

Acronis OS Selector 5.0 Deluxe OS SELECTOR

Steve Cobrin takes a look at the latest version of the partition and boot manager which includes support for Windows, XP NTFS, SuSE Linux 7.3 ReiserFS, and Red Hat Linux 7.2 Ext3 filesystems

Acronis' OS Selector is a very powerful product, which uses a simple GUI that combines a very powerful disk editor, partition manager and boot manager all in one. It understands Linux filesystems, including EXT3 and ReiserFS; it can copy, move and resize partitions; and though it may not be as user-friendly as competing products like PowerQuest's Partition Magic, with which, unfortunately, it also shares the same licensing restrictions (use by one person on one machine only), it does have a few extra features. It's questionable, though, whether these are enough to make the product a worthwhile purchase.

What's in the box?

The software comes boxed, with lots of impressive sounding product info on it. Inside the box were a CD, manual and a registration card containing the Product-ID used when configuring the software and registering with Acronis.

The CD runs from Windows, can create install

floppies and, best of all, is bootable and will take you straight through to install the software, or allow you to repair some conditions. The CD contains Adobe Acrobat 5, OS Selector itself (version 5.00 build 472 for this review) and a PDF version of the printed manual.

Ok what should things look like? The DOS-like OS Selector screen displays on boot-up and offers the choice of booting via mouse or cursor keys to Windows XP or Linux. In the case of the Linux option it actually boots to LILO, where we choose the specific configuration of Linux we want. It is important to note, that you must still maintain an appropriate LILO or GRUB configuration, if you want to boot Linux, and that this may need to be recreated

after any partitioning changes. This implies that you must ensure you maintain a Linux boot floppy.

Test machines

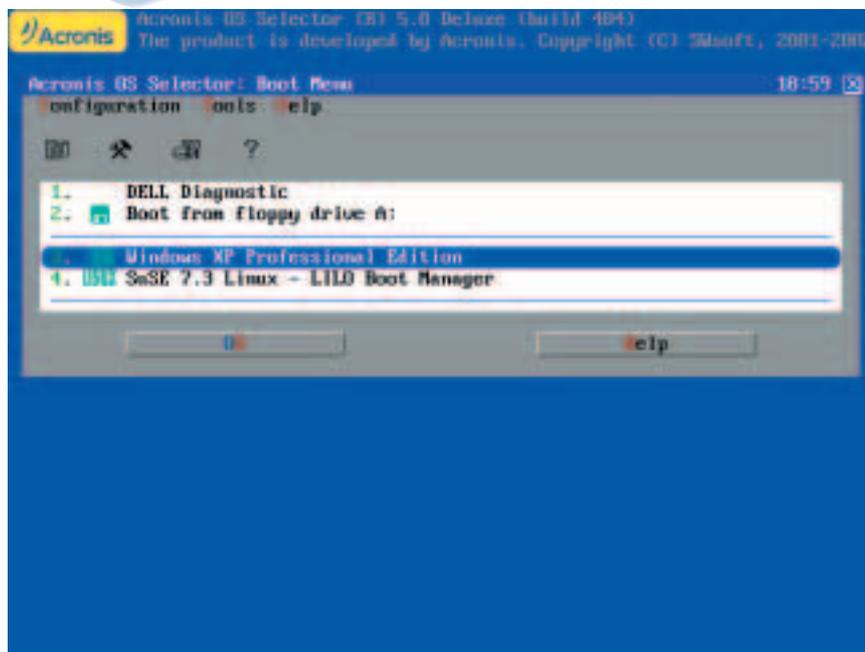
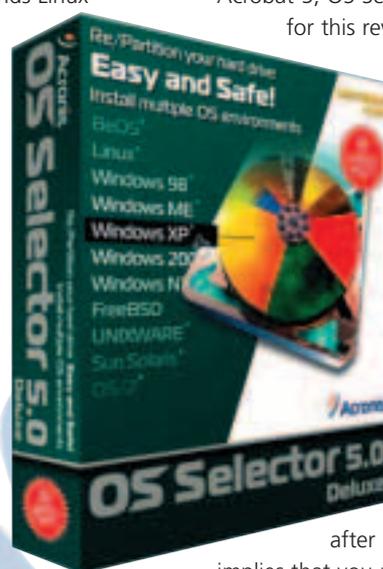
Laptop 1: Pentium II MMX 200MHz, Hi-Grade Notino AS6000, 80Mb RAM, 6Gb IDE hard disk, floppy drive.

When we tried to boot the CD on this Laptop, OS Selector immediately fell over with a program exception error. When a Partition Magic rescue floppy was used, it identified a disk error, fixed it and successfully came up. OS Selector still failed to run. We deleted all the existing partitions and tried again, still without success. We finally tried swapping the hard disk, all to no avail. Not an auspicious start.

Laptop 2: Pentium III 750 MHz with SpeedStep, Hi-Grade UltiNote AS8400, 192Mb RAM, 20Gb IDE hard-disk, floppy drive, DVD drive.

This time at least the OS Selector boot ran, and offered to install itself, however it needed a FAT32 or FAT16 partition to install in and had problems finding one until we ran the Disk Administrator option and created and formatted a partition for it – all of which is supposed to be automated.

The system configuration that we were trying to achieve was as follows:



OS Selector Boot Menu

14Mb	Primary hidden FAT16 OS Selector partition
4Gb	Primary NTFS – Windows 2000 Standard server
4Gb	Primary NTFS – Windows .NET server beta3
Extended Partition containing:	
6Gb	FAT32 Windows data partition
3.35Gb	SuSE Linux 7.2 – root partition
805Mb	Linux – /home partition
399Mb	Linux – swap partition

It should be noted that Partition Magic does NOT support the management of partitions containing Windows Server OSes, for that you need the significantly more expensive VolumeManager version.

At various times OS Selector offered to select support for ASPLinux, a distribution we'd not heard of before – we chose not to.

After setting up our partitions, it was interesting to note that Partition Magic thought that there was an error with our setup, as OS Selector created a partition that was on a cylinder boundary. It is unfortunate that partition managers can disagree as to what should be reported as an error. Also at one point it appeared as though our Linux Swap partition began before the start of our extended partition. It's not clear whether OS Selector caused this – it certainly couldn't fix it and in the end we had to fix it by recreating the partitions from fdisk running from a Linux Rescue disk.

We really wanted each Windows OS to think it was the C: drive, and the FAT32 partition the D: drive. This is the sort of sneakiness we've previously managed by using PowerQuest's Partition Magic and Windows 95 and 98SE. However, we just couldn't work out how to do this with Windows 2K and OS Selector.

Once OS Selector is installed and configured, its not always clear what partitions are being booted, and we never got the partition hiding features working properly. After selecting "Use Windows NT/2000/XP partitions hiding" against the .NET partition, things went badly and it wasn't possible to boot anything but Linux. This would have been easily remedied if OS Selector had an option to allow booting from CD, whilst hiding selected partitions. I've only seen this available once on QuarterDeck's Partition-It software, which seems to be no longer available.

Well, eventually I decided to give in and reinstall, and let Win .NET and Win 2000 have their own unique drive letters. After that it all went quite well – the partitioning software is quite intuitive, although the GUI is much less elegant than that of Partition Magic.

Laptop 3: Pentium III 1.2GHz with SpeedStep, Dell



Latitude C610, 512MB RAM, 30GB IDE hard-disk, floppy drive, DVD/CDRW combo drive.

Having installed Windows XP and SuSE Linux 7.3 on the third laptop, all seemed well enough. Although Partition Magic complained of a partitioning error on the disk, OS Selector didn't seem to care. It's difficult to know whether to be worried or not about this, which in itself is quite worrying!

Desktop PC: Dual Pentium III 400MHz, ASUS P2BS Motherboard with on-board SCSI Ultra 2, 256Mb RAM, 1x9Gb SCSI hard disk, one 1x18Gb SCSI hard disk.

This is a machine on which we'd already had several versions of Windows and Linux installed, so there was a lot of legacy partitioning for OS Selector to configure; it really wasn't very happy.

The menu we got it to provide was:

- 1.Windows XP Professional Edition
- 2.Windows 2000 Professional Edition
- 3.Linux

The interesting thing, with the NT-family of Windows is that they have their own boot loader, which will be automatically configured when Windows installs, so selecting either Windows options actually takes you to the same menu as defined by the BOOT.INI on the first Windows partition.

Unfortunately for us, the Windows XP option refused to load, giving the message "NTLDR is missing". We didn't get any complaints or assistance from OS Selector throughout this process and the documentation is a bit light on troubleshooting.

Conclusion

In general, OS Selector can only be recommended if you need the extra Linux filesystem and Windows Server support, and want to learn lots about the intricacies of partition and boot management. Otherwise we'd recommend Partition Magic and, if you're feeling more frugal with your money or want get close to the bare metal, look to use existing Linux tools and freeware Windows tools.

A unique feature of OS Selector is the support for Linux Ext3 and Reiser FS filesystems

OS Selector 5.0 Deluxe

Supplier	Acronis
Price	£35 to £49
Web	www.acronis.com/products/oss50
For	Some unique features
Against	Non-Free software, bit glitchy

rating 8/10