

LINUX DISTRIBUTION

# Ubuntu 5.04



**Andy Hudson** hopes this is one hedgehog that won't get squashed.

**BUYER INFO**

Easy-to-use distro. Also consider: Xandros, Linspire or Mandriva.

- **DEVELOPER** Ubuntu Project
- **WEB** [www.ubuntulinux.org](http://www.ubuntulinux.org)
- **PRICE** Free under GPL

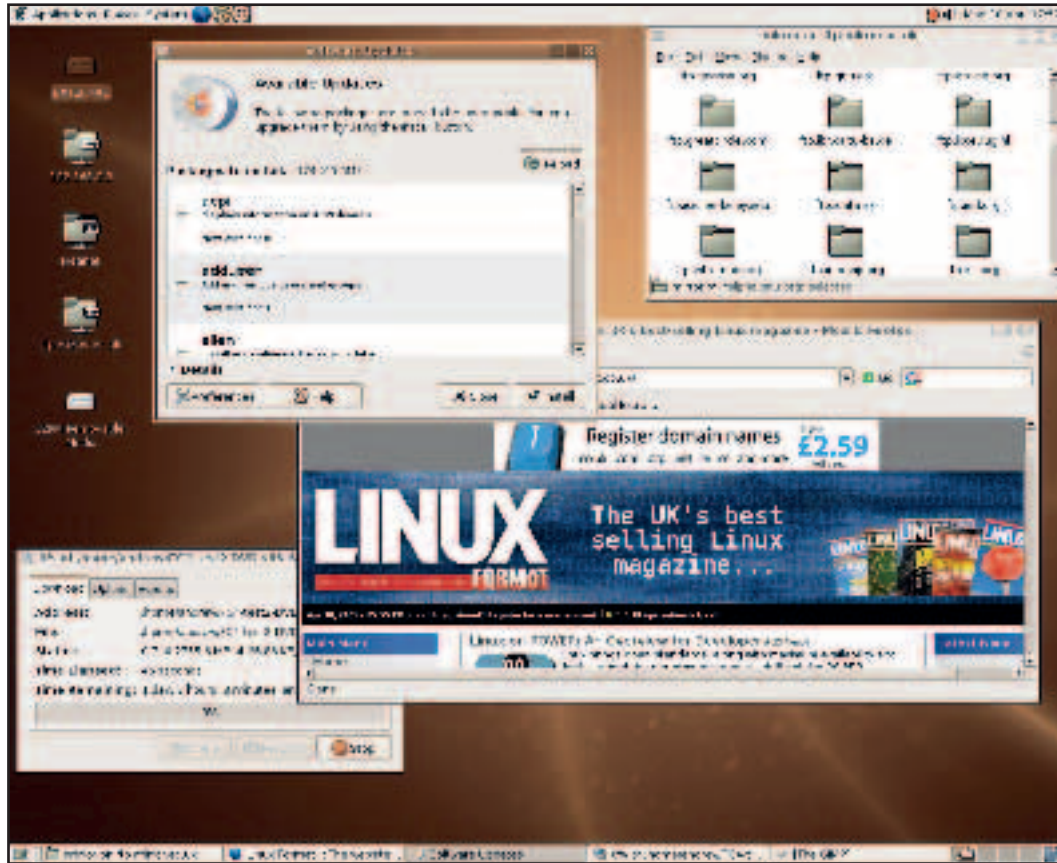


The Ubuntu team only launched their first release (4.10, aka The Warty Warthog) in October 2004. Since then, Ubuntu has become one of the most downloaded distros available today. What's its secret? The slogan says it all: Linux for Human Beings. This is a distro that you shouldn't have to be a geek to use.

Version 5.04 – The Hoary Hedgehog – comes on a single CD and doesn't even use its full capacity. Compare this with the handful of CDs that you need to install such distros as SUSE, Fedora and Mandriva and it's clear that Ubuntu is trying hard to be easy to configure and get going.

Similarly, it doesn't baffle the new user with a puzzle of software choices. In fact, you don't even get to select individual packages for installation; rather you get the predetermined set of software recommended by Ubuntu (see *Hoary's Core Software box*, below right). Ubuntu has stuck with Gnome as standard and provides the usual Gnome software bundle.

If you prefer KDE you should look at Kubuntu, Ubuntu's little sister born in March 2005 ([www.kubuntu.org](http://www.kubuntu.org)), or use *Synaptic*, Ubuntu's package manager of choice, to install KDE and its apps.



**Look beyond the brown Human theme to see a solid Debian-based distro and a fresh approach to Linux.**

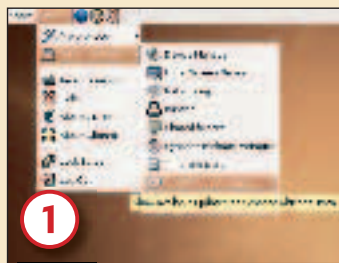
We installed Ubuntu two different ways. First, we upgraded our test laptop from Warty using *Synaptic*. Ubuntu is based on Debian – and as *LXF* readers are aware, Debian has a superb package management tool in *apt*. Ubuntu uses *Synaptic* to provide a GUI front-end to *apt*, and upgrading is a simple matter of pointing the

repositories to 'Hoary' rather than 'Warty'; clicking Reload, selecting Mark All Upgrades and clicking Apply. After *Synaptic* downloaded and installed 798 packages (approximately 400MB), Ubuntu upgraded itself flawlessly. It will download and install any upgrades it can find – automatically. Moving seamlessly from Gnome 2.8 to

Gnome 2.10 shows the strength of *apt* and how smoothly it handles dependency problems.

After about an hour of work, *Synaptic* proudly proclaims that it has finished, and you are ready to work on your new Hoary computer. We were very happy with the whole upgrade experience, and after a few hours of

**HOW TO UPGRADE SOFTWARE IN 5.04**



**1** Click on **Ubuntu Update Manager** under **System > Administration**.



**2** Choose the repositories you want to take software updates from.



**3** Select which components to use from each individual repository.



**4** After the repository data has been downloaded, de-select the packages you don't want and click **Apply** to let Ubuntu work its magic.



**Kubuntu is largely the same as Ubuntu but ships with KDE as standard rather than Gnome. Oh yes, and it isn't brown...**

tinkering to make sure everything was fine we decided to press ahead and do a fresh install from scratch.

Booting directly from the CD takes you into a text installer. You get through a sum total of eight screens that require input, before Ubuntu copies files across and installs itself. Prior to installation we had resized the existing NTFS to allow space for Ubuntu (although there is an option to resize partitions within the installer). At this stage you have to be very careful – the default choice for Ubuntu is to erase all partitions on the disk.

When you're past the partition setup, which is very straightforward thanks to the text interface, Ubuntu dives in and starts to copy packages across to the hard drive. All in all it took about 15 minutes from start to finish, including the first boot and letting *apt* set up the software.

### The new black?

Once Ubuntu has finished its work you are presented with the *gdm* login prompt, resplendent in... brown. Yes, the colour scheme from Warty has been carried forward into Hoary: it seems Ubuntu is quite fond of the look and feel of brown – or Human, to give the theme its proper name.

### HOARY'S CORE SOFTWARE

- Kernel 2.6.10
- Gnome 2.10
- OpenOffice.org 1.1.3
- Evolution 2.2
- Gimp 2.2
- Gaim 1.1.4
- Firefox 1.0.2
- Gnome BitTorrent client
- Totem
- RhythmBox

### NICK SAYS...



**"Ubuntu still suffers from Debian-like problems – where are the configuration tools? Even if you hate Yast at least it's obvious where to go to add a printer"**

Regular Gnome users will probably be quick to change it, but the brown isn't so bad, giving a slightly earthy feeling. Regardless of colour, the user interface is classic Gnome 2.10 complete with Applications, Places and System menus.

Evidence of Gnome's maturity is apparent in that all three of the menu options in 2.10 were previously available under the two menus of Gnome 2.8 but they feel more accessible here – they're not buried under lots of menus. A quick flick through the Applications menu reveals the 30 or so applications that are readily available with Ubuntu, as well as the system tools. The Places menu is pretty bare to start off with – the idea being that as you make links to FTP and file servers they will be listed here for quick connectivity. Finally, the System menu allows you to make changes to the system preferences as well as the tools available to administer your new system.

A nice utility new to 5.04 is *Ubuntu Update Manager*, a GUI front-end to *apt-get upgrade*. It's a very simple tool, with updating literally just a matter of two clicks. You can specify the repositories that you want to monitor, and *Update Manager* will do the rest. Fedora Core, SUSE and Mandriva have all had their own notification and updating tools but this

is a first for Ubuntu and a welcome addition. Sensibly, you can pick and choose which type of updates you want to use – security updates or distro updates, for example, as well as any specific packages you require. However, unlike Fedora's *up2date* you cannot specifically exclude certain packages automatically – kernel upgrades, say, which can cause headaches when you have programs dependent on specific kernels. Instead, you need to check through the list of available updates and de-select the automatic kernel update.

On the whole, though, *Update Manager* is an asset for Ubuntu, and will help new users to keep their system current and bug-free.

Although by default you don't get to choose the software that's installed, once you get into Ubuntu (and especially *Synaptic* itself) you will be surprised at the sheer number of packages available. Ubuntu has access to the entire Debian software base – some 16,271 packages at the time of writing. Each repository has four components: Officially Supported, Restricted Copyright, Community Maintained (or Universe) and Non-free (Multiverse). The software available to you will depend on the options you choose here. The default Officially Supported and Restricted Copyright give you access to 3,164 packages.

### Central command

Another key part of Ubuntu is the policy of disabling the root account by default and using only **sudo** to access system commands. Recognising that the majority of people who will use Ubuntu will be installing it at home, the project team took the decision to allow ordinary users to make system-wide changes. They believe users "should have the freedom to customise and alter their software in whatever way they see fit", as they note on the website.

While most Linux purists will recoil in horror from this, it is worth noting that if a user tries to open a program that requires *sudo* they will be prompted for a password, making it clear to them that they are making important changes to the system. One benefit of using *sudo* is that, in the event of everything going belly-up, you can check the commands that were run as **sudo** using the */var/log/auth.log* file. This gives you an electronic paper trail to help rectify the damage.

And this brings us to Ubuntu's core philosophy – ease of use. When many

Windows users are introduced to Linux, they hate not being able to make changes to the system as and when they feel like it (ie not having root access by default). The use of *sudo* circumvents this, and there are other small touches in 5.04 that simplify the experience for Windows migrants.

Offering a standard suite of desktop applications with no initial variation helps the user make the transition as painlessly as possible. Advocates of choice will complain that this prevents users from being able to pick their own software. This may be true, but what's important to the new user is that they do not get swamped by choice. If Linux is to be adopted in the mainstream it has to develop a standard set of applications for end users. Once this is in place, users can then learn about the alternatives available to them and change their OS accordingly. Ubuntu leads the way in this regard.

Plenty of consideration shown towards the newbies, then, but what will an experienced Linux user gain from using Ubuntu? Well, for one it's refreshing in its simplicity – if you're happy with the default packages there is no reason to change them. But if you're the type who likes to download a new distro every day, you can use the Gnome *BitTorrent* client included in the default package set.

The enhanced Gnome tool set will also appeal to system administrators, especially the network tools, which let you perform any number of networking-related tasks and troubleshooting. Perhaps most alluring is the fact that with Ubuntu you get the best parts of Debian, which makes things like package management absurdly easy.

Powerful and extremely usable, Ubuntu has much to offer both new and old users. It's Linux for human beings and geeks, if you like. This is only its second major release, but things are ticking along very nicely. **LXF**

### LINUX FORMAT VERDICT

FEATURES	7/10
PERFORMANCE	8/10
EASE OF USE	8/10
DOCUMENTATION	7/10

Ubuntu's writers have achieved a lot in the last six months. Give this release a chance and you will not be disappointed.

**RATING 8/10**

