# Opera Developer 24

Ben Everard can never have too many web browsers, so he installs another. Those videos of kittens won't watch themselves, you know.

For almost 20 years, Opera has been a good browser, but never quite managed to gain much traction on the desktop. Yet we as Linux users should know that just because a product's market share hovers around 1%, it doesn't mean that the software isn't any good. Has this new version got what it takes to finally push it mainstream?

The first thing we noticed on starting up Opera was the interface. It's obvious that the developers have put a lot of effort into making this work really well. For example, if you hover the mouse over a tab, you get a large preview of the web page in the tab. Opening menus (and other graphical transitions) fade in and out rather than abruptly change. This has quite a pleasing effect, particularly on the full screen transitions like adding a new option to the speed dial. None of this has any effect on how the browser actually functions, but we still love it.

Underneath the GUI, this is the first version of Opera for Linux to be based on Google's Chromium code rather than WebKit. Since Blink (the Chromium rendering engine) has only recently forked from WebKit, you shouldn't expect any drastic changes soon. As you can see from the diagram below, Opera performance is roughly similar to Chrome's although a little worse in most cases. We don't think it's enough to be noticeable though.

The one thing that Opera does differently is in marking items that you want to return to later – or bookmarking. This has been around since the early days of the web and hasn't changed that much on most web browsers. Opera now enables you to save items to three places: bookmarks, stash and speed dial. The speed dial is what opens when you create a new tab. Bookmarks work in the traditional sense. The stash is a vertical scrolling list that you can view on a full page, and is halfway between the speed dial and
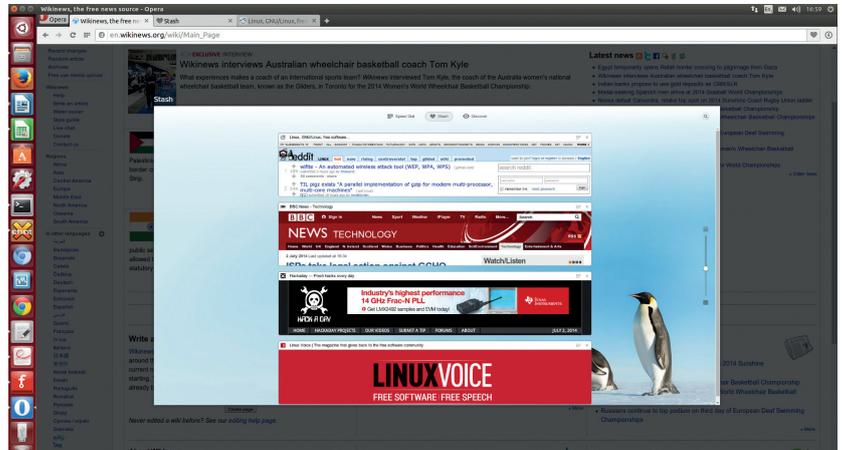
The Stash provides an alternative to the ususal bookmarks and speed dial methods of getting to your most frequently accessed web pages.

the bookmarks. It wasn't entirely clear to us what it added beyond the other two, but some people might find a use for it.

Free as in non-free

Of course, we haven't yet mentioned the huge elephant in the room. Opera isn't free-as-in-speech software (it is free as in beer), and probably never will be. It's built on the Blink rendering engine, but since this is released under BSD and LGPL licensed, Opera Software is allowed to use it in a closed product. The only tempting feature of Opera that isn't easily done in free software is its Turbo mode. This is essentially a proxying service that compresses web pages before sending them to you, and can make a huge difference on slower internet connections. Unless you're dead-set against closed software, it can be good to have Opera installed on a laptop as a backup browser in case you get stuck on a slow connection.

The Opera add-ons site lists 750 extensions. This isn't as many as more mainstream browsers, but should include everything most people need.

At the moment, the only Linux distro that Opera Software is releasing a version for is Ubuntu, on the basis that it wants to focus on a single platform. Of course, it didn't take long for there to be an Arch package created for it, and unofficial packages for other distros may appear if it proves popular. LV
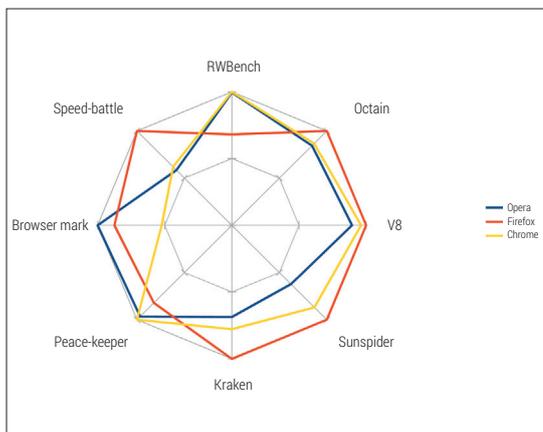
Opera performed well in the full browser benchmarks, and less well on the tests that focused purely on JavaScript.

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

Possibly the best-looking browser for Linux, but it loses a point because of the lack of freedom.

★★★★☆