OpenSUSE 11.3

Looking for a distro that gets the best out of KDE 4.x? Nick Veitch discovers that he needn’t look any further than Novell’s latest Linux offering.

In brief...

Mainstream Linux distro. Also consider Ubuntu, Fedora and Mandriva.

Core software

KDE 4.4.4
Gnome 2.30
Kernel 2.6.34
OpenOffice.org 3.2.1
Firefox 3.6.6
GCC 4.5

Features at a glance

LXDE desktop
The lightweight desktop environment now receives official support.

Virtualisation
VirtualBox, virt-manager and KVM bring virtual tech to SUSE.

Features
9/10
Performance
8/10
Ease of use
8/10
Documentation
9/10

Most definitely the king of all the KDE distros, OpenSUSE now delivers more up-to-date apps and a better user experience, right from the time you install it.

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prefer a more minimal desktop or who need to use more primitive hardware.

As for KDE itself, OpenSUSE includes version 4.4.4 (4.4.5 had only just been released at the time of writing), which is well configured and runs as happily as KDE 4.x can. We’d even venture to say that OpenSUSE is the best distro on which to run KDE.

One of the curious new ‘features’ is 2GB of free cloud-based backup. From all reports, it sounds reliable and good, but there doesn’t seem to be anything to distinguish it from Dropbox or other services that also support Linux.

There are genuine additions though. The more up-to-date Linux kernel brings access to KVM, and OpenSUSE also has a range of other virtualisation tools available – notably the open source edition of VirtualBox and the most excellent virt-manager, which was originally developed for Fedora/Red Hat. It has to be said that both of these require some user knowledge to set up, so it’s nowhere near on a par with Fedora for ease of use in this area.

New tech ahoy
Like any modern distro, there are more than a couple of technology previews in this release. The interesting ones are the BTRFS filesystem and Gnome Shell. BTRFS is halfway to being a database, applying the B-tree data structure concepts to the filesystem. With development largely sponsored by Oracle, it may one day get the nod to succeed ext4 as the default Linux filesystem, so it’s useful to be able to try it out. However, there isn’t a great deal of benefit for normal desktop use.

As for the Gnome technology preview, your mileage may vary. On one test machine, it didn’t like the graphics card at all, so it’s worth checking it out before you set it as your default and choose the auto-login option.

Installation is even easier than before and the automatic install option will queue up vital non-free downloads for you (such as MS core fonts and various bits of Adobe stuff). It really couldn’t be much simpler. With new options for netbook users, better hardware recognition and the backing of the OpenSUSE Build service, this version probably heralds a new Golden Age for fans of the Gecko.