postmarketOS 22.06 aims to revive end-of-life smartphones

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A Linux distro for smartphones abandoned by their manufacturers, postmarketOS, has introduced in-place upgrades.

Alpine Linux is a very minimal general-purpose distro that runs well on low-end kit, as The Reg FOSS desk found when we looked at version 3.16 last month. postmarketOS's `pmOS` for short version 22.06 is based on the same version.

This itself is distinctive. Most other third-party smartphone OSes, such as LineageOS or GrapheneOS, or the former CyanogenMod, are based on the core of Android itself.

The project is quite different. It uses the mainline Linux kernel, and a standard userland, to support a wide variety of devices. The theory is that not needing a manufacturer's outdated firmware or drivers means that pmOS can use more current components, direct from the various upstream Linux projects. The project's own wiki currently lists over 200 supported devices, including phones, tablets, and e-book readers, ranging back to the venerable Nokia N900.

They're not all equally supported, though. Most of them can can boot, many have Wi-Fi support, but currently just two actual phones work as phones: the open-source hardware PinePhone and the Purism Librem 5. Even saying that, though, the ability to connect to Wi-Fi and use an old device as a pocketable terminal could make obsolete hardware useful again.