Ten distributions in a lab test

APPLIED ALCHEMY

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Most Linux Magazine readers will get themselves a new distribution about once a year. Now's a good time to do it as all the main distributions have just come out.

The candidates

SuSE Linux 7.2
http://www.suse.de/uk/
Personal Edition
£29
Professional Edition
£49, Update £27

Red Hat Linux 7.1
http://www.redhat.com
Deluxe Edition
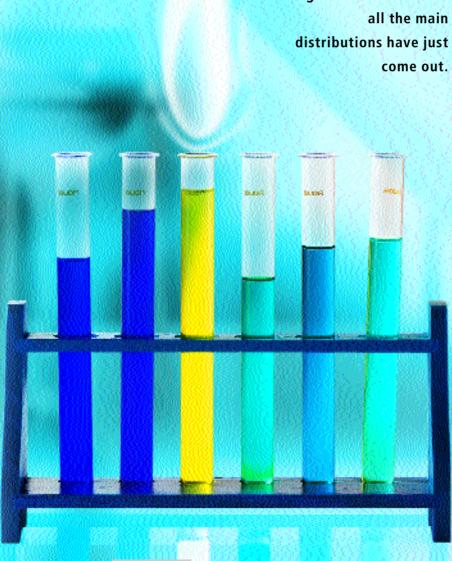*£71*
Professional Edition
£177

Linux-Mandrake 8.0
http://www.linux-mandrake.com
Power Pack
£56
Pro Suite Edition
£136

Caldera Open Linux
http://www.caldera.com
Workstation 3.1
60/100 $US (without/with support)
Server 3.1
600/800 $US (without/with support)

Progeny Debian 1.0
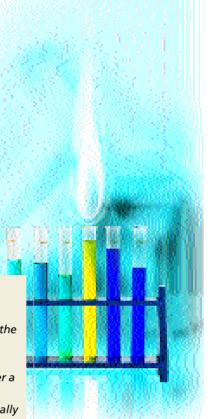*http://www.progeny.com*
£44

This is the right moment for a distribution test; on the one hand the 2.4 kernel is still nice and fresh, but on the other hand, it has been hanging around long enough to be suitable for productive systems. Also, Xfree86 4.0 and KDE 2.1 have made their names as standards.

In February SuSE had already presented its Linux 7.1, based on kernel 2.4.0. But the reviews were somewhat mixed (Linux Magazine Issue 9). Now the German developers have souped up version 7.2.

The competition is not sleeping. Red Hat Linux 7.1, Linux-Mandrake 8.0 and Caldera Open Linux have also just come out. The testers did a top-to-toe examination of all four distributions for each Standard and Professional variant. The test field is completed by the Debian-derivative Progeny, a commercial development by the founder of Debian, Ian Murdock.

The concept of the test follows the idea that when choosing a suitable distribution, every user has different preferences. Hence the test is broken down into sections called Installation, Hardware, Desktop Compatibility, Server Compatibility, Security and Support, and Documentation. This makes it easier to find your own personal requirements. ∎

Waiting for Woody

While commercial distributors chuck a new product onto the market several times a year (which has not always been perfected but may be equipped with all the latest features), the Debian team takes a more relaxed approach to the matter. Until they are satisfied with a version, it keeps the testing label.

Although Potato is constantly being updated with security patches, it contains neither a 2.4 kernel, nor XFree 4.0. There are unofficial packets available to adapt a Potato installation to Kernel 2.4 at http://www.fs.tum.de/~bunk/kernel-24.html. Anyone who really wants to keep their finger on the pulse must weigh up stability against newness and upgrade to the successor test version, Woody. It is not yet known when Potato is to be succeeded by Woody as a stable version. Commercial Debian distributors such as Progeny therefore offer rebored releases of Version 2.2.

The Debian Project is not lying idle. For the recent LinuxTag meeting, Michael Bramer produced a release squeezed onto one CD containing the Potato installation system, the majority of the packets from Woody and also KDE and Gnome from the unstable version Sid. Kernel 2.4 is also included as an option, as is XFree 4.0.3. Although it is not possible to offer the range of software on one single CD, which Woody is missing when the current binary packet size is of five CDs.