An updated version of Linux XP was released on December 21 and since then I had been waiting for an English release. There was an English directory on the mirror, so I thought one would be forthcoming. I gave up. I downloaded the Russian version and was able to get it to display in English with a few mouse clicks. So don't let the fact it's a Russian distro throw you off. Test it out anyway... if you want a distro that is based on Fedora/Redhat, comes with a 2.6.10 kernel, Xorg 6.8.1, and gnome 2.12, yet looks remarkably like KDE meets Windows.

Linux XP Professional Edition is described as "a universal and secure operating system for Russian speakers designed for home and business use. It is based on freely available sources from Red Hat Linux and Fedora Core."

The installer is anancoda. As Linux XP is based on Redhat, this is expected. It's not really dressed up very much, although the in-flight slide-show was customized for Linux XP. I couldn't read much of it other than the occasional "Linux XP" or "Red Hat", but it was interesting. I could make out that a lot of it was advertising, and some were an introduction to the system through a few screenshots. The installer is a simplified version I do believe, it asks very few questions. I recall a chance to set up partitions and it asking for a root password, but that was about it. That was enough really. ...if you don't mind running as root. (or setting up your own user after initial boot). There was no network config and after boot, it couldn't bring up the network and then I realized, "hey, there's no nic in that machine!" No wonder...

OK, back to your regularly scheduled review:

As stated, the desktop under English looks very Windows like, but we expected that given the chosen name of the
distro: LinuxXP. But it looks more like windows 95/98 than XP. However, they've added a nice theme that makes the widgets kinda 3D and a nice start button. The icons are a bit ...yuk, but after you change the Language, they are of little consequence.

To change the language easily, click on the start button and navigate to the menu item that has a windows' colored logo and the words Linux XP. This will be the control center. When it starts, navigate to the icon in the menu frame that has an American and the (politically correct term for) Russian Flag. You will see three icons, two with flags again. Click on the first one and you will be presented with two readable choices: Russian and English. Click English and restart gnome. (No other boot options are necessary as the default system locale is C, and "us,ru" is in xorg.conf.) There is also an option in the login screen for choosing your language, but one doesn't see that initially because one is logged in automatically as root.

Even after finally changing the language, I still couldn't find a terminal in the menu. However Linux XP does come with gnome-terminal and one can start it from the "Run application" menu item. I looked and looked and was not able to find an application to edit the menu. I looked even longer and harder and wasn't able to ascertain where Linux XP stores its menu list/settings. So, as a result, I'm stuck starting the terminal from the run menu. I wish you better luck.

Speaking of menus, they are quite sparse. There seems to be applications for most popular tasks, but they are clearly aimed at the average "I use my computer to email, im, surf the internet..." kinda person. There are applications to:

- (un)tar/(un)zip file, calculate, look up words, light editing, and syncing with a palm
- edit images and look at photos
- file share, email, surf, im, irc, and video conference
- listen to cds, radio, tv, and watch movies
- draw diagrams and manage projects

There is a software installer/system update application in the Linux XP Control Panel. There was an update available already and a few extra applications available to install. Some included wesnoth, inkscape, skype, and mplayer. For office applications I found Abiword and oo2 (which I assumed to be OpenOffice.org 2.x) listed as available, but OpenOffice must not really be present on their mirrors as my request to install it went ignored. The software installation program seemed to function quite nicely and it looked remarkably like the one I remember from the old Windows days. However, some application(s) didn't show up in the menu, although I was asked about it. An item appeared for Abiword in the menu after reboot, but it did not function. Trying to execute abiword from command line resulted in an "error while loading shared libraries: libfribidi.so.0: cannot open shared object file: No such file or directory." I tested the installer with xcdroast as well and although no menu entry appeared, a shortcut did appear on the desktop and it did function, albeit with a non-root operation warning and having to set up the cdrw device manually due to its scanning for obsolete scsi emulation.
During the software installation, a popup appeared that stated something about "my Linux XP wasn't activated, that I had 96 boots left. I could activate thru the control panel > activation". I wasn't able to ascertain the cost of this activation as the site is in Russian. As such, this whole system activation thing put a damper on the whole experience. But with 99 boots, I suppose one could put off activation for quite a while.

The update function [21] installed a "Pack 1," then I was given some kind of information [22] in Russian. When clicked "okay," the system rebooted. Upon reboot, the file browser, eye of gnome and the gnome-terminal opened on the desktop. I shutdown with only the terminal and updater open. The network did not function again as well.

To bring up the network I could run dhclient from [23] the commandline, but I suppose we need to set it up to come up at boot. The network option was already "checked" in the start up services configuration, so setting it up in the Linux XP Control Panel was in order.

The Linux XP Control Panel looks very much like the PCLinuxOS or Mandriva Control Panels, and it has similar capabilities. Perhaps not as extensive and inclusive, but one can set up their basic system with this nice neat app.

The menus were what one might think of as sparcely populated. Linux XP includes about one program per task. For example, they chose firefox for the browsing app, evolution for email, gimp for image manipulation, gaim for instant messaging, and totem for movie playing.

Hardware detection was adequate although my network interface card was not picked up when installed after system install. I do not know if it would have been detected and set up during the system installation or not. Regardless it wasn't much trouble setting it up later in the Control Panel. The machine I tested on was a simple machine relegated to the ranks of spare. I commonly have trouble with anacoda and my main desktop system (specifically my harddrive geometries & partition blocks), and Linux XP continued that tradition. As a result, I installed Linux XP 2006 onto an old ata 66 Maxtor harddrive using a system equiped with a Pentium3 667, 256 mb ram and ati rage 128 video card sitting on an intel 815 chipset mobo.

The performance of Linux XP on this old system was surprising. Given the low specifications of the test machine, I fully expected Linux XP to be quite sluggish. This was not the case. In fact it was amazingly peppy. I was not able to test movie file handling and no flash plugin was included (or functional), however java did just fine.

In conclusion, I found Linux XP to be an adequate system for someone with modest requirements, for example perhaps that teenager who wants to im and listen to music but keeps downloading virii, spyware, and trojans or your granny who only wants to write a few letters, email and look at some pics of the grandkids. I see it as an admirable attempt to sway Windows users towards Linux, and I think Linux XP may have accomplished that. It's appearance would not throw any Windows user into a tailspin of confusion. It was an easy install, easy configuration and easy use. I rather liked it for what it was. Although it has all the feel of a commercial product. The only major drawback seems to the the
time limit requiring an activation code (I wonder what would happen after 99 boots). For the right market, Linux XP has a definite use. For experienced users, it's a nice novelty to load up, look at, and then boot back to your normal system. I can't see myself switching. But perhaps you know someone who will.

More Screenshots [33].

Linux XP Website [5]

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Source URL:  http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/4207

Links:
[22] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/linuxxp/updates1