

Red Hat 7.1 on Test

THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET LEADER

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At the date of this test there was not yet a boxed version of Red Hat 7.1 available. To test we got hold of the download version (2 CDs). Available will be a Deluxe Workstation Version (costing approx. £59.15) as well as a Professional Server Version (costing approx. £147.89). The former comes with immediate support for laptops and multiprocessor systems and contains 9 CDs and two manuals.

Installation

Red Hat 7.1 caused no problems at all during installation, thanks to its very good automatic hardware recognition. Both the SCSI-DVD drive as well as the USB mouse worked right from the start. And the nVidia graphics chip was recognised immediately. Developers at Red Hat favour the GNOME desktop. So it is surprising that the developers are no longer integrating the new GNOME 1.4 desktop together with Nautilus file manager in Red Hat 7.1.

Red Hat continues to rely on the tried and trusted partitioning tools DiskDruid and fdisk. Since Linux is still operated in most cases in parallel with an existing Windows partition, the recommended automatic partitioning, which deletes all existing hard drive partitions, would only be sensible in the rarest of cases. Red Hat is still bucking the general trend by doing without the journaling file system Reiser-Fs. The graphical installation program leaves the impression of being mature and clearly designed. Because of its useful pre-sets it is enough for the inexperienced user to click on the Continue button. The online help is available at all times.

Initial configuration

The GNOME desktop, does seem really neat, though which administration tools Red Hat has available would be helpful. There is a program icon on the desktop for configuring Internet access by modem. Under the menu item *Programs/System* there are more configuration tools. That the X11-based *control panel* does exist as a central starting point for the configuration tools, is something that a newbie only finds out after logging onto KDE. Apart from Linuxconf, you will find in the *control panel* some innovations such as configuration of any ADSL modems present. Basic configuration

steps, can be dealt with easily with the control panel. On first login, Red Hat makes icons for floppy, CD-ROM and Zip drive on the desktop and these also function immediately.

Expandability

You can install pretty much everything that can be tracked down with the ending *i386.rpm*. Red Hat continues to rely on the rpm front-ends GnoRPM and kpackage. It recommends membership to its own Red Hat Network. Every buyer of a full version, receives free access to the RHN Software Manager for a few weeks. This is a big software pool, kept up to date by Red Hat with respect to new program releases and corrected bugs. This update system by Red Hat considerably simplifies the task of system updating. After the free test phase expires, though, Red Hat asks the user to pay for this extra service. As a matter of fact, as a member one also has to pay another price: As the result of the relatively synchronous updates and bugfixes, the Red Hat systems registered in the RHN become more homogeneous and thereby in future more open to large-scale attacks from the Net. Although Red Hat has always championed GNOME as standard desktop, a desktop user fairs noticeably better if they select the brand-new KDE 2.1.1 as standard desktop. Could this fact potentially hide a smart move by the Red Hat strategists, to bring about a significant increase in the number of RHN registrations through the GNOME 1.4 updates?

Playing with fire

Among the most important innovations must be the integration of the new Linux kernel generation (2.4.2). It is now possible for the user to swap the plugs of his USB devices without rebooting. Owners of the latest graphics cards (except PowerVR chips!) will be glad that the current latest XFree86 4.0.3 has been included. In the security domain, too, Red Hat has included a new firewall configuration tool, with which new firewall rules can be defined in a relatively easy way. As long as Red Hat's paid online RPM update services remain optional and does not become obligatory for systems to work correctly, the distribution will also continue to find a following of enthusiastic supporters. ■



The distribution with the Red Hat is estimated at present to be the world's most frequently used Linux distribution. Linux Magazine has just taken a closer look at the brand new Red Hat 7.1

Red Hat 7.1 (Download Version)

- + Brand-new system together with USB hot-plugging
- + Relatively beginner-friendly installation/initial configuration
- GNOME 1.4 not yet integrated
- Online updates paid for after brief grace period