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Recommended PC gaming chairs

Tim Clark Feb 5, 2015

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Page 1 of 5



"Do you get paid to sit around all day testing games?" "No, we also do chairs."

Between recent articles about **the effects of sitting down** on your body, and our experimentation **with standing desks**, you might think PC Gamer has fallen out of love with the humble chair. Dear reader, that could not be further from the truth. As

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gamers and office workers, our writers spend a significant chunk of each day sat on their money makers in front of screens. Given that most of us don't plan to change that anytime soon, it only makes sense to do so in a great chair. So that's what I set out to find.

When budgeting a PC setup, how much do you normally allocate for a new chair? Probably a lot less than you're willing to spend on the graphics card, but consider how integral the chair is to the overall experience. GPUs will come and go, but a good chair can last you a decade, and unless bionics researchers finally buck their collective act up, you're not going to be upgrading to spine 2.0 anytime soon. It makes sense to look after the vanilla model.

I wanted to find three chairs—budget, midrange and high-end—that maximised comfort, support and value. I knew I needed expert advice to help narrow my search, so I spoke with Melissa Afterman, **MS CPE**, a Senior Principal Ergonomist with **VSI Risk Management & Ergonomics**, Inc. who

specialises in workstation setups. "Absolutely chairs are still okay," she told me. "Yes we know that sitting too long is bad for you. The reality is that standing too long is just as bad for you, and so the answer is movement. Taking breaks, getting up at least every hour and moving, or changing your position from standing to sitting every hour so that you're not standing too long either."

When searching for a new chair, aside from essential-but-obvious tweakable elements like seat height and armrests, Melissa told me a key element to consider is the backrest: "If you're typing and working at the computer, you really want more upright support so that you can maintain neutral spine posture and let the chair hold you up," she said. "But when you switch to gaming mode, you may want to recline a little bit to relax your lower back, while still having good support in that position. So a locking backrest and/or some sort of tension control is important."



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- **Best gaming processors**
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Another feature to look for, though it tends to be found on more expensive models, is a seat pan slider. This enables you to slide the positioning of your butt forwards or backwards relative to the backrest. “The nice thing about that,” explained Afterman, “is that if you’re tall you can get more support behind your leg, and if you’re short it can be set more shallow so you can actually sit all the way back in the chair.”

When it comes to fabric and other materials, it’s pretty much a purely aesthetic decision—though whether you prefer plush leather or breathable mesh should be dictated by how hot you are. No, really. Afterman explained: “Some people run cold, some people run warm, and I think that when you talk about the fabric choices it depends on personal comfort and aesthetics.” As for what you should definitely avoid, Afterman recommended steering clear of overly rigid seat pans and fixed height armrests—both are likely to lead to discomfort.

In terms of how much you should expect to spend, she suggested that in order to tick all the boxes an ergonomist would hope to find, \$300-400 ought to be enough for a supportive chair that looks and feels great. Below that, there are going to be tradeoffs. Likewise, if you’re willing to spend more, you can open up greater levels of customisation and luxury.

Testing chairs

Armed with her advice, I began cross-referencing customer reviews with chair round-ups written elsewhere to create a shortlist. Over the course of three months I then called in samples and tested them, with help from the variously shaped rear-ends of the PC Gamer team.

Whilst it’s impossible to be exhaustive with our first pass at a subject this big, I’m confident that any of our picks will delight you (and your butt). Of the chairs we tested, the one I believe offers PC gamers the best value is the Office Master OM5. It has all the ergonomic functionality of name brand chairs at twice its price, impeccable build quality, and good looks that are substantially customisable. What’s unusual about the OM5, though, is that it actually dispenses with a lot of the fiddling found on ergonomic chairs in favour of a simpler approach.

On the next page: our recommended PC gaming chair.

Page 1: Introduction to our recommended PC gaming chairs

Page 2: Our recommended PC gaming chair

Page 3: Our budget chair recommendation

Page 4: Our high-end chair recommendation

Page 5: Wrapping up: competitors and future testing



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Page 2 of 5



The regular and high-backed versions of the OM5, just hanging out

Our recommended PC gaming chair: Office Master OM5 Series

On the face of it, the **Office Master OM5** (\$497 with armrests from Ergodirect, **or \$519 on Amazon**) sounds like the snake oil of seating. The marketing materials describe it as “a self weighing chair that intuitively responds to a wide range of

OFFICE MASTER OM5

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body weights and sizes without the need for manual tension.” Essentially: don’t worry about all those levers and knobs on the other chairs, this one will magically work out what your butt and back need, no problemo. My skepticism didn’t last long, though, because when it comes to the OM5, sitting is believing.

These are the elements of the OM5 which are adjustable: the height (self explanatory), the front seat “waterfall” lip, which you can curl forwards if your thighs want the extra space, and the armrests, which can be slid back and forth, and be rotated towards your body. Where all the smart stuff happens is around your hips. Lean back, apply a little forward pressure, and the seat pan shifts forwards while the backrest reclines in response, articulating smoothly thanks to wheels on runners that function much like the ones in desk draw sliders. It takes a little getting used to, but transitioning from upright work mode to relaxing whilst playing or watching swiftly becomes a cinch.

Aside from the fact it doesn’t require regular fussing-with to feel right, what I like most about the OM5 is that the natural tension in the backrest is neither too tight nor too loose. It requires just the right amount of effort to make the seat and backrest shift in tandem, but I didn’t find myself slipping around when I wanted to remain stationary. In fact, the more time I spent in the chair, the more I found myself enjoying the opportunity to move around relatively freely, taking the opportunity to lean back regularly rather than getting stuck in the same position for extended periods. As Afterman noted, it’s vital to find a chair that encourages movement, and the OM5 does just that.

The workmanship on the chair, from its lightweight aluminium base to the slatted PolyFlex backrest, is robust and impressive, giving it a feel that’s far closer to the higher-end models we tested than the budget choices. The 12-year warranty which the OM5 comes with also speaks of confidence in the build quality. There’s plenty of scope for personalisation, too, with cushion fabric available in multiple colours and a leather option, should you be channeling a more ‘80s power exec vibe. **Amazon sells the Office Master OM5 in many configurations.** The backrest can also be ordered in a tall version (pictured right in main image).



That crescent-shape is where the smart backrest mechanism lives.

The OM5 is compelling because it gives you close to high-end quality for a midrange price. You feel like you're getting in on a secret that only seat nerds know about. However, I should also note that one of our testers didn't like the moving back. So, if you're not convinced by the idea of its 'look mom, no levers!' trickery, consider checking out Office Master's new **Affirm series** (AF528 model tested, \$434 specced as pictured) as an alternative, which offers a more standard suite of adjustments. It's another excellent ergonomic office chair, though for my money feels a little less special than the **Office Master OM5**. But, if the idea of being able to lock your tweaks seems essential, the Affirm is a safer and slightly cheaper bet.

On the next page: our budget chair recommendation.

OFFICE MASTER AFFIRM



The Affirm is a more conventional task chair than the OM5, but also excellent.

Page 1: Introduction to our recommended PC gaming chairs

Page 2: Our recommended PC gaming chair

Page 3: Our budget chair recommendation

Page 4: Our high-end chair recommendation

Page 5: Wrapping up: competitors and future testing



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