Damian Conway's Mastering Vim

After many years knowing only 'i' and ':wq' in Vim, **Graham Morrison** feels it's time to get some video learning.

Damian Conway is a natural teacher. Actually, that's not true. We know he appears natural and relaxed and full of fragile wisdom. But this doesn't come naturally. It's the result of hard work. His 30-minute keynote presentation at QCon took over 100 hours of preparation. Likewise, we can't even begin to guess how long *Mastering Vim*, a video of three hours and 25 minutes, took to produce. We're tempted to say decades, as we've seen his dexterity with this humble text editor first hand. We've seen him meld presentations with live code demos, hack away at Perl and tell jokes, all with just a few chordal keystrokes, all at the same time. If there was going to be anyone to push us through the pain barrier of only remembering three *Vim* commands, it was going to be Damien Conway.
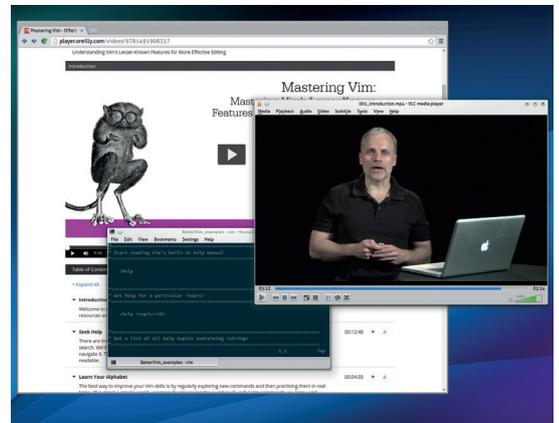
We've never tried 'Video Training' before, and we're rather distrustful of leaving books and words behind, especially with the costs involved. But we genuinely like the idea of an expert trainer using their experience to show us, personally, how to do cool stuff. You need an account at O'Reilly, and their training videos are purchased just like anything else they sell. All your purchases, whether they're ebooks, books or videos are tied to your account, and you access the content from the 'Your Products' page of the web portal.

Blockbuster video

The video interface has changed considerably over the last couple of months. It works in *Firefox*, but if you use *Chrome* you also get control over playback speed. This helps in some of the more complex moments. Brilliantly, you can choose to either stream or download the video, with the end format being m4a. We only downloaded the 3:34 minute introduction, which is around 30MB, so extrapolating that to the full duration, you should expect the entire video to take up around 2GB of storage. In common with O'Reilly's ebooks policy, these files are completely free of DRM, and played back perfectly in VLC (H264 MPEG-4 video with MPEG AAC audio).

Each chapter is organised and explained brilliantly, and there's a downloadable file for the code, examples and *Vim* configurations mentioned.

We stuck with streaming as it was more convenient. The video quality is on a par with Netflix, albeit with a maximum resolution of 720p. The entire course is split into 22 chapters with some variations in duration, from just a few minutes up to closer to 20. We watched the entire video over the course of about six weeks. This is very much going to depend on your experience level. In the third chapter, for example, Damian recommends going through each key on the keyboard and trying to learn what their functions are, with and without Shift and with the Control keys! This is a tough proposition for our limited brain capacity, but we set an hour aside and tried our best. We didn't remember that many new keys straight away, but forcing ourselves to concentrate made a huge difference and did help us get the most from the remainder of the course.

The sub-heading for this video is 'lesser known features for more effective editing', and each chapter feels like a collection of Damian's hard-won productivity hacks, whether that's post processing your search results or using code completion. This is a course crammed full of practical examples, some live demos and lots of advice. It doesn't touch on the really advanced stuff, but we think it does more than enough to pull the average *Vim* flirt into a more steady, long term relationship, requiring neither the discipline of a book, or huge amounts of coffee. LV

Being able to watch Damian put examples into practice is another advantage of video.

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

Beg your boss to take this from your entertainment budget. It's far cheaper than an afternoon at the Celtic Manor.

★★★★★