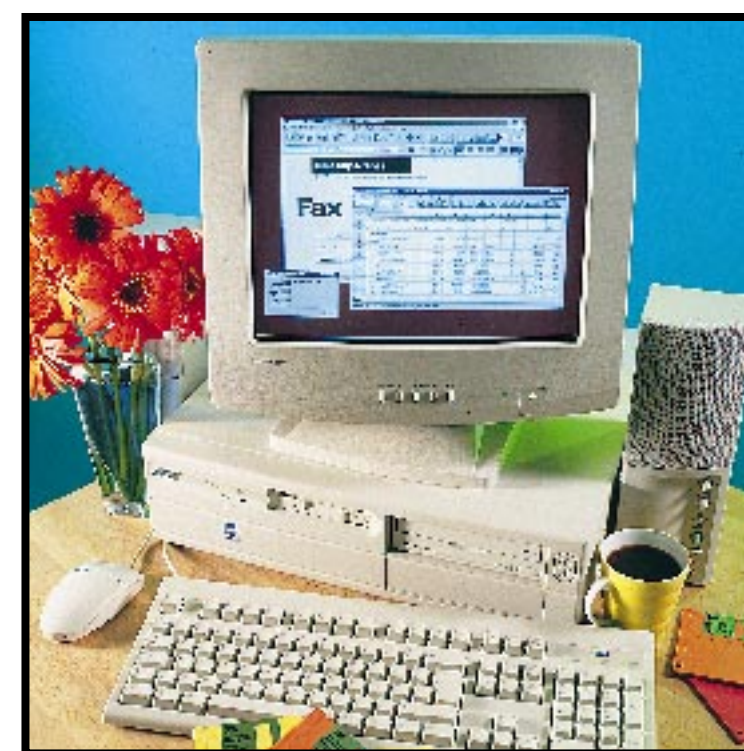
Products Dan Dantum Home Plus-133

Manufacturers are at long last facing up to the fact that many people who buy a computer from them will not have used one before, let alone tried to take one out of its box and plug all the pieces together. So most are finally making attempts to whip their documentation into shape and although manuals still vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, almost all are a great improvement on the badly-translated and typo-ridden handbooks that accompanied

most machines a few years ago.

The documentation that is supplied with the Dan Dantum Home Plus-133 PC consists of only a single folded A4 sheet. However, it is concise and explains everything that a novice user needs to do to get a machine set up, switched on and working.

The Home Plus-133 has a desktop case and, as you would expect from one of the larger PC manufacturers, the internal layout is neat and tidy. All cables are tied back and nothing gets in the way of anything particularly important. Access to the two free Simm slots is wide open and there are four



PCI and three Isa slots free, with one of each being shared.

A Soundblaster AWE32 sound card is fitted, which is perhaps a little excessive for a machine intended for more 'serious' applications, but at least it can be used to play relaxing Midi files during hectic times in the office. The graphics controller is the popular Matrox Millennium (with 2Mb of Ram) and a 28,800bps modem is also supplied. The Dan-badged monitor is actually made by CTX and gives a sharp, clear image on its respectable 14in diagonal.

We'd be lying if we said that the Dantum Home Plus-133 was the fastest PC in the world, but it's certainly one of the fastest Pentium 133 machines we've ever tested. Add to that the facts that it's well specified and competitively priced, and you end up with a PC that has much to recommend it.

£1,897.63 (incl VAT)
Dan: 0181 830 1100

Dan Dantum Home Plus-133

Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5



AST Advantage! 624

Once the packing tape is off, the first thing out of the AST box is a large, colourful sheet that explains how to set up your system. As with the other machines under consideration in this review, it's pleasing to see a manufacturer trying to help its customers, rather than leaving them with a handful of cables to sort out themselves.



Once the final Windows 95 configuration is complete, AST owners are treated to a multimedia presentation from a sincere American couple who explain how to get the most from your new PC. The delivery is a little cheesy, but the presentation is actually quite useful and certainly informative for new PC users. Other presentations explain aspects of the computer's hardware and software, and the whole thing has been well thought out and pitched at exactly the right level for beginners.

As if multimedia tutorials weren't enough, AST has even gone to the trouble of providing its own user interface, called Works II. This consists of a blue spot that sits on the desktop and offers an alternative way of navigating through all the different software. Moving the mouse pointer over the spot causes a menu for such things as on-line help and installed applications to appear.

In theory, Works II can be used for everything and Windows 95 can be all but forgotten. That's not to say Works II is better than Windows 95, it's just different, and whichever interface you elect to use depends on your preference.

The 624's slimline case has only a single button on the front for power, which will be no doubt be welcomed by those people who've accidentally pressed reset and lost a morning's work when groping for the floppy disk eject button.

As with all slimline cases, the smaller-than-average size of the 624 means that expansion isn't one of its strong points. There's only one free 5 1/4 in drive bay, one dedicated PCI slot and one shared Isa/PCI slot. Space restrictions mean the slots are mounted verti-



cally on a riser board, at 90 degrees to the motherboard. There's plenty of room around the shared slot but access to the two on the other side is a little more difficult. Their positioning makes fitting a full-length card out of the question and the PCI slot is difficult to use because of the tangle of ribbon cables and two 8Mb Simms that lie below it.

The 16-bit ESS1788 audio and 64-bit SiS 6205 graphics controllers are both integrated onto the motherboard, which is fortunate as there isn't anywhere else they could go. The SiS 6205 gives a steady image, capable of a resolution of 1,024x768 in 8-bit (256) colour, 800x600 in 16-bit (65,536) colour and 640x480 in 32-bit (16 million) colour. The AST-badged 15in monitor has a viewable diagonal of about 13.75in and gives a respectable image.

Although it's an ideal beginner's machine and a more than capable performer, the Advantage! 624 is a little expensive when compared to some of the other PCs in this group test. This factor, and its limited expansion potential, means that unless ease of use is a priority, more demanding users might be wiser to look elsewhere.

○ £1,799
○ AST: 0990 611611

AST Advantage! 624

Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Viglen Power 133 PC

This Viglen, also known as the Genie P5/133, comes with a large guide that clearly explains how to set up the whole system. Its tower case is large but it won't dominate your desk if you don't fancy using it as a floor-standing system. It can also be stood on its side as the CD-Rom drive has clips that will hold discs in a vertical position.

There's no shortage of room inside the Viglen's case, and it's good to see an internal layout that is tidy and almost devoid of clutter. There are two Isa and three PCI slots, with a further slot shared between the two. There is nothing in their way, which means plenty of room for expansion cards of all lengths. The two 8Mb Simms are a little less accessible as they are tucked away behind the 3 1/2 in drive bays, but getting at the two empty Simm slots is relatively straightforward.

The Viglen comes with a 14,400bps modem and has 16-bit sound integrated onto the motherboard rather than being provided through a separate card. The ATI Mach 64 PCI graphics card is typically excellent. It is capable of a resolution of 1,280x1,024 in 16 colours and a more usable 800x600 in 16-bit colour. The Viglen-badged 15in monitor is also impressive. With a diagonal of just over 14in, it gives a rock-steady and well-formed display, courtesy of the simple digital controls.

The Viglen Power 133 Multimedia PC is a capable performer at a good price. A safe buy for anyone who wants a PC from an established company.



○ £1,741.37 (incl VAT)
○ Viglen: 0181 758 7000

Viglen Power 133 PC

Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Red Box Winstation Entrepreneur

Red Box's Winstation Entrepreneur uses a Cyrix 6x86 133+ chip rather than an Intel Pentium processor. Although the chip itself is rated at 110MHz, the 6x86 is claimed to perform more like a 133MHz Pentium, hence its name. Our benchtests certainly bear this out, and although the Winstation was outperformed by the Dan and Gateway machines, its performance is nevertheless respectable when compared with a typical Pentium 133 machine.

Its tower case is larger than most and a rather novel system is used to hold it together. There are no screws at the rear of the machine and to get inside the front panel has to be smartly pulled away and then the metal cover can be slid off. This system foxed us until we read the manual, and although it may prevent an equally dim, opportunistic thief from getting at the valuable internal components, we weren't too sure of its security. The lack of any sort of sturdy fastening means the case can be opened in seconds, which is not necessarily a good thing.

The inside of the Winstation is an expansion junky's paradise and there's ample room to add almost anything you want.

The motherboard is neatly laid out and there are few trailing cables. There are five Isa and four PCI slots, with one of each acting as a shared slot. There is 16Mb of EDO Ram by way of two 8Mb Simms and there are six free Simm slots. In other words, any old 4Mb Simm you may have lying around can be put to good use rather than being left to depreciate. There are also brackets for a further two hard disk drives and there are three free 5 1/4 in drive bays.

A 28,800bps modem and 16-bit wavetable sound are provided on a single Isa card – a Miro MiroConnect 34 – and the graphics controller is a Videologic Grafistar 600. The 15in Hitachi 15MVX monitor isn't quite so pleasing – distortions at either side of the screen couldn't be rectified and the focus wasn't properly set. This could have been caused by a knock during delivery as Hitachi isn't known for dodgy displays.

If you want expansion potential beyond your wildest imaginings, then this is the machine for you. It's also quick, well-specified and well-priced.

○ £1,909.38 (incl VAT)
○ Red Box: 01480 405541

Winstation Entrepreneur

Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5



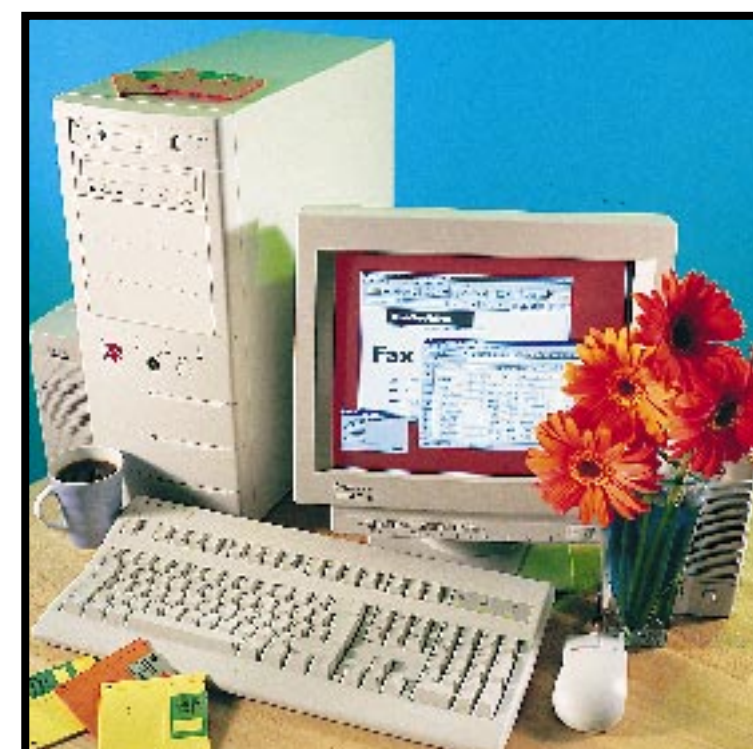
Olympian Evolution 2000 CX 150

Olympian is a relative newcomer to the PC industry and first started selling ready-built PCs a couple of years ago. Pleasingly, its documentation is well up to scratch and the lucidly-written manual covers everything from using the keyboard to resolving interrupt conflicts. One nice touch is the bag of assorted screws that comes with the system – just what you need when you inevitably drop the casing screws in an inaccessible spot behind your desk.

The Evolution 2000 comes in a tower unit which can be stood on its side on a desk or used as a floor-standing model. Inside, all cables are neatly tied back, leaving plenty of room to get at the various components. There is 16Mb of Ram on two 8Mb Simms, leaving two slots free, and there are four PCI and three Isa slots, with one of each being shared. There's also room to add two further internal 3 1/2 in devices and two of the three 5 1/4 in bays are free.

Like the Red Box, the Evolution 2000 uses a Cyrix 6x86 processor, in this case the faster 150+ (clocked at 120MHz). Although it's supposed to perform like a Pentium 150, the test results for this machine put it more in line with some of the faster Pentium 133s. This isn't because its performance is below par but because the Dan and Gateway PCs are so fast.

A Soundblaster AWE 32 sound card is fitted as well as a 28,800bps modem. The graphics card is the excellent Matrox Millenium (with 2Mb of Ram), which is capable of 32-bit colour at 800x600 and 16-bit colour at 1,024x768. The 15in Microscan4V/ADI monitor, however, is less satisfactory. Its diagonal of just under 13.75in is reasonable and



its focus is generally sharp, but it proved impossible to get an image with parallel edges – something that we again put down to a heavy-handed courier.

Although by no means as fast as the processor would have you believe, the Evolution 2000 CX 150 is nevertheless a swift PC at a sensible price.

- £2,109.13 (incl VAT)
- Olympian: 0181 880 4222

Evolution 2000 CX 150					
Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Compaq Presario 9230

Compaq is one of the largest PC manufacturers in the world and, in the past, its products have commanded something of a price premium. These days, however, its pricing is a little more competitive and the Presario 9230 costs more or less the same as a similar machine from one of the smaller manufacturers.

It is supplied in a tower case and has two wide feet on the bottom, so you can safely place it on the floor without worrying about someone accidentally knocking it over. Alternatively, the feet can be removed and the case stood on its side and used as a desktop unit.

Compaq supplies a couple of slim manuals with the Presario: one identifies the sockets at the rear of the machine, the other addresses common start-up problems. There's also a large, colourful pictorial guide to setting up the system, a job that's further simplified by the fact that all the plugs and sockets are colour-coded – a nice feature that will allay the fears of a nervous PC novice.

When it comes to opening the Presario's casing, Compaq continues to impress with its user-friendly approach. The removal of six large thumbscrews (no screwdriver needed) allows the two side panels to be slid away, revealing the interior. The Presario's internal layout is divided into two halves (each covered by one of the side panels). The motherboard is mounted vertically on one and access to the various components is relatively clear. The neat layout is marred by a mass of cables that trail from one side of the motherboard to the other, although they are tied together and long enough to be pushed aside when necessary.

On the other side of the case, behind a vertical metal panel, are the expansion slots. There are four Isa and two PCI slots (one of each is shared) and all are free as the sound and video are integrated onto the motherboard. Even the 19,600bps

Home/office PCs compared

Manufacturer	Model	Processor	Ram	HDD*
Amstrad Direct	PC9555i	Pentium 133	16Mb	1Gb
AST	Advantage! 624	Pentium 100	16Mb	1.2Gb
Compaq	Presario 9230	Pentium 133	16Mb	1Gb
Dan	Dantum Home Plus-133	Pentium 133	16Mb EDO	1.2Gb
Gateway	P5-133	Pentium 133	16Mb	1.2Gb
Olympian	Evolution 2000 CX 150	Cyrix 6x86 150+	16Mb EDO	1.7Gb
Red Box	Winstation Entrepreneur	Cyrix 6x86 133+	16Mb EDO	1.2Gb
Viglen	Power 133 Multimedia PC (Genie P5/133)	Pentium 133	16Mb	1Gb

● = Yes ○ = No . *HDD = hard disk drive.

modem is a proprietary Compaq model that fits into a special separate slot. The Presario comes with only 8Mb of Ram as standard and this is integrated onto the motherboard, leaving four Simm slots free. We fitted two 4Mb Simms for the purpose of our tests, but an extra 8Mb can be bought from Compaq for around £140 plus VAT.

The Compaq-badged 15in monitor's diagonal is a little on the small side at around 13.5in, but the image was sharp and suffered from no detectable deformities. The S3 Trio64V graphics controller is also fine but limited to 16-bit colour at both 640x480 and 800x600, and 8-bit at 1,024x768.

Of all the machines in this group test, the Presario 9230 was the only one that gave the impression of being designed rather than simply being assembled. That didn't do much for its performance, however, which, to put it politely, was surprisingly lacklustre.

- £2,157.29 (incl cost of Compaq 8Mb of Ram expansion and VAT)
- Compaq: 0181 332 3000

Compaq Presario 9230					
Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5



Home/Office PCs (continued)

CD-Rom	Soundcard	Screen	Modem	Software	Other	Warranty
Quad-speed	●	15in	14.4	Wordperfect Works 2, Quicken 4, PC Comms Office, assorted multimedia titles	Speakers	1 year on-site
Six-speed	●	15in	28.8	MS Works 4, Intuit Quicken 4, AST Works II, assorted multimedia titles	Speakers	1 year on-site
Quad-speed	●	15in	19.6	MS Works 4.0, Intuit Quicken 4, assorted multimedia titles	Speakers	3 years, first year on-site
Eight-speed	●	15in	28.8	MS Works 4, Intuit Quicken 5, Lotus Organizer, assorted multimedia titles	Speakers	1 year back-to-base
Eight-speed	●	15in	28.8	MS Office Professional	Speakers, tape drive	3 years back-to-base
Six-speed	●	15in	28.8	Lotus Smartsuite, Corel Draw 4	Speakers	1 year on-site, lifetime back-to-base
Quad-speed	●	15in	28.8	MiroConnect Office	Speakers	1 year on-site
Six-speed	●	15in	14.4	MS Works 4, MS Publisher, MS Money, assorted multimedia titles	Speakers	1 year back-to-base

Amstrad PC9555i

Perhaps as a hangover from the company's hi-fi days, Amstrad's PCs have sometimes been perceived as lesser relations of the systems produced by bigger manufacturers in the field.

But that perception should change now that Viglen has become the sole computer division of Amstrad (Amstrad bought Viglen about a year ago). Marketing, purchasing, and manufacturing of Amstrad PCs are all now handled by Viglen.

The documentation supplied with the PC9555i is certainly up to Viglen's usual standard. There are two manuals: one giving informa-

tion on setting up and configuring the PC, and the other providing a broad overview of PCs in general. The latter is well-written and although it sometimes wanders into more technical areas, it nevertheless provides useful information for novices and seasoned users alike.

The PC9555i comes in a slim-line desktop case which doesn't offer anywhere near the same expansion capability as a standard desktop case, let alone a tower. In fact, the 9555i's case is even more cramped than usual for a slimline system, having only one PCI and one Isa slot for further expansion. The slots are mounted horizontally and the two Isa slots on the other side of the riser

(only suitable for half-length cards) are taken up by a 14,400bps modem and a 16-bit sound card.

Access to the two remaining Simm slots is clear but if you want to get at the IDE interfaces on the motherboard, the modem and sound card have to be removed first as the interfaces are buried somewhere beneath them.

The S3 Trio 64 graphics controller is integrated onto the motherboard. Although it can be pushed all the way to a resolution of 1,280x1,024, this is only in 16 colours. The more usable 800x600 and 640x480 resolutions, however, are both limited to 16-bit colour.

The 15in monitor, badged with the Amstrad logo, has a respectable viewable diagonal of just under 14in, but the sides aren't quite parallel, regardless of how much you adjust the pin-cushion setting. Since the monitor is the same model as the faultless one supplied with the Dan system, this problem is probably a one-off.

The Amstrad PC9555i is a reasonable machine. Its performance could hardly be described as breathtaking but it's satisfactory and, what's more, it's cheap. That low price isn't without sacrifice, however, and the PC9555i is not a machine for users planning more than the most minimal of upgrades.

- £1,577 (incl VAT)
- Amstrad Direct: 0990 811811

Amstrad PC 9555i					
Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5



What makes a PC fast?

It will come as no surprise to learn that the speed of a PC is ultimately governed by the speed of its **processor**. However, that's not the end of the story, because a processor's performance can be adversely affected if the rest of the components in the system are not up to scratch. When part of a computer slows down the performance of the rest of the components, it's called a bottleneck.

Unfortunately, a computer's processor is so phenomenally fast when compared with the other components that bottlenecks are inevitable, so the trick is to try and reduce their effect.

● **Ram** (random access memory). When a program is running on a computer, ideally it and everything it needs is stored in Ram. Ram works at speeds that are measured in nanoseconds (a thousand millionth of a second), which makes it an ideal medium for storing information that needs to be accessed quickly. When running Windows, however, free Ram is usually in short supply as it tends to be full of other things, usually Windows itself. The data needed by programs that are running has to be put somewhere, and if there's no room in Ram it goes into virtual Ram – the hard disk. Unfortunately, it takes around a million times longer to get something off a hard disk than it does from Ram, so it's best to try and avoid using it. In other words, have plenty of Ram – 16Mb is the sensible minimum.

● **Hard disk** Generally, the larger the size of a hard disk, the faster it is and the higher its data transfer rate (the amount of data it can send to the computer each second). The connection between it and the computer is also important. For this purpose, most modern computers have an EIDE (Enhanced Integrated Drive Electronics) interface which supports both large disk sizes and high transfer rates. Older computers have an IDE interface, which is slower.

● **Cache** Although Ram has a data transfer rate thousands of times faster than the fastest hard disk, even this rate is slow when compared to the speed of the processor. To help improve performance, most PCs have a small amount of exceptionally fast Ram that sits between the processor and the main Ram, called a cache.

A cache controller tries to guess what data the processor wants next and stores it in the cache. If it guesses correctly (a 'hit'), then the processor receives the data a little more quickly, if not (a 'miss'), then it has to get it from normal Ram. Unfortunately, Ram fast enough to be used in a cache is very expensive and so PCs tend only to have a small amount, usually 256Kb, called a Level II cache.

EDO Ram is a relatively recent invention. Rather than rely on a separate cache, EDO Ram has its own – a small amount on each Ram chip. In theory, EDO Ram is faster than normal Ram with a Level II cache but in practice, there's little difference between the two. Surprisingly, EDO Ram with a Level II cache is significantly faster and some manufacturers are now using this apparently redundant combination.

● **Bus** A computer's bus is like a road along which data travels. The faster the bus, the faster the data can travel. All PCs have an Isa (Industry Standard Architecture) bus, which, because of its low speed, is best reserved for devices like sound cards. A faster alternative is Vesa local bus (VLB) but this has now been all but eclipsed by the superior PCI local bus format.

● **CD-Rom drive** If a program needs to read data from the CD-Rom drive, the drive should be as fast as possible. Most multimedia PCs have a quad-speed CD-Rom drive as standard but some manufacturers are already fitting six and eight-speed models, and there are even ten-speed models available.



Gateway P5-133

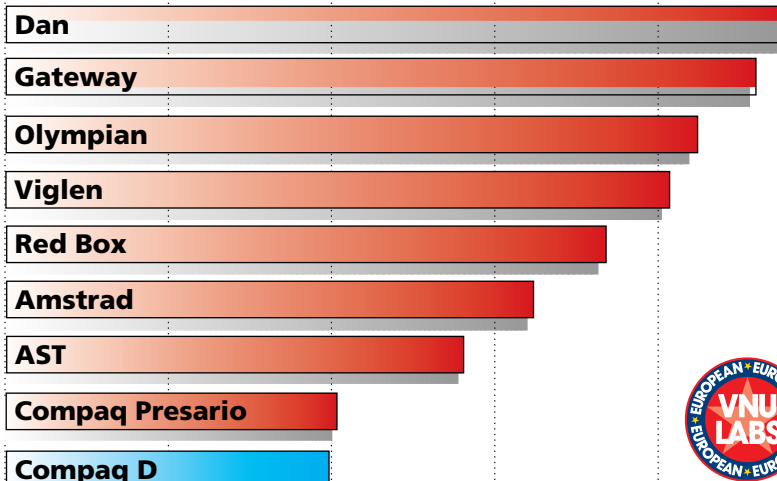
Gateway has really gone to town on the documentation for its machines. The 'Info Book' supplied with the P5-133 has colour photographs explaining how to connect everything, descriptions of the various components and the sockets they plug into, and even an introduction to Windows 95.

Although intended for use as a desktop unit, the P5-133's large case has small plastic feet along each of its sides which suggest it can be used as a tower system. Since the CD-Rom drive lacks the necessary clips on the disc tray, however, such a rotation would be ill-advised.

Internally, there's ample scope for expansion, partly because the box is larger than average but also because it has a neat motherboard layout. No cables get in the way of the important components and there's nothing but fresh air around the expansion slots, of which there ▶



Performance tests



NOTES: NSTL benchmarks from which this chart was generated were performed in the What PC? VNU labs. Performance is measured against a Compaq 486DX4/100. In all tests, a longer bar indicates better system performance.



Do I really need a PC?

Buying a PC can be a nightmare at the best of times but if you're buying for a small business, the situation can be further complicated if you ask yourself the question: 'Do I actually need a PC?' Your local high street store will probably recommend you buy one, which may not be the right answer for you, and getting the best advice can be an expensive business.

Fortunately, help is at hand and the Department of Trade and Industry has a

number of useful contacts that can provide free and independent advice for small businesses. By contacting the Business Link Signpost line, you can be put in touch with its nearest Business Link centre (there are 223 nationwide), where you can get advice on anything from which software is best for your needs to whether or not you should go on line.

● **Business Link Signpost line:**
0345 567765

are four PCI and three Isa slots, one of each being shared. Two 8Mb Simms are fitted, leaving two slots free.

The P5-133 has an S3 Trio64 PCI graphics controller, a 28,800bps modem and a Creative Labs 16-bit sound card.

Although we know Gateway monitors are sound, all the ones we've seen in the past have had a problem of some sort and the 15in Vivitron 15 supplied with the P5-133 is no exception. Like all Vivitron monitors, it uses a screen technology similar to the Sony Trinitron's and the near-flat screen has the same two characteristic faint black lines running across it.

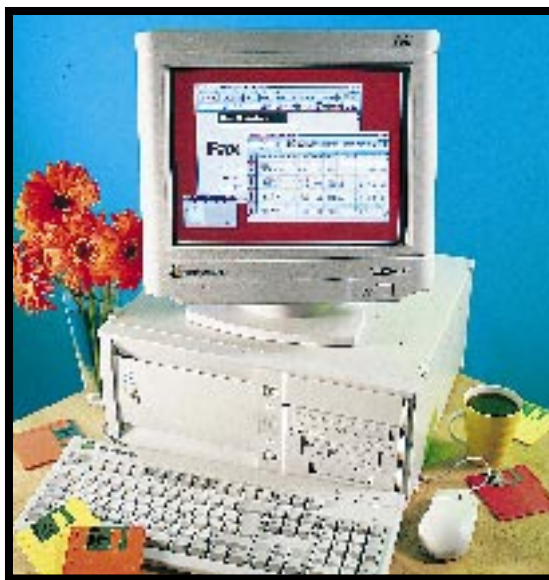
Unfortunately, the image was very poor. Icons on the desktop had a pronounced shadow and the only time the focus would appear normal is after several pints of beer. We can only assume these monitors are extremely sensitive to knocks during transit, as there is no way Gateway would knowingly send out units with faults such as these.

The P5-133 has a CD-Rom and a floppy disk drive, and was the only machine in the group test to have a backup tape drive. This was a Colorado model and although the supplied tape can only store up to 680Mb of data (around two-thirds

of the hard disk's capacity), it is still adequate for backing up important data and is much more convenient than using floppy disks.

The Gateway P5-133 is another outrageously fast PC and its price would make it a welcome addition to any desktop.

Unfortunately, the monitor supplied was dreadful, and we can only hope that its problems were caused by



Leasing

Buying a single PC is probably not beyond the capacity of most small business users and, with care, will probably have little impact on their overall financial situation. Buying several PCs, on the other hand, is another matter entirely. Even if you or your company has sufficient cashflow to be able to spend several thousand pounds on computer hardware, it may not be a good idea. It's an unfortunate fact of life that any computer, no matter how powerful, will eventually be superseded by something faster and cheaper. If this happens with one £2,000 PC, after three years, all is not lost. With £20,000 worth of machines, however, it's more of a problem.

One way around this is not to buy a PC but instead to lease one. Leasing is a bit like hire purchase. The leasing company buys the equipment for you and then you pay it a fixed amount for the use of the machines over a number of years. You do end up paying more for the equipment, and if you don't keep up the payments, the leasing company will take it back. The big advantage with this method is that payments are broken down into much smaller amounts that can be absorbed more easily. Some leasing companies even offer the option of upgrading the equipment during the leasing period, with little or no increase in payments.

● **The Systems House:** 0181 870 8800

handling in transit rather than an inherent fault.

○ £1,912.90 (incl VAT)

○ Gateway 0800 552000

Gateway P5-133

Performance	1	2	3	4	5
Features	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5



When it came to deciding which machine should be awarded Best Buy for this group test, we

considered only one factor - suitability for the intended application. Obviously, this encompasses a whole variety of aspects, such as performance, expansion potential and value for money, but the question we asked ourselves was: 'Is this a PC that offers pretty much everything a Soho user would want?' The machine we felt fitted the bill was the Dan Dantum Home Plus-133. For a Pentium 133 machine, it is phenomenally fast and that speaks volumes about its components and the thought that went into its design. It's also extremely well-priced at only £1,615 plus VAT. The one-year back-to-base warranty can be converted to on-site for an extra £35 and there's an option to extend this cover further. Overall, the Dantum Home Plus-133 is an excellent buy.



As a runner-up, we have to mention the Gateway P5-133. In terms of performance, it almost matched the Dan machine and it had the useful added extra of a tape drive. But it was badly let down by the poor image quality of its monitor, and that fact alone prevents us from recommending it more strongly. We have no hesitation, however, in recommending the Viglen Power 133 Multimedia PC. Excellent in every respect, it's a capable performer with high-quality components. One of its most attractive features is the price - just over £1,700 including VAT.

Julian Prokaza