

Mandriva 2009

Graham Morrison asks whether this 10-year-old distro does enough to survive for another decade.

In brief...

» User-friendly distro that provides an easy introduction for new users that's also suitable for the more experienced. See also Ubuntu or OpenSUSE.

Ah, Mandriva Linux. This beginner-friendly system was really the first major distro to put the end-user at the heart of its installation process, and as a result became the distro of choice for newbies, while retaining enough advanced features to keep more experienced users happy too. Since then the rise of Ubuntu has all but eclipsed Mandriva in the popularity stakes, but the last couple of releases from Mandriva Linux have brought this worthy distribution back on to our radar, taming that volatile mixture of cutting-edge features and stability. The 2009 release is no different: KDE 4.1.2 is the showcase component, a version of the desktop that was released just days before Mandriva 2009 hit the mirrors. And KDE is joined by Gnome 2.24, *OpenOffice.org* 3.0, *Firefox* 3.0.2, and even a developer's release of the *Amarok* music player. But the first thing you'll notice is the new installer.

Dare to upgrade

It's a real pain having to reinstall and reconfigure everything each time there's a new release, so we instead chose to upgrade our standard 2008 installation. Mandriva started off well. The installer recognised the previous version, and it took the trouble to inform us that the KDE 4 configuration files were incompatible with those used by the old version.

Unfortunately, that's where the good news ends. After waiting patiently and installing the updates, the inevitable reboot only presented us with a broken Mandriva 2009 installation. Our USB keyboard didn't work, and even when we tricked the login



» Mandriva 2009 includes many proprietary packages out of the box, including Google Picasa, Google Gadgets and Google Earth.

window to let us through, all we got was a blue background and a lonely *Xterm*. That meant going back to a full install.

The second installation gave us a chance to explore the new installer. There's a desktop selection page, for example, which features tiny images of Gnome and KDE along with a custom desktop option. It would be more useful to have larger previews of each desktop, but it's a nice touch; as is the installation summary, which contains a comprehensive overview of the default settings for the installation, many of which can be changed before the final reboot. You can specify the default operating system for *Grub*, for instance, or whether *Pulse Audio* is configured for surround sound.

Demo

The KDE desktop has been tuned for Mandriva's new look, which means lots of black embellished with Mandriva's 'fractured light' colour scheme. Not being massive Pink Floyd fans, we changed this pretty quickly. To circumvent the new Plasma KDE desktop feature and make the change to KDE 4 a little clearer for KDE oldthinkers (that is, users of the old 3.x versions), Mandriva places the virtual desktop folder plasmoid prominently in the middle of the display. Mandriva also uses the classic menu view rather than the KDE 4 default, which is an excellent decision.

What isn't so great is that the default installation is littered with demo versions. *Cedega* is installed, but you no longer get a

key to use it. Fluendo's *Codeina* can be used to purchase and install media codecs, but none are included, and there's only a time-restricted demo of the *LightZone* photo-editing application. You might expect that of a free distro, but not one that costs the best part of £40. But top of our list of annoyances is the Google Toolbar leaching on to the *Firefox* installation. It may only take a second to remove, but many users might feel that Google is pervasive enough without needing Mandriva to evangelise for it. Despite these setbacks, everything else works as it should. We had no stability issues (other than with the Nvidia drivers), and the high-quality software repositories provided every application we needed. The risk of including cutting-edge software seems to have paid off: Mandriva Powerpack 2009 is a solid release. **LXF**

Features at a glance



KDE 4.1.2

KDE is still the default desktop, and Mandriva has done a great job of packaging and customising it for 2009.



Netbooks

This release has officially-sanctioned support for the Asus Eee PC, Acer Aspire One and the MSI Wind.

LINUX Verdict

Mandriva Powerpack 2009

Web: www.mandriva.com
Developer: Mandriva Linux
Price: €49 (download)

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| Features | 9/10 |
| Performance | 8/10 |
| Ease of use | 8/10 |
| Value for money | 6/10 |

» Worth the money if you're looking for a cutting-edge distro with a wide choice of packages and a modicum of support.

Rating **8/10**