

LINUX DISTRIBUTION

Ubuntu 6.06



This dapper distro is fashionably late, writes **Andy Hudson**.

KEY STUFF

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

- **DEVELOPER** The Ubuntu Foundation
- **WEB** www.ubuntu.com
- **PRICE** Free under GPL



It's hard to believe that the first Ubuntu release was less than two years ago. We've had a Warty Warthog, a Hoary Hedgehog and a Breezy Badger, and Ubuntu now commands the lion's share of conversation within the Linux community (it seems to have been top of the DistroWatch.com rankings since records began). Its success has even persuaded Mepis to switch to using Ubuntu as its base, rather than Debian.

Whatever conspiracy theories you may read about Mark Shuttleworth, this much is true: the Linux world is not enough. At the beginning of the development cycle for this new Ubuntu 6.06 release, he issued a challenge to the Ubuntu developers, exhorting them to make 'Dapper Drake' a real alternative for Windows XP users facing the costly upgrade to Vista. Let's see how close they've got.

Eye candy

One of Ubuntu's less appealing features has always been its text-based installer, which has been present since the beginning. It's still here in the Dapper release and still as ugly as ever, but it is very straightforward to use. Each screen is

clear and lets you know exactly what's happening, so you shouldn't feel lost at any stage of the 20-minute installation. One of the reasons why Ubuntu installs so quickly is that it provides you with a standard set of packages, with no room for manoeuvre. As we've said in previous Ubuntu reviews, we think that this is a good thing, especially for new Linux users who can be overwhelmed by distros offering a huge number of applications. Rather than being a limitation for more experienced users, the default package selection should be seen as a foundation on which to build Ubuntu just as you want it.

The standard login screen greets you once the installer has finished, and the speed increase over version 5.10 (the Breezy Badger) is evident in the bootup. This could be down to any number of factors, but it's most likely to be down to the use of GCC 4.0.3 across the distro. The first thing that



Never lose a window again – just hit F12 to see everything clearly.

start to delve into the menus you'll notice that Ubuntu is moving towards the Tango project's look and feel with its icons. Such a move is welcome, as

polished to allow quick and easy access to specific packages. All of these graphical niceties are designed purely with the end user in mind, and put Windows XP to shame – and even, dare we say it, give Mac OS X a run for its money.

“DAPPER DRAKE WILL BE SUPPORTED FOR THREE YEARS ON THE DESKTOP.”

strikes you after login is the splash screen, which sits there even after Gnome 2.14.1 appears. A simple click of the mouse dispenses with that, and you're free to explore.

Gnome's Cairo gives the desktop a pristine appearance, and when you

standardisation across distros will reduce user confusion and make it easier for Linux to win new converts.

The colour of Ubuntu has changed too – no longer is it the dominant brown of previous versions. Instead you get what the developers describe as caramel, which is a lot better than the garish orange that appeared briefly during development.

For real desktop envy we managed to get Xgl working after a bit of fiddling. You will need to enable the Universe repository to get hold of both Compiz and Xgl themselves, and you'll also need to provide a .Xsession file to enable the effects for your own login. But the new look is not just about flashy graphics and fancy animations; Dapper also includes some nice touches such as highlights on scroll bars when you move the mouse over the handles, and a new Add/Remove Programs application, which has been

Ducking under

Of course the most visible features often get the most attention, but it is important to delve under the hood to see what Dapper really delivers. To start with, Mono, while available for Ubuntu, is not installed by default from the CD, so the team haven't been able to add Beagle or any other Mono apps and you're stuck with Nautilus's default search capabilities. To get the Mono software available – Blam, Banshee and F-Spot among them – you must activate the Universe repository. Do that, and as soon as the lightning-fast Beagle is installed it supplants the Nautilus search tool. Even better is the addition of the deskbar (a standard Gnome tool), which is integrated with Beagle to give Ubuntu an alternative to Spotlight.

Apache 2.0, MySQL 5.0 and PHP 5.1 complete the LAMP lineup, giving system administrators and developers access to the most current versions.

But perhaps of more interest to corporate users is that this is the first version of Ubuntu to come with an

CANONICAL'S LAUNCHPAD

Launchpad is a new centralised system for tracking bugs, translation and other pieces of code that fly around the Ubuntu community. However, it is much more than that: it also provides these services for other open source projects. It is developed primarily by Canonical, the sponsor of Ubuntu, and not all of it is open source. However, the developers have committed to releasing the code for Launchpad in time, but they do admit that this may take several years until it is fully available. We tried out the Rosetta software translation tool (illustrated above); it really is extremely simple to use, and if you have some spare time, you could help the community a great deal by using it – perhaps for some educational apps?



What's the African for Ubuntu?

extended support lifetime. Normally each version of Ubuntu only gets 18 months of updates following its release. The original release, Ubuntu 4.10 (The Warty Warthog) has only just reached the end of its support lifecycle, and users are advised to upgrade to 5.04 (Hoary Hedgehog) or Dapper, which will be supported for three years on the desktop and five years on the server, making this distro almost as well supported as Red Hat Enterprise Linux (one of the leaders in this field).

Given Ubuntu's strength on the desktop, such a commitment may drive more large organisations to consider Ubuntu Linux. Its friendly appearance and all-round ease of use lend themselves to the end-user market, and with the introduction of a server flavour of Ubuntu there are no doubts that Ubuntu will grow in this arena too.

Shoehorned

With all this on offer it is surprising that Ubuntu still comes on only one disc – albeit a packed-full disc, at around 660MB! Three architectures are available: i386, x86_64 and PowerPC, and each version has an

associated Live CD available too, enabling you to test out Ubuntu before you decide to install it. This is where it becomes interesting – new to Dapper is the *Espresso* installer, which will transform your Live CD-based system into a fully-fledged Dapper installation.

The process itself is fairly simple, requiring very little interaction from the end user, much like the text-based installer. Users who are completely new to Linux should use the Live CD to make sure that their system works with Ubuntu, before using *Espresso* to permanently install to the hard drive. The install itself takes around 15–20 minutes, after which you are able to just reboot into your new Dapper installation. Of course there is the option to use a USB stick to have a persistent home directory, but this involves a bit of fiddling to get working, rather than the plug-and-play nature of Knoppix.

If you are already an Ubuntu user there is a third way to get a hold of Dapper, which is simply to open your **sources.list** file, set all the repositories to Dapper and simply do `sudo apt-get update && sudo apt-get dist-upgrade`. The ability to use *apt-get* is one of the



Use Xgl to show off your Linux desktop to Windows-using friends.

key advantages of a Debian-based distro, as it is lightning fast. As with previous versions, *Synaptic* is available as a graphical front-end for *apt*, making it easy to find and retrieve specific packages.

The update manager has also been refreshed slightly to give it a more friendly appearance.

Spin-offs

When it was launched, Ubuntu was alone: a Gnome distribution with access to the huge treasure trove of software available through its Debian heritage. Now there are three Ubuntu spin-offs, all with their own identities.

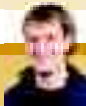
The best known is Kubuntu, the KDE derivative of Ubuntu that brings all the KDE goodness to the Ubuntu desktop as well as a few apps developed for KDE. Edubuntu was the next one to come along, which is the version of Ubuntu aimed specifically at academic environments. This includes an implementation of the Linux Terminal Server Project (LTSP), which allows direct control over pupils' desktops. The latest addition to the party is Xubuntu, which is based on the *Xfce* window manager and offers a light alternative to the more resource-hungry Gnome and KDE window managers. If you really want to you can easily obtain all three window managers under any of the three variants by installing the ***-desktop** package, where ***** denotes the variant you want to install.

Variant desktops is a good idea, and is something that we know the Fedora project hopes to move towards. Fedora suffers a little from trying to be an all-encompassing distro from the start (which is why it arrives on five discs as opposed to Ubuntu's single CD). What Ubuntu does is give you sufficient packages to allow you to have a working system, then give you the ability to customise your system exactly how you want it by using *apt-get/Synaptic*. This makes Ubuntu extremely portable in comparison with

UBUNTU'S CORE SOFTWARE

	5.10	6.06
Kernel	2.6.12	2.6.15
Gnome	2.12	2.14.1
Evolution	2.4.1	2.6.1
Firefox	1.0.7	1.5
GCC	4.0.1	4.0.3
MySQL	4.1.12	5.0
OpenOffice.org	1.9.129	2.0.2
X.org	6.8.2	7.0

GRAHAM SAYS...



"Ubuntu wraps Gnome into such a warm, fuzzy and friendly package that it's almost too much for an ardent KDE user to resist. Luckily there's Kubuntu!"

heavyweights such as OpenSUSE, Fedora and Mandriva, and much easier to obtain for people in countries that lack decent broadband access.

Ideal for newbies

Dapper's release was delayed because the team put extra effort into making it an extremely stable distro. The hard work was certainly worth it, although with the consumer release of Vista itself having been pushed back to early 2007 the pressure has relaxed slightly for Ubuntu. In fact with Dapper being so solid, for the next release Shuttleworth has asked the community to think about *Xen*, *AIGLX* as well as *Xgl*, and other goodies that may ultimately result in a slightly less stable version of Ubuntu. (This indicates a return to the aggressive six-monthly release cycle.)

Overall, this is the distro we would recommend for new users, especially now that Mandriva seems to have lost its way somewhat. Not only that, but seasoned Linux users will benefit from the free hand that Ubuntu gives to you in the way of package selection and management. Get it now! **LXF**

LINUX FORMAT VERDICT

FEATURES	9/10
PERFORMANCE	10/10
EASE OF USE	9/10
DOCUMENTATION	9/10

The best release yet from the Ubuntu camp. Go try it now and don't look back.

RATING **9/10**



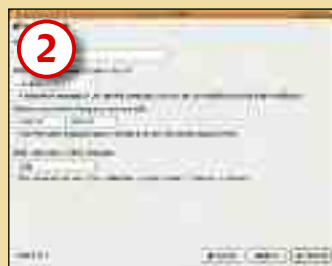
SERVING UP UBUNTU

Using *Espresso* to install Ubuntu from a Live CD

Installing Ubuntu from the Live CD should be the default for every new Linux user. Here's a quick step-by-step guide to getting perfect Ubuntu every time. After confirming all the details, *Espresso* will install the system to your hard drive in around 15–20 minutes, more than enough time for you to go and make yourself a real coffee. When it has finished, simply reboot and your new system will appear.



After the initial welcome screen you are prompted to select which language you want to proceed in.



Identify yourself to Ubuntu and give yourself a nice secure password. Don't forget it!



Where in the world are you? Select your time zone and location using the world map.



You can elect to resize the existing partition or manually edit the tables with *Gnome Partition Editor*.