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The Ubuntu development community has announced that the fifth Ubuntu 8.04 prerelease is now available for testing. Ubuntu 8.04 alpha 5 adds additional polish and reliability as well as a few intriguing new features. The official release of Ubuntu 8.04, codenamed Hardy Heron, is scheduled for late April and feature freeze is already in effect.

We tested alpha 5 to get a first look at the new features in action and to see how it compares to alpha 4, which we reviewed earlier this month. Ubuntu 8.04 includes a new sound server called PulseAudio, the new GIO and GVFS I/O abstraction layer and virtual filesystem mechanisms, the PolicyKit secure privilege escalation framework, improved support for virtualization, and a new VNC client. Integration of these features is moving forward steadily and GVFS has become a bit more robust.

One of the most significant new features added in alpha 5 is support for Wubi, a new installation mechanism that makes it easier for Ubuntu and Windows to coexist on the same computer.

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