

Frugalware 0.3 - getting there!

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Frugalware strives to combine simplicity of distros like Slackware or Arch with ease of configuration and use. It adopted Packman (from Arch Linux) as its package manager, and is compiled for i686 architecture. I've been following the progress of this project from their very first release and I really wanted to like it because the concept appealed to me, but until now I found it plagued by various small and not so small problems that would quickly turn me off. So I am very happy to report it appears that things have come together this time and Frugalware is starting to live up to its potential.

One of the major problems I've always had with Frugalware is their installer - most of the time I have not been able to complete the installation from the CDs due to mysterious problems that always appeared during the actual installation of packages on the hard disk. 'Mysterious' also because the error message inevitably informed me only that 'some error occurred during installation', or words to that effect... well, thanks for that! In fact, I got burnt so many times I no longer even bother downloading Frugalware isos - I found the process works much better with their net install. This is also the way I used this time - possibly the installer is by now working perfectly, but I just wasn't prepared to waste any more CDs and downloads. My other gripe is about the way this installer needs to be watched and prompted along the way - after making selection of packages the process starts, but after some base packages are copied it stops to present the options regarding GRUB. Once told what to do, it moves on to main body of installation... then it pauses again, to ask about installing additional packages! There are no reboots required throughout and surely it would be possible to gather all this information all at once, at the beginning, so the installation could be left unattended once it starts? Apart from that, installation is easy and clear. All the usual steps are there: creating the user, setting up network and video - special kudos for actually getting the refresh rates of my monitor right for once!

There is a huge amount of software available, just look at the list of Window Managers: KDE, Gnome, XFce, Fluxbox, Openbox, Blackbox, Enlightenment, IceWM... Multimedia needs are also well looked after with Mplayer, Kaffeine and Amarok, along with all the required codecs including those 'naughty' win32 ones. Java, Flash, nvidia and ati binary drivers are also provided, so Frugalware is a delight in this respect - none of this 'adding from outside sources' nonsense. There is also Mono, though I don't think many Mono-based applications are included (I looked for, and haven't found Beagle, Banshee and f-Spot)

Kernel used in this release is version 2.6.13, Gnome is at 2.12.1, KDE at 3.4.2 and Open Office at 1.1.5.

Pacman is a great package manager, effective, simple yet flexible. Frugalware guys wrote their own GUI front-end for those so inclined, though I find pacman is perfectly simple to use from the command line. There is also repoman, a tool for building packages from source.

The other tool developed specifically for Frugalware is their GUI runlevel editor, and this is something I really

appreciate, because I don't enjoy hunting through various runlevels turning scripts on and off by hand. On the command line there is also the 'service' command, used by some Red Hat based systems.

One test I like to perform on my desktop system is to plug in my digital camera. It is a Cannon Powershot A30, a common model well supported in Linux. Unfortunately, on Frugalware it didn't work. Forget auto-mounting on the desktop, I couldn't get gtkam to interface with it either. I suspect problem with USB, in fact I had an identical problem in one of the previous version of Frugalware. Back then it was a problem with user permissions, because I found I could access the camera as root. On this occasion however I discovered the root is no longer allowed to log into a GUI session at all - something I will have to change... Security is all good, but not when it stops you from getting things done!

So, this is how far I got for now... this is a blog entry, not an in-depth review! But I think I can say that while some issues remain, Frugalware makes solid progress with each release and by now it mostly lives up to its promise of a modern, easy to use system.

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