

Ubuntu 7.04

Scarred as a child by *Bambi*, will **Andy Hudson** find more strength in this Feisty Fawn? *Linux Format* asked him to install the beta release for a thorough preview.

In brief...

» Linux distribution that's easy to install and use. Also consider: Mandriva, Freespire or SimplyMepis.

We have long felt Ubuntu is a high-quality distribution, and we can't help but wonder what the distro team can do to improve on it. Should we expect more of the same from the project, or is it more a case of "to be perfect is to change often"?

This 'Feisty Fawn' release is actually the sixth incarnation of the OS, Ubuntu having been on the Linux distro scene for three and a half years. From the word go, Ubuntu was marketed as a new kind of 'Linux for human beings' and achieved incredible traction among the Linux community, but it's fascinating to see how this distribution is maturing, especially in the face of strong competition from the upcoming Fedora 7 and OpenSUSE 10.3. At the time of writing, the Ubuntu 7.04 beta had just been released, so it was with some interest that we downloaded the ISO and popped a freshly burned CD into our test machine.

Ubuntu's developers really stirred things up in the Linux community by deciding to make its single install CD a Live CD,

"Ubuntu 7.04 boots up in record time, leaving other Linux distros in the dust."

enabling interested parties to boot into a functional Ubuntu desktop to evaluate it before worrying about installation. Having demonstrated an Ubuntu Live CD to non-Linux users on a number of occasions, we've found that this approach really pays



» Want eye candy? Feisty makes it easy, but *Compiz* and *Beryl* aren't core packages yet.

dividends, as it gives newbies a feel for what they're letting themselves in for. Version 7.04 retains this useful feature.

Importantly, Feisty also includes proprietary drivers to fully show off the ability of Ubuntu. In our case, Feisty correctly identified and configured our internal wireless card (Intel IPW3945) and detected our wireless AP. A helpful D-BUS message alerted us to the fact that restricted drivers were in use. Clicking on the icon opens up the (new to Ubuntu) *Restricted Drivers Manager*, which gives you the option to enable or disable the drivers. We'd argue that most Linux newbies won't be concerned with the use of restricted drivers, but at least Ubuntu

leaves the choice to the end user rather than resorting to convoluted installation steps to get something to work correctly.

Feisty also retains the option to install from the Live CD so that you can change your Live CD environment into a fully-fledged installation. If you've used previous versions of Ubuntu, this will be fairly familiar to you. A nice touch, albeit one that we were unable to test due to the lack of a Windows partition, is the inclusion of a user settings migration wizard that claims to transfer your Windows settings to a new Ubuntu account of your choosing. This would be a boon for anyone who wants to make the leap to Ubuntu but doesn't want to lose all their personal settings from Windows, such

Step by step: Downloading codecs with CodecBuddy



» Select a file

As you attempt to play a media file that uses an unsupported codec, *CodecBuddy* displays a dialog requesting an external codec to play it.



» Choose your codec

CodecBuddy provides a list of codecs; just pick the right one. Before, you'd have had to use an unsupported repository to find the right codec.



» Confirm before proceeding

Before you download, you will be warned to check the legalities of whether you can legitimately use the codec.

as *Internet Explorer* favourites. Apart from that, the Live installation remains the same as before and we had the system installed on our test PC – a Dell D620 laptop with Core Duo (T2500, 2GHz), 1.25GHz RAM and 40GB HD – in under 15 minutes.

Sprightly

Booting back into our newly installed environment, the first thing we noticed was the speed at which the system starts. The whole distro boots up in record time, leaving other Linux distros in the dust. On our test machine, it took an average 32 seconds from pressing the power button to being presented with the Gnome desktop (yes, that includes login!). This kind of startup is great if you're a desktop user, as most Linux distros tend to be in the one-minute-plus range for startup.

The speedup is, of course, thanks to *upstart*, which replaces the old *sysvinit*. *Upstart* allows services to be dynamically started as they're needed, rather than in a set order. Although *upstart* is constantly being improved, it already provides a significant boost to startup times. Still, if you're using Ubuntu in the server room you're unlikely to be worried about having to wait a couple of minutes for booting!

Obvious changes to the look and feel are evident from the *GDM* login screen, which now sports a slightly more golden colour that's carried through to the main Ubuntu theme. *Slightly*. Love it or loathe it, Ubuntu isn't going to dramatically change the brown colour scheme any time soon, though it's pretty easy to change the default theme and background in under 30 seconds if you must.

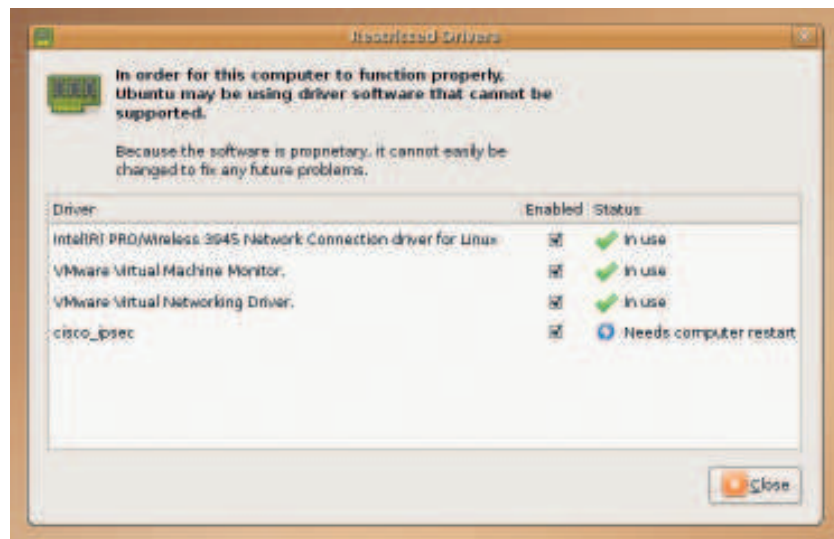
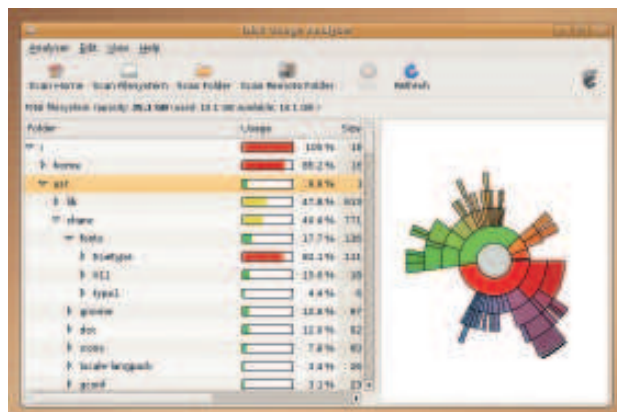
Perhaps the only thing that's missing is the presence of *Compiz/Beryl*, although a glance under the System > Preferences menu shows the inclusion of a Desktop Effects entry, something that Fedora implemented for Fedora 6. (While we're on the subject of the Preferences menu, Ubuntu seems to be suffering from serious menu entry creep: there's a very long list of options under Preferences. The Fedora team have sub-divided the Preferences



Paul says...

"This is a dull release for Ubuntu, leaving Fedora to storm ahead with *Xen*. What a shame!"

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► **Controversial, yet surprisingly helpful. Ubuntu now features the *Restricted Drivers Manager*, making light of your proprietary hardware needs.**

menu into logical groups so users don't have to scroll through all the options.)

Getting back to *Compiz/Beryl*, Ubuntu has not yet implemented either of them as supported features, although *Compiz* is installed by default. In an almost direct contradiction to 7.04's Feisty Fawn codename, Ubuntu seems to have been rather timid when it comes to *Compiz*, stipulating that it's an experimental feature and as such only available as a technology preview. This sounds straight out of Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5 (see review, **LXF92**), and is puzzling in a distro that's not an LTS (Long Term Support) release. *Beryl* is even more of an outsider, as it's only available through the Universe repository and not directly supported by Ubuntu. Still, Universe availability is a welcome change from the many different routes that users had to take to install *Beryl*.

Fractious

Other areas of interest include the inclusion of Gnome 2.18 along with its cornucopia of associated applications. Ubuntu also provides *OpenOffice.org 2.2*, which, at the time of writing, had only just been released, putting this distro at the forefront of new technology. For virtualisation fans, Ubuntu doesn't yet include either *Xen* or *KVM* as part of the officially supported distro, although again, both are available as part of the Universe repository.

We can't help but feel somewhat unimpressed by this release. True, Ubuntu has done a lot of things to increase usability, including *CodecBuddy* (see *Step By Step*, left) and finally making use of *NetworkManager* for wireless connections. However, we were hoping for a more daring release, seeing as this is the middle release between Dapper Drake and the next LTS version. It would seem that the Ubuntu

community has decided to play it safe at the moment, which is a shame. The feature list seems to run fairly short this time, giving other distros the opportunity to catch up. Fedora, in particular, will make huge strides forward with its seventh release due at the end of May. Perhaps Ubuntu feels the need to become more stable now that there are more distros based on it.

Whatever the reason, the Ubuntu project stands at a crossroads; the momentum it achieved with the first wave of releases (4.10 to 6.06) is starting to fade and it needs to find some way to kick-start development again. Without this, Ubuntu could be supplanted by other up and coming distros. So which direction should the project take? One idea would be to develop several configuration tools to either complement or replace the Gnome tools that Ubuntu is so reliant upon. If the developers are really serious about making Linux easy to use, they have a golden opportunity to build a suite of configuration tools à la Fedora's system-config* suite that gives end users an easy way to configure essential system settings.

Don't get us wrong – we're sure that 7.04 will be a fine release, it's just that we feel that Ubuntu isn't taking the necessary risks in order to build upon its current community dominance. **LXF**

LINUX FORMAT Verdict

Ubuntu 7.04 beta

Version: Ubuntu Foundation

Web: www.ubuntu.com

Price: Free under GPL

» *A solid if somewhat conservative release. Unless you're having problems with proprietary drivers, perhaps stick with 6.10.*