

Keyboard & Mouse

A festive photograph of four kittens sitting in a wooden basket. The kittens are of various breeds: a grey tabby, a black and white tuxedo, a grey tabby, and a ginger and white. They are surrounded by Christmas decorations, including a red and gold ribbon, a small bell, and a decorative ornament. The background is a warm, blurred Christmas scene with lights and garlands.

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

Your laptop
could catch
fire!

Linux for the
modern laptop

Removing line
breaks

Model park
opens

Removing or
disabling
applications

Google Earth
updates

In this issue:

[Your laptop could catch fire!](#)

Not just Sony 1

[Blue screen of death screensaver](#)

From Microsoft no less! 2

[Linux for the modern laptop](#)

The Editor tries several distros 4

[Removing line breaks](#)

Reformatting inserted text 6

[Model park opens](#)

Now racing at Goodwood 7

[Google Earth updates](#)

Latest improvements 7

[Removing or disabling applications](#)

Stop those unwanted applications 8

[Windows XP boot.ini rebuilding](#)

Making the Recovery Console useful 9

[Xandros 4 update](#)

Two important releases 10

[Speed up Windows XP](#)

Disable visual effects and unnecessary apps 11

©Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. (except where stated otherwise)

Produced using StarOffice 8.0 from <http://www.sun.com> running under Xandros Linux 4.0 from <http://www.xandros.com>

Editor: Peter Campbell,

C/-Hobart Computer Users Group Inc., PO Box 3179, West Hobart Tas 7000, Australia

Phone: (03) 6261 5686 **Email:** editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed herein are those of the Editor or the author of the item concerned and are not necessarily endorsed by the Management Committee of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. While care is taken in compiling the information in this newsletter, the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc. and its officers and members cannot take responsibility for any problems arising from the use of the information

Website: Back issues of our newsletters are available from our website <http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>

Subscriptions: To subscribe to this newsletter, please visit our website. It is available in PDF format only

Reprinting: While permission will be given to other non-profit organisations to reprint items from this newsletter, (where the Group holds the copyright to the material in question), please contact the Editor for verification before reprinting

Our cover: Kittens – a high-resolution Webshot, available to subscribers only

Your laptop could catch fire!

You may have heard that Sony is recalling some lithium-ion laptop batteries after at least 47 laptop computers overheated and some actually caught fire.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml06/06271.html>

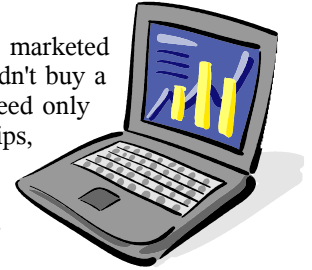
You may not have heard that other brands of laptop could be affected. Here's how:

Despite the brand-name on your computer, it wasn't necessarily built by that company. For example, your Apple, Dell, Fujitsu, Gateway, HP, IBM, Sharp, or Sony laptop was probably assembled by the Taiwanese laptop company Quanta Computers. Its screen was probably made by LG Philips, Samsung, AU Optronics, or Chi Mei, while the battery was probably manufactured by Sanyo, Matsushita, or the Sony Energy Devices Corporation. It is that last that is at the heart of the problem.

Approximately 10 million lithium ion laptop batteries manufactured by Sony have the potential of overheating, possibly resulting in a fire. These potentially defective batteries can be found not only in certain Sony laptops but also in certain laptop models sold by Apple, Dell, Fujitsu, Gateway, Hitachi, IBM/Lenovo, Sharp, Sony, and Toshiba.

Hewlett Packard and Acer also use Sony batteries but at the time of writing hadn't issued a recall on any of their laptop products.

The laptops affected were all marketed within the last year, so, if you didn't buy a new laptop in that period, you need only observe the following safety tips, which come from the US Consumer Product Safety Commission. (*Italicised* additions are mine throughout.)



If, however, you did buy a new laptop, whether or not it is of a brand mentioned above, check with the supplier whether there has been a recall.

Laptop safety tips

Do not use incompatible computer batteries and chargers. If unsure about whether a replacement battery or charger is compatible, contact the product manufacturer.

- Computer batteries can get hot during normal use. Do not use your computer on your lap [*without a ramp to allow air circulation*].
- Do not use your computer on soft surfaces, such as a sofa, bed or carpet, because it can restrict airflow

and cause overheating. [*If you must use a laptop in such circumstances, try using a 'stable table' and a ramp under the computer to ensure adequate air circulation.*]

- Do not permit a loose battery to come in contact with metal objects, such as coins, keys or jewelry. [*Contact with such objects could cause an external short circuit, damaging the battery.*]
- Do not crush, puncture or put a high degree of pressure on the battery as this can cause an internal short-circuit, resulting in overheating.
- Avoid dropping or bumping the computer. Dropping it, especially on a hard surface, can potentially cause damage to the computer and battery. If you suspect damage contact the manufacturer.
- Do not place the computer in areas that may get very hot. [*E.g. In the sun, or near a heater.*]
- Do not get your computer or battery wet. Even though they will dry and appear to operate normally, the circuitry could slowly corrode and pose a safety hazard.
- Follow battery usage, storage[, *disposal*] and charging guidelines found in the user's guide [*or on the manufacturer's website, if you don't have a guide.*]

[Index](#)

Blue screen of death screensaver

With delicious irony, Microsoft TechNet now offer a “Blue Screen Of Death” (BSOD) screensaver. This came about when MS bought SysInternals earlier this year and made the SysInternals utilities available through TechNet.

The screensaver puts up a BSOD that looks Very Very Real - in fact, it uses actual system data from your machine to customise it so that it looks even more real. And every fifteen seconds, it simulates an attempt to reboot resulting in ... another BSOD.

An excellent screensaver to install on shared systems.

Download it at

<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/sysinternals/Miscellaneous/BlueScreen.msp>

Thanks are due to Robin Johnson for passing on that one. Pity it isn't 1st April. Everyone would have thought we were having them on!

Here's an extract from the Microsoft TechNet website concerning the screensaver:

One of the most feared colors in the NT world is blue. The infamous Blue Screen of Death (BSOD) will pop up on an NT system whenever something has gone terribly wrong. Bluescreen is a screen saver that not only authentically mimics a BSOD, but will simulate startup screens seen during a system boot.

- *On NT 4.0 installations it simulates chkdsk of disk drives with errors!*
- *On Win2K and Windows 9x it presents the Win2K startup splash screen, complete with rotating progress band and progress control updates!*
- *On Windows XP and Windows Server 2003 it present the XP/Server 2003 startup splash screen with progress bar!*

Bluescreen cycles between different Blue Screens and simulated boots every 15 seconds or so. Virtually all the information shown on Bluescreen's BSOD and system start screen is obtained from your system configuration - its accuracy will fool even advanced NT developers. For example, the NT build number, processor revision, loaded drivers and addresses, disk drive characteristics, and memory size are all taken from the system Bluescreen is running on.

Use Bluescreen to amaze your friends and scare your enemies!

Bluescreen runs on Windows NT 4.0, Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows Server 2003 and Windows 9x (it requires DirectX).

Note: before you can run Bluescreen on Windows 9x, you must copy `\winnt\system32\ntoskrnl.exe` from a Windows 2000 system to your `\Windows` directory.¹

Simply copy Sysinternals `BLUESCRN.SCR` to your `\system32` directory if on Windows NT/2K, or `\Windows\System` directory if on Windows 9x. Right click on the desktop to bring up the Display settings dialog and then select the "Screen Saver" tab. Use the pull down list to find "Sysinternals Bluescreen" and apply it as your new screen saver. Select the "Settings" button to enable fake disk activity, which adds an extra touch of realism!

¹ If you don't have access to a Windows 2000 system, try the copy available from: <http://members.driverguide.com/driver/detail.php?driverid=30670>
It may be suitable, but I haven't tested it..

When you go to Microsoft to download your copy of the screensaver, have a look at the other utilities that MS have acquired with SysInternals. Some of them could be quite useful. While they are principally aimed at the professional, I spotted two or three that a reasonably experienced user might have occasion to employ.

[Index](#)

Linux for the modern laptop

What I looked for

When I tried Xandros 4.0 on my laptop, the clock started gaining rapidly and the sound didn't work properly. No doubt, someone who spoke fluent "LinuxGeek" could have steered me towards suitable fixes, but I decided to see if I could find a Linux distribution (commonly called a "distro") that would run the laptop perfectly "out of the box", especially the clock, the sound chip and my inbuilt and PCMCIA wireless links. I also wanted to be able to install additional software without hassles and to be "comfortable" with the way the installed distro functioned. That last is entirely subjective and what suits me may well not suit you.

Freespire, Xubuntu, Kubuntu?

I tried Freespire, but it failed to recognise the sound chip. I tried Xubuntu, but didn't like the Xfce interface, nor the way new applications were added. I tried Kubuntu which has a KDE desktop, as does Xandros. However, Xandros has enhanced the KDE desktop, added some well integrated proprietary utilities of its own, and amended menus to make them more intelligible to a Windows user. Kubuntu didn't come close and the choice of Adept-installable applications was somewhat limited, which was a surprise given the huge

number available from Debian.

Italian dessert?

Then I tried an Italian dessert – or, rather, a Linux distro named after one. Sabayon, as it was called, had an attractive colour scheme, used two taskbars – one at the top of the screen and one at the bottom – and appeared to drive the laptop properly. Being Gentoo-based, it used a different method of installing applications, but I still struck problems. Another "coaster" for the collection!

SimplyMEPIS?

Then I decided to try the latest version of SimplyMEPIS. I had tried a previous version of this distro on my desktop and thought it might be worth a look. I found that the MEPIS developers had linked up with Ubuntu and used both Ubuntu and Debian as sources. As a result, MEPIS offers one of the largest selections of additional applications.

I downloaded the single CD version from Internode. As an Internode customer, anything I download from the Internode mirrors is unmetered and doesn't count toward my monthly quota, but I didn't want to take the time to download the full three CD version. I burnt the ISO file onto a CD and ran it.

Like many Linux distros, MEPIS allows you to test it by first

running it “Live”, booting and running from the CD and a RAMdrive that it sets up in your computer's memory. Sound worked, clock behaved, wireless network running, Kpackage and Synaptics for additional applications. Looked like a goer so I tried to install it by clicking on the desktop icon provided for the purpose. No matter what I did, it would not install. Then I realised why.

To install applications and, in this case, Linux itself, you must have “root” or “administrator” privileges. I rebooted into the “root” account and it installed without any problems. I then began adding applications. There were two different systems, but I managed to navigate my way around and install a selection of applications.

The Launch menu was somewhat peculiar in that it gave the description of the application followed in brackets by the name of the application. If you deleted the description using the menu editor, the name was displayed without the brackets.

As SimplyMEPIS is Debian-based, I was able to configure it to resemble Xandros – all that were missing were the proprietary additions, such as Xandros File Manager.

SimplyMEPIS proved quite usable, but, somehow, still wasn't what I was looking for.

Mandriva One

Mandriva used to be called Mandrake until the *Mandrake the Magician* publishers objected. Around that time, Connectiva merged with Mandrake and the name was changed to Mandriva. Another acquisition was Lycoris and Mandrake One incorporates some technology from that distribution. So I thought I would try that.

It installed simply enough from the one CD, (the ISO file of which I downloaded and burnt to CD), came with a good selection of applications, but no games, and ran quite well on my laptop.

It was when I went to add more applications that I was confronted with thousands of “packages” - not complete applications, but the components that the applications are installed from. With Freespire, Xandros and Lycoris you choose an application with a couple of clicks and it downloads and installs, taking care of all this package business without any input from you. Not so Mandriva One, despite the Lycoris technology. Again, not something that I could recommend to a novice moving from Windows 98.

Next issue we'll conclude this look at various distros with some advice on how to choose one.

[Index](#)

Removing line breaks

When you paste part of an email or a webpage into a word processing document, you often find that the text doesn't flow or wrap around. What can you do about it? Firstly, you could manually join the lines together by adding a **space** to each line and then pressing the **DELETE** key. That's OK for a few lines, but quickly becomes a pain if the inserted text is longer.

Secondly, with many word processors you can search for the paragraph character (¶). At the end of each paragraph you may find two in succession. If so, you can use the procedure below. If not, insert an extra one before you begin.

- **Select** the text to be reformatted.
- Use **Find (Search) and Replace** to change ¶¶ with some other character (e.g. ##).
- Then **Replace** single ¶ characters with a **space**.
- Finally **Replace** the ## (or whatever character you have used) with ¶¶ to complete the reformatting.

Thirdly, you can use that procedure with recent versions of *Word*, but there is an easier way that should work with paragraph marks, but may not work with line breaks characters(↵).

- **Select** the text to be reformatted.

- Go to the **Format** menu
- Choose **AutoFormat**.
- Click **OK**.

In *Open- Star- Office* you cannot search for the line break or paragraph character, but you can use **AutoFormat**. However, it only works with **Default** paragraph style.

- Choose **Tools** and click on **AutoCorrect**.
- On the **Options** tab, ensure **Combine single line paragraphs if length greater than 50%** is selected.
- Click **OK**.
- **Select** the text to be reformatted.
- In the **Apply Style** box on the **Formatting** bar, choose **Default**.
- Choose **Format**.
- Click on **AutoFormat**.
- Click **Apply**.
- **Select** the text to be reformatted.
- In the **Apply Style** box on the **Formatting** bar, choose the final style for the inserted text.

Lastly, when pasting text in experiment with Paste Special on the Edit menu. You may find an option that makes it easier to reformat. If so, always use that.

[Index](#)

Model Park opens

Do you run radio-controlled model cars? Then you will be happy to know that Stage 1 of the Lions Goodwood Model Park was officially opened recently.

The President of the Model Makers and Collectors Association Inc., Brian Johnson, spoke about the history of the park, Bill Wedd spoke on behalf of the Lions and thanked the many people and organisations who had contributed to development of the park and the Mayor of Glenorchy, Adriana Taylor, then declared it open, inviting former Mayor, Terry Martin MLC, to join her in unveiling the plaque.

Stage 1 consists of the Clubrooms, a gravel track and a sealed track. The former Junee Street hall in Chigwell was cut in three and moved to the site, where it was reassembled and refurbished. Both tracks have ramps for the disabled to reach the platforms.

The opening was followed by demonstration and celebrity races, involving the Southern Tasmanian Model Car Club and various celebrities, including Ric Patterson, Michael Hodgman MHA and Lisa Singh MHA. For more information:

<http://mmaca.com>

<http://www.stmcc.com.au>

[Index](#)

Google Earth updates

Towards the end of last month, an update fixed many of the holes in the SRTM data used by Google Earth. This greatly improves the appearance of Mt. Everest, Matterhorn, and others in South America, Asia, and Europe.

Also included are imagery updates:

- 12 high-resolution cities in Germany (Bayreuth, Bochum, Castrop-Rauxel, Fulda, Hof, Mannheim, Marburg, Potsdam, Schweinfurt, Siegen, Unna Froendenberg, Wuerzburg)
- 6 high-resolution regions in the UK (Bridgend, Cleveland, Dundee, Plymouth, Poole, Rochford)
- 31 city updates from Digital Globe
- Entire island of Oahu
- Imagery from individual cities/counties: Grants Pass, OR; City of Kent, WA; Salem, OR; Douglas County, WA; Hartford County, MD; Jackson County, OR; Summit County, OH;
- Expanded/updated coverage for the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Indiana, and Florida
- Darfur
- 66 Islands
- Improved San Francisco Bay area

[Index](#)

Remove or disable applications

Here, based on Microsoft's advice, is how to remove or disable unwanted applications:

- Run an antispyware program, such as Windows Defender, Ad-Aware, or AVG Antispyware (Avgas).
- Run an online scan, such as Windows Live OneCare safety scanner. These scans are free, but there may be a charge for cleaning up – not in the case of Windows Live OneCare, though, that Microsoft service is completely free and available at <http://safety.live.com>.

If your antispyware program and the scan don't solve the problem, you might be able to disable the troublemaker through Add-On Manager in Internet Explorer, or the corresponding function in your chosen browser. Here's the procedure for Internet Explorer:

1. Open Internet Explorer.
2. On the **Tools** menu, click **Manage Add-ons**. (If you're using Internet Explorer 7 or Windows Vista, click **Enable or disable Add-ons**.)
3. In the list of add-ons, look for add-ons you didn't accept or don't recognize. Click to select the one you

want to disable, and then click **Disable** in the **Settings** section in the bottom half of the **Manage Add-ons** box.

4. Click **OK**.

Add-ons are programs that extend the capabilities of Internet Explorer and other web browsers, and include such functions as toolbars or programs you can use to make hotel reservations or search the Internet. While these are useful, most of the functions can be performed without the aid of the third party toolbar. Browsers such as Internet Explorer 7, Firefox and Opera come with their own in-built search facility and you do not need to add a third-party one. Firefox, in particular, has a huge range of approved add-ons that can provide you with almost any additional feature you want. Be safe. Use these in preference to third-party, advertising-supported ones.

But there are also add-ons you wouldn't want under any circumstances, such as those that redirect your search to their own Web site, implant spyware, or change your homepage.

My advice is to be very careful about adding third party add-ons unless they come from a site associated with the browser (e.g. Firefox extensions) and keep a close eye on what young people are doing when they use your computer. That's when the less-than-reputable add-ons usually get installed.

[Index](#)

Windows XP boot.ini rebuilding

Here's something most users *can* do from the **Recovery Console** in Windows XP.

Most of us find the **Recovery Console** a complete mystery because all it offers is a command line prompt. However, if you know what to type, you can rebuild the **boot.ini** file, an



Fig. 1: Fred Langa - author of "Windows Secrets & Langanlist" newsletter

action that can fix a number of problems, such as "hal.dll file, missing or corrupt". It is also useful if you have had to start a Windows XP install twice, leaving two entries to select from when booting up, only one of which works.

These instructions come from Fred Langa's invaluable "Windows Secrets & Langanlist" newsletter.

You can subscribe to the newsletter

at Windows Secrets' sign-up page:

<http://windowssecrets.com/links/n8pp7t45iwmgd/50a5d7h>

'Intermittent problems can be among the hardest to troubleshoot. But the simplest thing to do to try to resolve [a problem] is to start with XP's Rebuild command. The short

form of the fix is as follows:

1. *Boot from your XP Setup CD and enter the Recovery Console**
2. *Enter the command attrib -h -r -s [c:\boot.ini](#)*
3. *Delete the file (del [c:\boot.ini](#))*
4. *Run bootcfg /rebuild*
5. *Run fixboot*

'Those five steps can fix a number of thorny startup issues and may be all you need. But if the above is too telegraphic for you, you can read fully detailed instructions in [Fred's] InformationWeek article, "[XP's Little-Known Rebuild Command](#)." Microsoft's official instructions can be found in "[Description of the Windows XP Recovery Console](#)" and "[Recovery Console Tools and Settings](#)." '

If rebuilding **boot.ini** doesn't fix the problem that you have, do a search of the Internet, using details from any error message you have received.

This is always worth doing, as there are often Microsoft articles dealing with the problem, as well as articles by various "gurus" just waiting for you to find and read them.

*When you boot your computer from your XP Setup CD, it will stop at a screen giving the option of repairing the installation from the Recovery Console. Choose this option by pressing 'R'.

Xandros 4 update

Two new developments have occurred on the Xandros scene.

The first is the release of version 4.1 in the guise of a business-oriented desktop known as Xandros Desktop Professional. For \$USD99.99 you get an installation CD, an applications CD, a 300+ page manual, a printed installation guide and a 30 minute SkypeOut coupon. Freight from USA to here is around \$USD35.



Existing users of Xandros products can upgrade to Professional from \$USD49.95, depending on their existing version and whether or not they have Premium membership of Xandros Networks.

Professional includes a 3D interface, (If you're waiting for Vista, eat your heart out!) Bluetooth and wireless support,

Codeweavers Crossover Office to run Microsoft Office and other Windows applications, Firefox 2, Evolution groupware client, and OpenOffice.org 2.0. It uses kernel version 2.6.18 and KDE 3.4.2 (Xandros enhanced).

Apart from the special video requirements for the 3D effects, Professional will run happily on any PC-compatible having at least a 450 MHz CPU, 256 MB of RAM and 3 GB of available hard disk space. The minimum RAM is 128 MB and hard disk space can be as little as 1.5 GB, but, as is usually the case, minimum specifications mean performance compromises and it is better to have, or exceed, the recommended specification. As updates and additional programs are installed over the Internet, a broadband connection is highly desirable

The second development is the upgrading of Xandros Home Premium through Service Pack 1 to use the new kernel version. Firefox is updated to version 2.0 and other applications are also updated.

Installation of the updates is simple. Firstly, click on the Xandros Networks update and allow it to install. Then click on the Service Pack upgrade and allow it to install. You can go on using your computer while the Service Pack is downloaded.

Xandros don't issue updates as frequently as some other

distributions, but, when they do, they are fully tested and usually perform well. However, always watch for minor patches which sometimes follow an update to correct problems noticed on computers which differ from those used by beta testers.

Xandros Linux desktop products are now available in three



Fig. 3: Desktop search - one of the new Professional features

main "flavours", Home, Home Premium, and Desktop Professional. Xandros also have Linux server products. Education discounts are available to qualified purchasers.

Speed up Windows XP

When you install Windows XP, the setup program enables all visual effects that it detects your PC may be able to handle. Some of these are really not much use, other than to slow things down. By turning them off, you can improve the responsiveness of your system. Here's how in XP Pro:

- Right-click on My Computer and click Properties
- Click on Advanced
- Click on Settings under Performance
- Disable all visual effects except the last three (and optionally Smooth Edges of Screen Fonts)
- Click OK
- Right-click on the desktop and click Properties
- Click the Appearance tab
- Click Effects
- Untick the first two boxes and click OK.

If Windows XP still seems a little sluggish, have a look what icons appear next to the time. While antivirus and certain system functions should be there, some other applications may be unnecessary. Right-click and exit them. If this results in an improvement, you need to stop them from starting when booting. Also run your antispyware to clean up any spyware that may be slowing your computer.

