

TestDriving SimplyMepis 6.0-4 Beta 2

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[4]SimplyMepis is in another development cycle and version 6.0-4 beta 2 was recently released. I wasn't overly impressed with the original 6.0 release and was a bit curious as to how things were progressing. So, I downloaded the 32bit beta 2 to give it a test run. This is what I saw.

The initial boot screen remains mostly unchanged. Your choices still encompass options for graphical compatibility and I booted using the default "Boot Normal." I was testing this release on my newly acquired HP laptop as my desktop was busy with a long compile. Mepis detected the graphics and display correctly and booted in a well proportioned resolution. The new silent boot splash is quite attractive and definitely much improved. It is still Mepis blue and has a discreet logo at the bottom center featuring the Mepis pyramids under the sun. The matching login screen is updated and looking very pretty as well. So is the KDE start splash. Things were looking good for Mepis so far.



At the desktop I found the correct resolution of 1200x800 used and the touchpad working properly. Sound was detected, configured, and working although the volume buttons on the laptop didn't. However, sound could be adjusted using kmix. I wasn't surprised that the wireless wasn't detected and I didn't have much luck with ndiswrapper and the windows drivers. However the wired ethernet was detected and with a cable plugged in, the internet connection was ready to go upon login.

The default desktop wallpaper is much more attractive than in Mepis past. The color seems more fashionable and the

design much more modern. The panel stretched about 75% of the screen width in a normal mode. Obviously missing this release was the old cartoon aquarium. This was a cool little applet - six years ago. But it does seem quite antiquated now. It was a good decision to lose it. Kweather is still present as well as ksensors, which seemed to be functioning properly on my laptop. The trash can is now in the panel as well, but other icons still occupied the desktop. Those included a shortcut to Demo's documents folder, the mounted cd/dvd disk, a mepis help link, and a link to the Mepis harddrive Installer. I think if you're gonna put the trash can in the panel, you should lose the rest of the desktop icons as well. One good point is that all the commercial adverts/icons are not present. At the other end of the panel is this really nice start button icon featuring the updated Mepis logo. In fact, all the icons were updated to a much nicer theme. Taking all into consideration, the desktop of SimplyMepis is looking really nice.

The menu structure is still basically the same as found in 6.0, but it seems like the number of applications has decreased. There are still plenty available including of course all the KDE apps as well as some that don't come in the KDE releases. Firefox is the main browser and is the latest available version, 2.0.0.1. However, OpenOffice.org is still 2.0.2. They will need to update that, especially in light of the latest vulnerability reported. Gaim is still present as well as ebay bidwatcher. Kino, digicam, showfoto, and Xara Xtreme are included as well as, of course, The Gimp 2.2. Thunderbird is included if you prefer it to Kontact. Kmpayer, amarok, and RealPlayer are featured for multimedia enjoyment. There is KlamAV and Guarddog for those who are security conscious. All of these apps worked really well. I didn't test every single application in the menu, but I did try to hit all those that aren't part of the KDE packages. All I tested fired up and functioned.

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One of the apps that worked really well was kmpayer. I was quite tickled to be able to watch some downloaded movie and sample files. Another was browser plugins. I was able to watch videos at google video as well as quick time trailers, although I had some trouble with the trailers at gamespot.com. Flash and java(script) worked wonderfully. It's nice to run into a distro that includes this kind of support.

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And of course there are a few system tools and utilities. They are still using synaptic for package management, which did not function here on the livecd. Kcontrol has been replaced by System Settings, as we saw last release. Kcontrol is still present, even if not in the menu. System Settings calls up all the kcontrol modules, so I'm still wondering why. I couldn't seem to find anything like a system wide configuration utility for hardware management and the like, but perhaps my eyes are beginning to show their age. There is also Mepis' harddrive installer that always worked well in the past. We'll test it out again when this cycle gets closer to gold.

Under the hood we're looking at kernel-2.6.15 and gcc 4.0.3. Xorg is version 7.0 and KDE is 3.5.3. I was a bit disappointed at the older kernel and especially the older KDE. 3.5.6 is due to be tagged on January 15, perhaps they'll upgrade for the next beta. It's hard to detect Ubuntu's influence beyond some of the package names and that System Settings (as found in Kubuntu).

All in all, SimplyMepis is beginning to get back into their groove again I think. Overall, I liked what I saw in this beta. They are spending more time or thought in the appearance of their offering as well as trying to make it more utilitarian. Hardware detection and setup was very good. It was looking great and seemed to function really well at this point. I was disappointed in the age of some of the included applications and KDE, but again, despite this they functioned well. Mepis was once at the top of the game and hopefully they'll find themselves there again. The playing field is a bit more competitive these days, but SimplyMepis is still a very good choice for newcomers and experienced alike. They paved

the way for many of today's distros in many areas and I'd like to see them reach a higher level of popularity again. Perhaps this release will help. Time will tell.

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