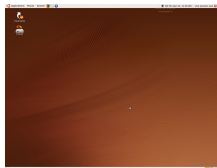


21 May 2009

By: Daniel Pop-Silaghi, Linux Editor



Ubuntu 9.04

[Ubuntu 9.04 Review](#)

The Jaunty Jackalope

In only a few years of existence, Ubuntu reached a very high level of popularity. With the slogan "Linux for human beings," Canonical clearly aimed to provide a smoother transition for the regular desktop users who wanted a change in their everyday computing experience. Though some may question Ubuntu's true contribution to open-source innovation, one cannot deny its important part in popularizing GNU/Linux and freeing a lot of users from proprietary software restrictions and high costs.

Ubuntu 9.04 (Jaunty Jackalope) respects the established six-month release schedule and provides enough reasons to make you update from older versions. If you want to find out how Ubuntu evolved, below we offer you an in-depth review of the most popular Linux operating system to date. We've tested Ubuntu 9.04 for a period of two weeks, on the following hardware:

- AMD K8 nForce 250Gb Motherboard
- AMD Sempron 2800+ Processor
- Nvidia GeForce FX5500 Video Card
- 512 MB RAM
- IDE HDD 80 GB Maxtor
- LG CD-RW/DVD-ROM Drive
- 17" BENQ T720 LCD
- Intel Gigabyte GA-965P Motherboard
- Intel Pentium 4 3 GhZ
- Leadtek Geforce 7300GS 256 VRAM
- 1 GB DDR2 RAM
- SATA HDD 80 GB Seagate
- Samsung WriteMaster CD/DVD RW Drive
- 19" Samsung SyncMaster 913V LCD
- Notebook HP 550
- Intel Celeron M 530 1,73 GhZ CP
- Mobile Intel GME965 Express
- 1 GB 667 MHz DDR2 SDRAM
- SATA HDD 120 GB Seagate
- CD/DVD RW Drive
- 15.4" WXGA LCD
- Intel Gigabyte GA-965P-S3 Motherboard
- Intel Core2Duo 1.8 GhZ
- ASUS Geforce 7300 GT 256 VRAM
- 3 GB DDR2 RAM
- SATA HDD 250 GB Western Digital
- ASUS CD/DVD RW Drive
- 19" Samsung SyncMaster 920n LCD
- AMD K8 nForce 250Gb Motherboard
- AMD Sempron 2800+ Processor
- Nvidia GeForce FX5200 Video Card
- 1.5 GB RAM
- IDE HDD 80 GB Hitachi

- LG CD-RW/DVD-ROM Drive
- 19" DELL LCD
- MSI Intel 845 Motherboard
- Intel Pentium 4 2.4 GhZ
- Nvidia GeForce FX5500 Video Card
- 2 GB RAM
- IDE HDD 160 GB Seagate
- Samsung WriteMaster CD/DVD RW Drive
- 19" LG W1934S-SN LCD

Installation

Ubuntu 9.04 Jaunty Jackalope comes in a standard CD ISO for both 32- and 64-bit architectures. There is either the option of downloading and burning the images manually or, by request, Canonical can ship users a CD for free. We decided to first try the Live version on our test machines, before messing around with existing partitions, and install from there.

After enjoying the redesigned boot splash, the Live environment loaded and everything went perfectly fine on 5 of our computers. Even the resolution was set to the maximum value for our monitors. However, on the first machine in the above list, things went haywire with Nautilus entering into a continuous crash/restart loop, forcing us to reboot and choose the direct installation option (and yes, the CD was checked for defects beforehand).

Either way, the seven Install steps are identical. You must admit that the new timezone map is eye catchy. Though the automatic zoom from previous versions was no longer there to annoy me, it was still quite hard to "land" where I wanted from the first try. No worries though, as you can scroll through the now-separated "Region" and "City" drop-down lists until you find what you need, which definitely speeds the entire installation process. The next page features another improvement: Ubuntu automatically and correctly detected the keyboard layout. However, the option of manually selecting it is still there.

The partitioning step has been also improved a lot, especially when you want to dual boot with a Microsoft Windows operating system. Ubuntu 9.04 sticks to the EXT3 filesystems for the default installation, so if you want to try out the new EXT4, you will have to manually partition your hard drive. We would also recommend this method for another reason: by default, Ubuntu will create only one partition (besides the swap), and having a separate /home partition is always a safer bet. More and more Linux distributions will do that automatically, so it's a shame Ubuntu still creates only the root partition.

On one of the machines we've had Windows operating systems on the HDD, and the Migration Assistant asked if we wanted to import some of the settings and preferences, like instant messaging accounts, Firefox bookmarks, desktop wallpaper or documents. The installation completed without any errors, and within a reasonable time frame - 8 to 13 minutes. All in all, the installation is still as easy as it can get and most users should encounter no problems.

First impressions

With the installation out of the way, it's time to enjoy Ubuntu 9.04. After a quick boot process (about 37 seconds - from grub to a working desktop - on our slowest machine), we

were delighted to see a completely redesigned black and dark red login screen. Probably expecting a brand new desktop too, some of you might be quite disappointed with yet another brownish wallpaper and the same weathered Human theme set as default. Fortunately, a quick look in the appearance window will revive that smile on your face, as Ubuntu comes with three brand-new themes (New Wave, Dust, Dust Sand) and an extra wallpaper. The best part however is the fact that the fonts are not automatically adjusted and they look quite nice. Of course, as for any modern Linux desktop, we had to enable the 3D effects, a process that gave us no headache.

Ease of use

After a great start with Ubuntu 9.04, the time came to dive deeper into the operating system and see how it performed. Though the GNOME desktop environment has been updated to version 2.26.1, there aren't major changes, so everything was exactly as it had been on the Intrepid Ibex (Ubuntu 8.10); two panels, two workspaces, the usual menu bar and notification area. Speaking of which, Ubuntu 9.04 boasts a brand-new and modern notification framework, which we've yet to encounter in any other available distributions, at the moment of the review. That will certainly increase the coolness factor of any Linux machine. And not only that, but the new notifications are quite useful and will unify otherwise separate elements of Ubuntu. Pidgin instant messages, update notifications, new emails, Transmission events, volume control and much more will appear in the same form: a really slick black box in the top right of the screen, complete with corresponding icons. It will stay on the screen for a few seconds and then fade away. When we first heard about this new feature, we were worried that it would turn out to be intrusive, covering buttons and other controls. Fortunately, that wasn't the case, as when one hovers the mouse on top of a notification, it will become almost transparent and let you have full access to whatever is underneath it.

With this new notification framework there is also a new icon on the top panel showing a small envelope. Here's a quick example of its functionality: when someone comes online in Pidgin, a green dot will appear in the corner of this envelope - clicking on it will open a menu from where you can quickly open a new conversation with said contact. Cool! Coming with GNOME 2.26.1, the default sound server is now PulseAudio. To complement it, the new volume control applet is more intuitive and easier to grasp.

Setting up Ubuntu the way we liked was quick and easy through the System Preferences menu. Resolution, themes, keyboard shortcuts, power management, preferred applications or startup applications, they are all there for quick customization. In a short amount of time, anybody can make Ubuntu work in the best way for them. I know that many users can perfectly live with their Ubuntu installation without ever touching the terminal, but more advanced tasks (and users) require typing a few commands in the Linux console, so we're still waiting for Canonical to include the handy "Open in terminal" Nautilus script in the right-click context menu by default.

All the entries in the "System Preferences" and "Administration" categories are pretty much self-explanatory so most users will immediately know where to go in order to change various settings. "Sessions," for example, is now called "Startup Applications," to remove any confusion. Ubuntu also makes it really easy for users to keep their systems up-to-date

through Update Manager and its notifications (which, by the way, no longer sit quietly in their corner; a window pops to urge you to update your system whenever it is necessary). For a real headache-free experience, there is also an option to automatically install security updates without asking for confirmation.

Testing of various hardware

First of all, you should know that our Intel-based HP 550 laptop listed at the beginning of the article had no issues at all with the driver installed in Ubuntu 9.04 and the Compiz Fusion effects. It worked out of the box!

Ubuntu's number of supported hardware devices is continuously increasing and we're happy to report that most of our peripherals were instantly recognized and were ready to use in no time. Multimedia keys present on a lot of keyboards these days work perfectly with Ubuntu's default audio player, Rhythmbox; extra mouse buttons are also usable. Speaking of mice, the scroll wheel speed is still not configurable, but most users should be perfectly happy with the default speed.

We had an HP Deskjet 3845 printer and its recharged cartridges refused to leave any "traces" on the paper with the default, normal quality setting selected. Lowering it to draft yielded the expected print. Note that this problem is not Ubuntu-exclusive as it occurred in all Linux distributions that we used with that printer. A new cartridge will work with all the settings, but as Linux sees the recharged ones as almost empty, printing with the default quality doesn't work.

The other printer that we tested, a Canon Selphy CP-740 is recognized by Ubuntu, but only if the user installs some packages and manually adds the printer.

We also had an entry-level Trust TB-4200 graphical tablet that was far from performing as intended. The little light flashed to tell us that it was active, but hovering the stylus over the tablet didn't move the pointer (we had to actually push on the surface while dragging to move it), tapping on the tablet had no result and the other two buttons didn't work. What bothered us was the fact that the same tablet used to work just fine on Ubuntu 8.10 (Intrepid Ibex). Sad!

On the brighter side, upon plugging in any other device, be it a digital camera, a USB stick or a mobile phone with a memory card, Ubuntu recommends actions for the different types of content and conveniently places corresponding icons on the desktop during the time they are mounted. Other than that, regular and USB headsets as well as most webcams play nicely with the Jaunty Jackalope.

In conclusion, we had no major problems that could not be easily fixed, with the hardware posted at the beginning of the review.

Testing of various applications

Ubuntu's software repository is known to be one of the biggest out there, with a very large collection of both Canonical-maintained and third-party applications. The default Jaunty installation comes with a great selection of open-source software. As you probably already know, the GNOME desktop environment chose to use Brasero as the default CD/DVD burning tool. Throughout the countless disc burning tasks that we performed, Brasero never failed us. It's speedy, it has all the features one needs, including file and image checksum, normalize option for Audio CDs and a basic cover editor.

In the office environment, Ubuntu 9.04 can be put to work right after installing it. With Evolution 2.26.1 being dramatically improved to support Microsoft Outlook formats and the popular OpenOffice.org 3.0.1 office suite, there's little reason to not be happy with Jaunty Jackalope. Unfortunately, just as it happened six months ago with Intrepid, OpenOffice.org was updated to version 3.1.0 a short while after Jaunty was released, so, most likely, users will have to either manually install the new version or wait for Karmic Koala. The default web browser is, as expected, Mozilla Firefox 3.0. Though not at its latest version, the first set of updates will include the most recent security and bug fixes. We're curious if Canonical will decide to upgrade it when the 3.5 version comes out...

Other Internet tools include Pidgin 2.5.5 instant messaging client, Transmission 1.5.1 BitTorrent client and Vinagre 2.26.1 / Terminal Server Client 0.150 for remote desktop capabilities. The powerful Ekiga SIP and VoIP software is also there. There is a new utility in the Administration area: Computer Janitor, which will clean the unmaintained packages or erroneous files in your system. The integrated archive utility (File-Roller) was also improved and supports the powerful LZMA compression algorithm. For basic graphics and photography work, GIMP 2.6.6 and F-Spot Photo Manger will please just about any skilled or amateur individual.

Compiz, a major ego-scratcher for Linux users out there, was updated to a new version and we were delighted by the fact that finally GNOME and Compiz get along much better. In Ubuntu 8.10, having Compiz enabled would cause some really nasty graphical glitches when hovering the pointer over the window controls. Now, users don't have to install Emerald just to run away from that bug, as the new Compiz fixed it and you can fully enjoy Jaunty's great new themes.

Multimedia (Audio/Video)

Multimedia capabilities are clearly mandatory on a desktop operating system and Ubuntu had always been friendly with all kinds of video and audio formats. Still, for a full multimedia experience, users should install the ubuntu-restricted-extras package from the repositories, which will ensure support for most formats.

As for the ever-popular Adobe Flash format, it evolved quite nicely in the last period of time and behaves much better than it did a few years ago. However, we've found a nasty problem with Adobe's Flash Player in the 64-bit edition of Ubuntu 9.04, because the 32-bit version is installed by default and you are unable to play most of the flash videos, such as the ones from YouTube and other popular video sharing websites. However, removing the 32-bit flash player and manually installing the 64-bit one (which right now is in alpha state), gives you a working flash player.

Though there are still some performance issues, especially when enjoying a Compiz-enabled desktop, Flash in Linux is undoubtedly on the right path.

Games

All work and no play makes Ubuntu a dull boy, therefore Jaunty Jackalope, just like its brothers, comes with the same GNOME game collection for your regular 5-minute fun. But,

some of us often need more than Mahjongg and Four-in-a-Row to quench our video game thirst, and the Linux gaming scene still has a loong way to go until it reaches a respectable status. Nonetheless, slowly but surely, more and more games are becoming available on our beloved platform and developers are starting to hear our desperate prayers. Some of the more popular examples are "On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness" and "World of Goo," two great games that saw the light of day on the Linux platforms too. So, if you're a mad gamer, you will find a very attractive selection of open-source games available in Ubuntu's repositories, such as Sauerbraten, Open Arena, Nexuiz, Warsaw, Warzone 2100.

Curious to see how Jaunty handles the pressure, we installed a bunch of them (including the demos for World of Goo and On the Rain-Slick...) and we really have no complaints. They all worked flawlessly. Moreover, World of Goo for Linux seemed to perform even better than its Windows version on the same hardware. Still, there are a lot of Windows-only games that we want to play and if you don't dual boot, the only option is to use Wine in order to enjoy your favorite games. Wine can easily be installed from the Ubuntu repositories and its supported game collection is growing every day. Unfortunately, on our older, less powerful systems, recent game performance in Wine makes them unplayable, at framerates well under the hardware's real capabilities. Still, there are many games that behave unexpectedly well, so it's a mixed bag.

Bugs

Unfortunately, on our systems (and from what we could gather, on many others), a quite annoying bug makes the PC speaker beep every time we shut it down. Disabling the alert sound and muting the corresponding control doesn't solve the problem. Most likely, this will get fixed pretty soon, as the submission on Launchpad shows a large number of affected systems.

Brasero, as great as it is, is plagued with a weird bug: whenever there's an active burning task in progress, keeping the little progress window not minimized will remove any keyboard functionality on the desktop. To better explain, clicking on the desktop will not make the window lose focus, thus the keyboard commands will only affect Brasero's interface. The workaround is to minimize the application into the notification area using its own icon.

Even if it's not the default filesystem, tested on five of our computers, the EXT4 filesystem performed quite pleasing. However, on the sixth machine there were some weird freezes when permanently deleting files. We had a quick look over Jaunty's release notes and apparently that is a known issue: "In some cases, deleting files from an ext4 filesystem is reported to cause soft lock-ups in the kernel (330824). Investigation of this problem is ongoing, and it is expected that a fix for it will be made available as a post-release update."

Another documented known issue consists of performance regressions on Intel graphics cards. And though there are many users reporting such problems, our Intel graphics powered HP 550 Notebook worked perfectly and was 3D-enabled right from the Live environment. For less fortunate users, there are some workarounds, but most would be better off with downgrading the driver.

Conclusions

Ubuntu 9.04 (Jaunty Jackalope) is no doubt worthy of the hype that surrounds it. Though far from being a massive overhaul (Karmic Koala will most likely take care of that), there are

a lot of under-the-hood improvements and tweaks that allow Ubuntu to keep its Linux distro "crown." It's definitely not the perfect operating system but it appears that Ubuntu is on a clear ascending path. Hopefully, Canonical will be quick to fix some of the more obvious issues that could keep some from hopping on the Jaunty bandwagon. But for most, upgrading to Ubuntu 9.04 is a no-brainer. You'll get more speed, more stability, a better look, modern notifications and up-to-date software. Our final conclusion is that Ubuntu 9.04 is the perfect solution for daily office tasks and for most home users, except hardcore gamers (of course).