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Sunday, August 13, 2006

Time to buy a Thinkpad again?

About 18 months ago I had a very nice perfectly configured Debian T42p Thinkpad stolen at a conference. I had less than two weeks before the next conference and I didn't have time to fiddle with my OS to get a new Thinkpad up and running with Debian. It also annoyed me that there was no way to buy a new Thinkpad without paying Microsoft for yet another Windows XP license I would never use. So I swallowed some Open Source pride and bought a Powerbook G4. It took a bit of getting used to, but overall it was a pleasant experience for a while. It was a Unix laptop which just worked and I was up and running quickly.

The Powerbook hasn't done so well over time though. It is not nearly robust enough for my hectic travel schedule which include plenty of mad dashes through airports in strange countries. The clasp to hold it closed broke long ago. The power plug thing is so bent out of shape it won't hold the power connector solidly. These two factors probably contributed to my battery completely dying after about a year and I had to replace it. Also, whenever I put it down the CD Rom tries to eject a non-existent disk, and the screen has a long dent in it which causes a dark area on the display. The cheap silver paint has rubbed off the case where my wrist rests, the key labels are disappearing and my cursor-left key isn't there anymore. Half the time it won't come out of sleep mode requiring a reboot and the other half it simply turns itself off. It also gets amazingly hot. I do have full Appicare on it, but it doesn't appear like they will fix any of this stuff because the 4 or 5 big dents in it is obvious signs of it being dropped and they state they won't fix damage due to a drop.

I have of course been eyeing the new MacBookPro, but I see no signs that it would be any more robust. And even worse, now with their Intel move they are using Intel's Trusted Computing Platform for who knows what. I haven't seen much on what they are doing with the TPM beyond tying the OS to the hardware, but since they are not a member of the Trusted Computing Group there is no oversight. I also find myself using very little Apple software. It is shiny and pretty for the most part, but not really something an old UNIX hack like me would use on a day to day basis. Compiling things on a G4 is painful. gcc and gdb do work, but Valgrind and Callgrind don't which means I can't do any serious development on it.

So, back to the Thinkpad. With Lenovo's announcement that they will sell the T60p with Suse pre-installed I am assuming this means I can finally buy a Thinkpad without paying the Microsoft tax. Combine that with the amazing improvements of Linux on the desktop spearheaded by Ubuntu and it all means that my Apple experiment is coming to an end after about 18 months.

Of course now I need to figure out how to navigate the Lenovo ordering process. It doesn't appear that they have this non-Windows T60p available yet. Probably need to wait until after Linuxworld next week. Will also need to figure out whether EPP (employee) or SPP (stockholder) pricing is cheaper, or if there is some other mechanism to get a bit of a discount. How about an AOSD (Annoying Open Source Developer) discount?

Posted by Rasmus at 11:18

the new thinkpads doo look sexy, esp for old unix hack(er)s :-). that would prolly be my choice of computer to do work on (mac laptops are great for home computers imho: play/serve music, watch videos, browse the web, chat).

valgrind/cache-grind prolly will work on a macbook pro someday, due to the intel processors... vmware has finally been ported too! :)
Anonymous on Aug 14 2006, 13:16

Rasmus,

I hate to disappoint you but Lenovo is charging a ransom to have SLED preinstalled. It's cheaper to pay the MSFT tax for the exact same ThinkPad T60p.

Here's my whole story related to navigating Lenovo's SLED preloaded ThinkPad ordering process:
<http://linux.nyvisitek.com/2006/08/15/lenovo-and-novell-want-a-ransom-for-linux/>

I bought a MacBook in late May and though it's a pretty good machine, it's not as comfortable as a ThinkPad and it's not as durable, that's a definite. I am actually thinking about picking up a ThinkPad now, if I can get it at a reasonable price and keep the MacBook for non-essential, non-travel related work. Here's a link to my most recent post comparing the MacBook and ThinkPad. It's not the MacBook Pro you were thinking about but hopefully, it will help.

<http://linux.nyvisitek.com/2006/08/05/apple-macbook-vs-lenovo-thinkpad-part-3/>

Pankaj

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P.S. VMWare for OS X will go into Beta later this year. Until then, I've found QEMU to be pretty good at running Ubuntu and DSL
Anonymous on Aug 25 2006, 10:15

I don't really care about SLED. I just don't want to pay for an XP license. The fact that you can get it with something other than XP should theoretically mean they should be able to sell it without an OS. I tried all the tricks I could think of last time before the Lenovo sale, but even ordering it without a hard drive didn't work. They still wanted me to pay for an XP license.
Anonymous on Aug 27 2006, 09:06

Rasmus,
I'm sure this is a perfect example of how MSFT negotiates (read "dictates") to PC manufacturers exactly how they can sell the computers they produce. MSFT undoubtedly provides some significant discount for each PC sold with Windows and a penalty for any PC sold without Windows.

If you can manage to convince them to give you a ThinkPad without a harddrive or w/o Windows, please let us all know.

Pankaj
Anonymous on Aug 27 2006, 19:36

I'm wondering if you've considered something like the Panasonic Toughbook.

Yeah, I know the price is ridiculous.

But if those ads aren't total bull[bleep] then it makes a lot more sense than buying a new laptop every time you drop the dang thing, or, in my case, spill Diet Pepsi all over it. Again.

Got lucky the second time and did not fry the mobo, actually.

I guess it's even more of a pain if a toughbook gets stolen, as they cost so much... Get Y! to buy it for you :-)

PS It is ridiculous that you can't even buy laptop parts to make a Frankenbox without paying MS tax.
Anonymous on Oct 25 2006, 15:35

What did you end up purchasing?
Anonymous on Dec 6 2006, 22:36

Nothing yet. The Powerbook is just barely hanging on. Fried another power supply and the replacement battery is now holding less than an hour's charge. Waiting until January at this point.
Anonymous on Dec 6 2006, 22:47

Is it still hanging on?

I found myself back at this thread today as my fan went on my t42p after just less than 2 years. I tend to leave it on at night, thinking that it would go in a low power / heat / fan mode. Guess not.
Anonymous on Aug 31 2007, 11:45