

ON TEST

SUSE 7.2

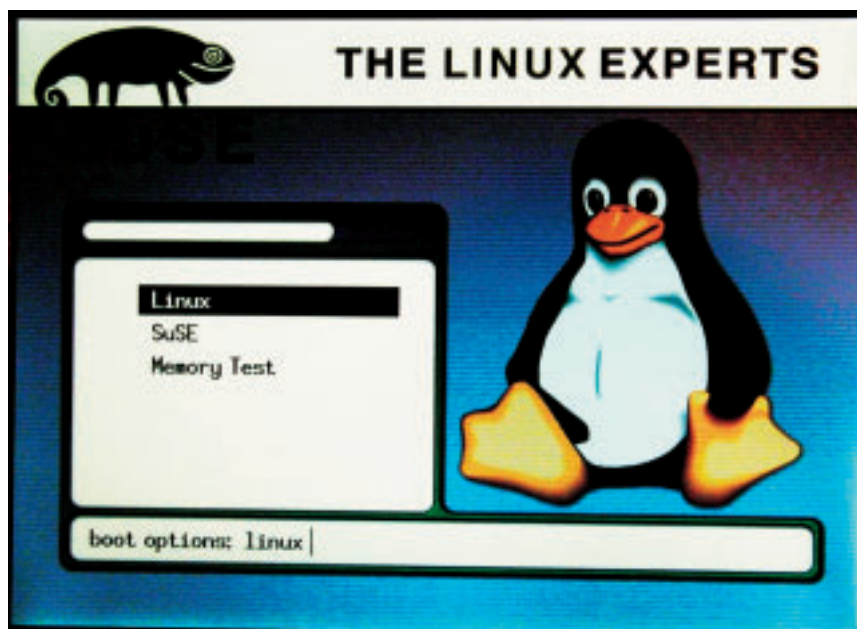
Geeko's latest SUSE 7.2 PROFESSIONAL EDITION ON TEST

RICHARD IBBOTSON

What is it that is attracting so many people to SuSE 7.2 and away from the other distributions? There's the absolute quality of the software coupled with the excellent technical support in the United Kingdom and from other countries through the Internet which is in fact in plain old fashioned English. There's also the SuSE English list out there on the Net. Other things that help are that there is a low cost personal version and a professional version as well. There is more than enough software for most types of engineer or scientist or home user. In fact there's so much software on seven CDs and on one DVD disk that it takes a long time to understand what to do with all of it. Just to finish it off there's an endless ftp site with many updates for the latest release and for the others that have been around for a long time. The SuSE distribution is the software that runs the Linux Magazine office so it must be good .

Initial installation

What's new in 7.2? Well, apart from the useful and never ending list of the latest updates for software such as Sendmail or Fetchmail or Emacs there is the



2.4.4 kernel with increased USB support and support for Iptables and NAT. There are several bonuses for the people who are graphical users rather than command line GNU shock troops. An evaluation version of Evolution which is Ximians latest assault on the desktop brightens up the day with its many features which combine a personal organiser with an email application to help the individual who is lost without Outlook Express. Other goodies are a release of Anjuta which is the GNOME IDE programming tool.

After a quick look through some excellent manuals the graphical installation method with YaST2 compares favourably with those that are available with distributions such as Red Hat or Mandrake or Linux by Libranet. The experienced UNIX person may not like that and may prefer to use the updated and original YaST which now shows many useful features that were not there before.

Going from penguins one to penguin number eight in the install screens doesn't require a great deal of skill. As Ruediger Berlich who is the Managing Director of SuSE Ltd likes to show at his



Using Mozilla.

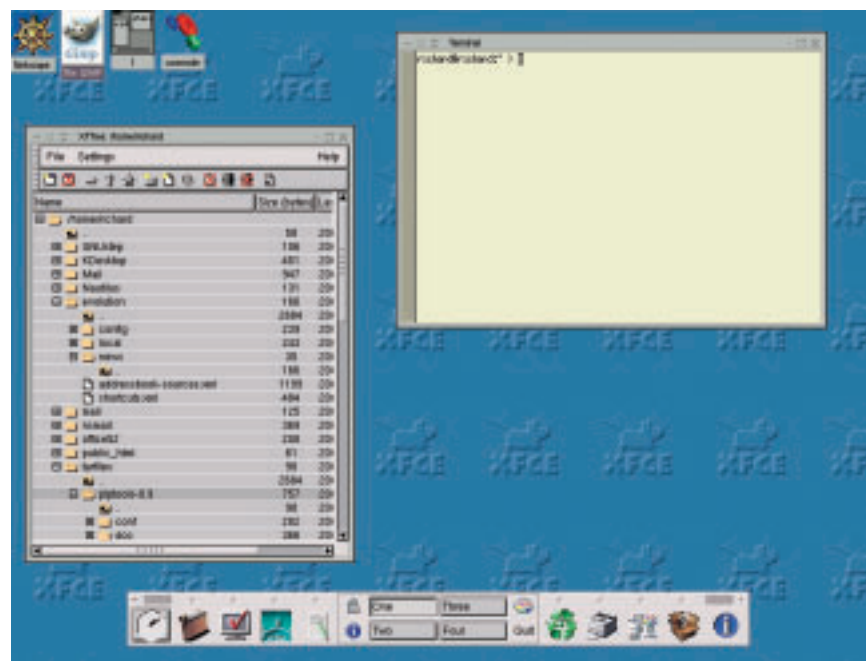
many public appearances the average MS Windows user can quickly understand what to do. Dual boot or a quick replacement of the Windows partition with Linux is easy to do. Something that is really good about the SuSE distribution is that you can quickly and easily install Reiser FS or Ext2 file systems. Either one is easily configured at installation.

The test machine was a notebook with an Intel processor. The 2.4.4 kernel modules and the PCMCIA modules worked fine on this hardware as did USB and Irda with a mobile phone for email and Web pages. For X-windows configuration either SaX or SaX2 can be used. Configuration is a point and click experience which should take only a few seconds. The test install did just that. Xfree 4.0.3 provides anti-aliasing and so the TrueType fonts are more rounded and easier on the eyes. Ten minutes of installation and a few more to key in network and ISP data produced a working laptop that could be used on a network or dial-up system without a problem. If you are someone who has to use sound or listen to music then you are very well catered for. The Alsa sound system is an SuSE sponsored project. Alsa works well on just about any personal computer and very well on notebooks. The applications manual gives extensive information about the applications. There are many applications for sound management. If you are a professional musician then you should consider using this distribution. It's so much better for sound than most proprietary brands of software.

There is also a choice of an enterprise class firewall or a personal firewall both of which can be used in whatever way the user wants to use them in

addition to the usual open source security tools. AMaViS has finally been included with this distribution. This is a high quality virus scanner that all mail that goes through a gateway machine or on a mailserver. There is a loopback mounted file system which increases the security of the system even further. Kerberos 5 is supported in this release which makes it popular amongst MS Windows users. Staying with MS Windows for a moment. Samba 2.2 is released with this version of SuSE Linux. If you want an internal file server that is virus proof and doesn't crash at all then you should think very seriously about using Samba on a mixed Win

Just one of the fourteen desktops available. Here XFce is running.



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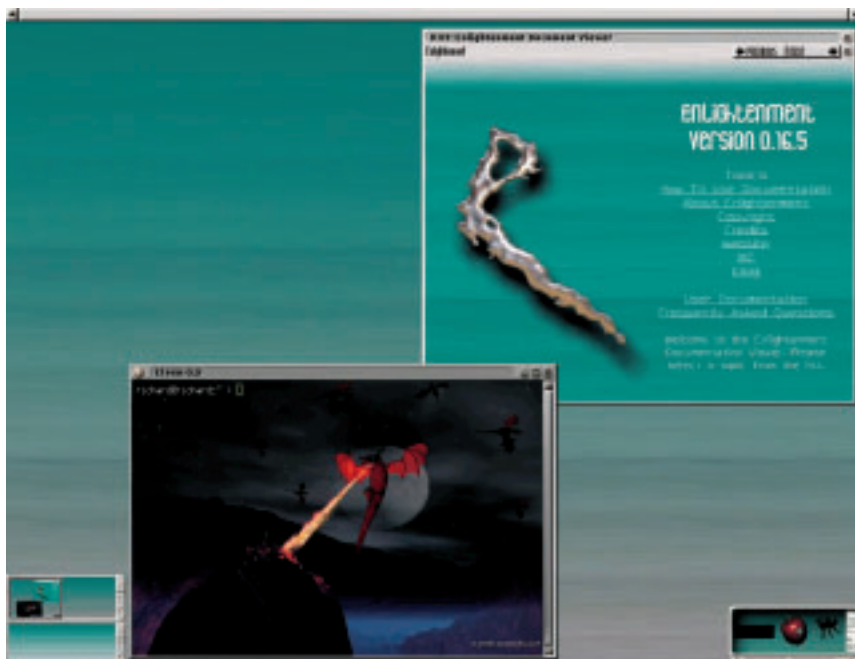
YaST2 running on the KDE desktop



2000 network. Many people have been able to get a good night's sleep for the first time in years after installing and configuring Samba and the 2.2 version is quite amazing once it's up and running.

If you want it, KDE 2.1.2 provides a well finished desktop. All of the desktops and the minimalist window managers are available at login so that you can choose whatever you want or just stay with the desktop that you like the most. The new GNOME window manager has been much improved in SuSE 7.2 with many more options available than there were in the last release. GNOME has quite definitely caught up with KDE2 in the way it looks and feels.

Enlightenment desktop



Once an installation is finished, a broken machine can be rescued with the SuSE rescue system which can be run from a floppy disk or from the first installation CD.

To say some more about YaST2: All of the command line hacking that used to be a part of Linux is now largely gone. YaST2 provides a fool-proof way of configuring your system. In the present day it's highly likely that training will not be available for the system administrator. This makes graphical management systems like YaST2 very popular and in fact they may be essential within the commercial world for people who quite simply do not have the time to read a book or go to night classes. YaST2 is particularly good for ISDN and ADSL configuration and once configured is rock solid for years.

Only in distributions like Debian is the old and traditional UNIX command line preserved. If you are a purist then you will presumably stay with Debian. However, the SuSE package management system compares favourably with the Debian one and I can't say which one I prefer. There is much evidence to support the claim that both the Debian and RPM package management systems will eventually be merged into something that will be as good as the Debian one.

To get back to the manuals once again. I feel that these are worth a second mention. After all, you are paying for the books and not the software. Other distributions provide some excellent books with their CDs. SuSE have come up with a range of documents that will keep the first time user or the experienced Linux user well informed in just the right way. It's easy to start out with the first

installation manual and then graduate towards the level of an intermediate level system administrator or novice programmer in this way. In fact many people I know learned about Linux by getting hold of a CD and then started by reading the docs that come with the software.

There are six books in total in the professional version. You can start with the quick install manual which provides the cartoons that most experienced computer users can understand – and certainly the newbies should be able to get to grips with Linux using this easy- to-understand booklet. It's the kind of thing that Microsoft should have done years ago and didn't bother to do. The next one along that would suit the beginner is the applications book. This is rather like the kind of publication that you can get with the Caldera Open Linux 2.4 release. There's a lot of information in this book that explains the kind of things that many people miss.

The other three manuals are an endless treasure trove of the kind of information that you just can't get from anywhere else without paying lots of money for it.

The configuration manual shows how to use point and click to do most things. There is a lengthy explanation of how to use file managers and other graphical interfaces. The network manual describes some simple and more advanced networking concepts. It's the kind of thing that you just cannot

obtain from anywhere in simple English rather than complex terms that are not understandable. The final volume is the reference manual. This is packed full of things that the other distributions have not bothered to include into their own documentation and books that accompany their software. It's worth buying the professional version just for this book alone.

Just a final word here: SuSE GmbH is the only Linux software distributor that has actually taken the time to study British English as it is and then they have produced a completely British distribution without all of the Americanisms that you can see in other distributions. This should mean something to the average Linux user. They have also spent a great deal of time and money translating their original German product into many other languages thus making SuSE Linux the distribution with the best documentation. The SuSE support database can be viewed on any of their computers and the same database can be accessed on their own website from you desktop, notebook or palmtop. So, you get not only man pages but also nice pictures as well as easy to understand instructions from SuSE and both the KDE and GNOME development teams in addition to the printed manuals.

SuSE Ltd will be at the Linux Expo at Olympia and at Birmingham NEC in September. We will look forward to seeing you there. This review like most of the Sheffield Linux User's Group website was produced with SuSE software. ■

Useful links

<http://www.suse.co.uk>
http://www.suse.co.uk/uk/suse_linux.html
<http://www.suse.de/en>
<http://www.suse.com>
<http://www.namesys.com>
<http://www.alsa-project.org>
<http://www.ximian.com>
<http://www.kde.org>

About the Author

Richard Ibbotson is the Chairman and Organiser for Sheffield Linux User's Group. You can view their website at <http://www.sheflug.co.uk>

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