

Red Hat Linux 7.2 STANDARD BEARER

Red Hat is often seen as synonymous with Linux, but does the latest version justify its position as the industry standard? Janet Roebuck takes a long hard look at Red Hat 7.2

The latest offering from Red Hat is based on the 2.4.7 kernel. The standard version costs £70.80 and comes with seven CD's. Of these one was documentation and one had demo versions of two Loki games (Kohan and Rune). Red Hat itself came on four discs with the final disc offering StarOffice 5.2 in five differing languages.

The documentation CD again supports lots of languages and as well as the expected HOWTO documents the two supplied booklets also have a Red Hat customisation guide. The only disappointment is that the Red Hat network guide is only viewable online, in either HTML or PDF format.

The Professional version of Red Hat 7.2, which weighs in at £176.40, has four additional CDs and a DVD. The CDs cover two discs of applications, a Web server CD and a system Admins CD.

Of the 2,000+ packages some big changes have been made. KDE 2.2 is shipped along with GNOME 1.4. The other big change is XFree86 4.1, which makes the most of new graphics card such as GeForce3 and G450 chipsets and adds a 1400x1050 resolution. The biggest change, however, is that the new ext3 journaling system is supported. Although other filesystems are available for Linux (XFS, JFS, and ReiserFS) Red Hat supports and champions the ext3 system. This allows easy conversion without data loss from existing ext2 partitions. Transition is straight forward as in reality the new journaling system is an extra layer on top of the ext2 system. The gain in using journaling systems is most apparent when you



have a crash. Recovery of information is very quick. And although it is not designed for it, the journaled system allows for fast restarts on a laptop. Both Netscape 4.78 and Mozilla 0.9.2 are included as well as a host of KDE application upgrades.

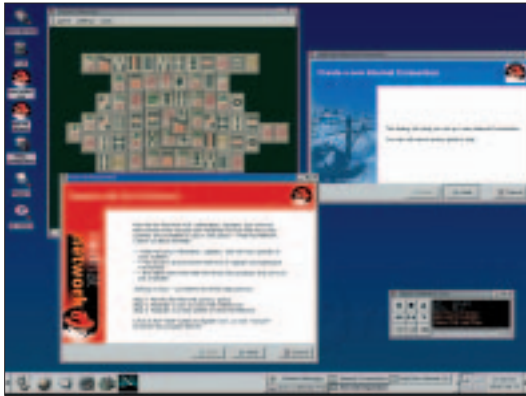
Don't be put off

Documentation is limited to two small booklets, which means there's physically not a lot to show for the cost. But don't let that put you off. The first 150-page booklet on installation explains the standard install, a text install and a system upgrade. A nice appendix on disk partitions is well written in clear logical English. The 200-page getting started booklet gets any new or intermediate user up and using most of the tasks very quickly.

Where Red Hat excels is with its support for GNOME. The latest version 1.4 is supplied with the Nautilus file manager. This always seems slow to start compared to the KDE desktop. This is due to the way Nautilus can be used to view files. The file manager has the ability to show information about a file such as a thumbnail picture of an image or play a music file. This ability to drill down to information



Figure 1:
Firewall
configuration



Registering with the Red Hat Network

obviously has a hit on performance speed but with faster processors this is less of a worry than it was a few months ago.

One of the major reasons for buying the Red Hat distribution is the Red Hat Network. Through the Web you can update your system and so always keep ahead in the security stakes. By following the graphical wizard you can register very quickly. This allows you to compare your system against the latest packages at Red Hat and upgrade if necessary. That's all very well if you are proactive as it allows you complete control. You have a choice on how you update your system and even location to do so. What we like is the Red Hat Errata Alerts. These now pop into my email account and tell me whatever is of importance. They come in little groups and average about one a day. An example can be seen in the Errata Alerts boxout.

No problems

The installation is as expected flawless and we cannot help but judge all other distributions against Red Hat. That is not necessarily because Red Hat is the best but that it is the standard. By being the standard it has to maintain its reputation. This is done admirably, as Red Hat is a good all round system. The lack of cute penguin characters does not mean it is not fun for home users. The support and documentation available mean that developers will not miss out and the support packages mean that any business would be happy. As a system to run straight out of the box we could not find anything wrong. It found all our hardware and worked without a flaw. The firewall configuration allowed some flexibility as can be seen in Figure 1. We did like the new animated cursors although for how long they will amuse and not become an annoyance remains to be seen.

The range of packages that come with modern distributions is now so large that no review could ever do more than scratch the surface. Fips is supplied to partition hard drives. The KDE has some nice utilities supplied such as Krayon for drawing pictures and Kugar for viewing XML data. I noticed all the usual packages and some that I had not yet

Errata Alerts

From: Red Hat Network Alert rhn-alert@redhat.com 31/10/01 00:51
 Subject: RHN Errata Alert: New teTeX packages available
 To: me

Red Hat Network has determined that the following advisory is applicable to one or more of the systems you have registered with the Software Manager service:
 Security Advisory – RHSA-2001:102-10

Summary: New teTeX packages available

Description: A flaw has been discovered in the temporary file handling of some of the scripts from the teTeX set of packages. This can, under some circumstances, lead to a compromise of the groups that LPRng runs as. Several scripts used the current process ID as temporary file names and have now been altered to use the 'mktemp' program instead.

Additionally, an insecure invocation of the 'dvips' program has been discovered in the print filter used for handling DVI files. This has been corrected to use the -R option.

The temporary file-handling flaw affects Red Hat Linux 7.1 and earlier. The DVI print filter problem affects Red Hat Linux 7.0 and earlier. This vulnerability was discovered by zen-parse.

Taking Action

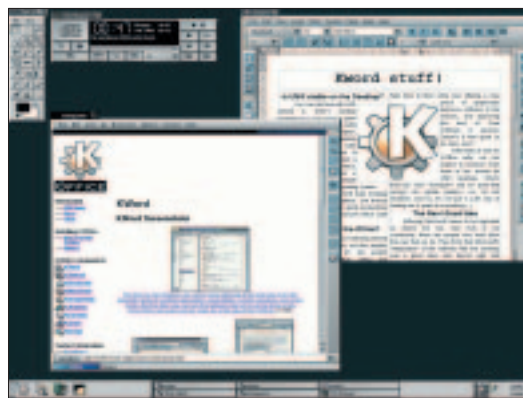
You may address the issues outlined in this advisory in two ways:

- log in to Red Hat Network at <https://rhn.redhat.com> and from the listing showing under 'Your RHN' select the affected servers and download or schedule a package update for that system.

- run the Update Agent on the affected machine.

There is one affected system registered in 'Your RHN' (only systems for which you have explicitly enabled Errata Alerts are shown).

Release	Arch	Profile Name
7.1	i586	my.system



The KDE desktop and KOffice on Red Hat

played with such as the wireless tools and the Reiserfs tools.

Some complaints have been voiced that the buying public assume Linux only means Red Hat. This is good for Red Hat and means their marketing is reaching people. If they then buy Red Hat it is still Linux and being a good product will not turn them away. All in all, the product is solid and will encourage a new generation of Linux users.