Short Test of the Caldera Beta

HAS **CALDERA** CRACKED THE KERNEL?

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Like most other distributions, Caldera relies on a graphical user interface during installation. The screen is split into a central area for displaying options, drop-down menus or text boxes and a narrow field to the right, which offers help on the respective installation steps. You can travel back and forth during the installation routine via the navigation areas at the lower edge of the screen.

Package installation

But once the selection of packages has been made and the installation kicks off, the set-up program no longer allows any steps backwards. While the packages are being copied onto the hard drive, the user can still go on configuring the network, setting the computer name and installing a modem. But you will search in vain for an ISDN or DSL connection here.

Installation and the rest of the configuration run in parallel, but the copy procedure can take somewhat longer. On completion of the installation, you are given the option of making a start diskette. A replica diskette, with which the installation can be replayed again and again in the same configuration, is not provided.

Pure and simple

The package installation itself has been kept straightforward. Several categories are pre-set for a rough distribution. In a little box, a tick shows if packages from the respective group have been selected. Each group can have several sub-groups, which in turn contain the individual packages. Caldera has decided on a display that presents the user with a description of the respective package in plain language. The precise version number is only learned by clicking on the package in another window, in which (if available) an additional description is then displayed.

If it is your first time installing Linux and you don't want to be bothered with detailed installation, you can simply let the computer make the pre-selection. A small bar helpfully displays the available disk space and the space occupied after installation in colour.

Partitioning

Partitioning in the Expert mode offers the user four partitions. This corresponds to the maximum number of primary partitions that can be created. The user has access to both ext2 and ReiserFS file systems. You can also define a swap partition via the menu or make an extended partition, as well as installing Soft RAID.

It's a bit worrying that only the partition limits are stated and thus no values in kilobytes or megabytes — making judging the right size something of a guessing game for the layman.

Under the bonnet

With this new version, Caldera relies exclusively on KDE again (also used with Version 2.1). With the X-Server the user can choose between the almost up-to-date XFree86 4.0.2 and the older Version 3.3.16. The Technology Preview sent to us came with Kernel 2.4.2.
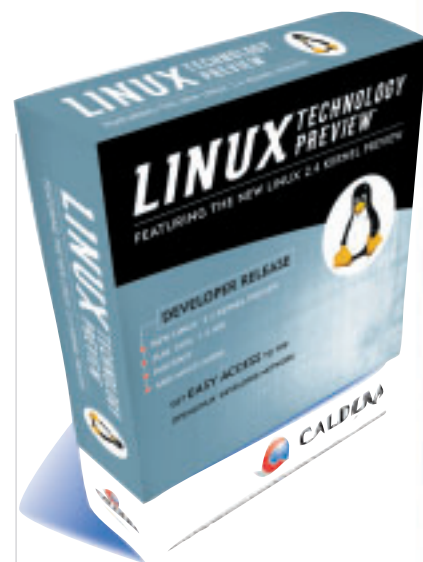
XFree 4 is installed as standard. But on our test device (a notebook) the server had severe problems recognising the Savage MX graphics card.

A nice touch for KDE devotees: COAS, the administration tool from Caldera, has been completely integrated into KDE's control centre. So Caldera has now drawn level with a few other distributions.

Conclusion

The Technology Preview of the next Caldera OpenLinux version is simple to install. The user is guided with assurance to a usable system by the graphical user interface. Apart from a few minor glitches (such as the partition limits in the reformatting of the hard drive) the lack of a keyboard option without deadkeys is the most glaring omission.

Generally, the whole installation goes off very quickly and doesn't overtax users with too many technical questions. It's just a shame that this is also the case in the Expert mode and that the installation routine doesn't offer the option of switching off the graphical log-in, this would have been a big help, given the existing graphics card problem. ■

It's been fairly quiet on the OpenLinux front recently, but the new kernel release has forced Caldera into a frenzy of activity.