

Shuttle LinuXPC

Graham Morrison thumbs a lift on the recently launched Linux Shuttle and test drives the pricier of its diminutive Linux offerings.

In brief...

» A small PC with a small form factor. Limited upgrade potential, but solid, reliable and quiet. Alternatives include the Isis we looked at in LXF98, as well as an increasing number of other PC vendors.

Our System

CPU: Intel Core 2 Duo (E4400) 2GHz

Memory: 1GB

Hard drive: 250GB

DVD/RW: Sony NEC Optiarc (18x)

Graphics: Intel integrated (GMA950)

Expansion: 1xPCI

Price: £450 including VAT

Shuttle has always made desirable computers. The Taiwanese company has cornered the market in machines that can silently sit in the corner of your living room, thanks to their small cuboid design and quiet operation. They're also compact enough to fit into just about any space, while at the same time keeping a similar level of performance to big-box computers. They make the perfect media centre, or home internet kiosk.

In what is becoming a wonderfully common move for PC manufacturers, Shuttle announced last November that it would start offering Linux with its latest XPC designs. There are two XPC packages available: one with OpenSUSE pre-installed and aimed at home users, and another with SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop 10, which is aimed at the business user. The hardware is the same in both cases, but you're free to change the configuration according to your own preference. We opted for the OpenSUSE version to keep the costs down, as the Enterprise Desktop is around €50 more.

You say aluminum

The first thing you notice about the XPC is that it has the same lovely brushed aluminium look that Apple uses for its MacBook Pro and MacBook Air portable computers. Aluminium is a great choice for cooling too, and even the DVD writer has a silver front panel. If you're more Johnny Cash than Metal Mickey, you can get the whole system painted black, but we'd be hard pressed to choose which we prefer.



» The Shuttle LinuXPC is small and quiet, but this means that it has limited upgrade potential – you're never going to fit a powerful graphics card into that small box.

When you first turn the machine on, you need to step through a couple of adjustments for the OpenSUSE installation, adding a root and user account and setting up localisation. This is a more professional approach than some of the other systems we've seen, and it's a big improvement over creating a simple default account and leaving the user to make their own accounts – which is how many other machines are sold.

Another sensible configuration option is that Shuttle creates a root and a home partition – 8GB for / and the remainder for /home. This is something that's tricky for new users to configure, and can be a real life saver when you want to try a different distribution or upgrade the current one.

Card reading

When you get to the desktop, the default KDE layout of OpenSUSE presents itself. There's no eye candy, and no *Compiz*. You find yourself sitting in front of a sober but well specified, smooth and stable Linux system. This is the kind of experience that many of us have been waiting for, and it's great that manufacturers like Shuttle are starting to see some of the benefits in using and selling Linux. The integrated card reader works without problems, and the box is as quiet as we'd hoped. As Linux

users, we also get that stalwart of many Windows PCs – a recovery DVD. This will make restoring your installation after serious system problems much easier, and when combined with the two-year pick-up-and-return warranty, these systems can be taken seriously by anyone looking for a Linux machine that they need day-in, day out. Its tiny form factor doesn't lend the LinuXPC too well to upgrades, and without an SLI slot or serious power supply, it's never going to be a games machine. But thanks to OpenSUSE, professional support and a serious warranty, this is a machine you can rely on. **LXF**



» A card reader, two USB ports and a mini-Firewire port on the front complement the Ethernet, four USB ports, standard Firewire, PS2 and audio ports on the back of the LinuXPC.

LINUX FORMAT Verdict

LinuXPC SD300Q2
Developer: Shuttle
Web: <http://eu.shuttle.com>
Price: Prices start at £340 inc. VAT

Features	7/10
Performance	9/10
Ease of use	8/10
Value for money	7/10

» A small, quiet and reliable Linux machine that's a very welcome addition to Shuttle's product range.

Rating 8/10