Major SteamOS update adds support for Steam Machine, even more third-party hardware

One of the key improvements for the Steam Machine and other desktop hardware is “greatly improved video memory management with discrete GPU platforms.” When we tested SteamOS on a range of generic PC hardware last year, we found that GPUs with 8GB of RAM could perform a lot worse in SteamOS than in Windows—a big issue for Valve since the Steam Machine is shipping with a Radeon RX 7600-caliber GPU that has 8GB of video memory.

We didn’t run into the same performance problems with 16GB GPUs or with integrated graphics that let games dynamically grab as much system memory as they need. We’ll need to run tests with this new SteamOS update to see whether and how much the situation has improved.

Other changes made with the Steam Machine in mind (but which should also benefit anyone rolling their own Steam Machine at home) include improved HDMI audio support, fixes for performance issues that affected Desktop Mode specifically, better support for HDR and variable refresh-rate displays, better default scaling behavior on TV screens, better support for rotated screens, and the ability to set different scaling modes for different screens in a multi-monitor setup.

We think the Steam Machine will be the most interesting as a console-like computer you connect to your TV, but Valve clearly expects that some users will want to use the system

more like a traditional desktop PC, too.

People running a version of SteamOS 3.7 can get the new SteamOS 3.8 preview update by opening Settings, then System, and switching the System Update Channel to “Preview.”

Valve has said it still hopes to launch the Steam Machine in the first half of the year, but the company hasn’t announced specific details on pricing or availability.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/major-steamos-update-adds-support-for-steam-machine-even-more-third-party-hardware/

Meta decides not to kill Horizon Worlds VR after all

The dream of the metaverse may have died for now, but Meta has decided it’s not *completely* giving up on the VR experience in Horizon Worlds, the virtual worlds service that it originally envisioned as the first step toward said metaverse.

The news was announced via the Instagram account of Meta CTO Andrew Bosworth. “We have decided, just today in fact, that we will keep Horizon Worlds working in VR,” said Bosworth in an AMA on the platform in response to someone who expressed disappointment at the previously announced plan to end support.

He went on to clarify that only games and experiences that already support VR will continue to do so, while new games will be exclusive to mobile, and the majority of the team’s

development focus will be on mobile instead of VR.

In February, Meta announced that it would be “shifting the focus of Worlds to be almost exclusively mobile.” It also announced changes to how its marketplace for VR software works, putting all the emphasis on supporting third-party developers in lieu of major first-party development. Meta had laid off 1,000 employees of its Reality Labs division in January, mostly by shuttering teams that were making first-party software and content for the company’s Quest VR headsets.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/at-the-last-minute-meta-decides-not-to-kill-horizon-worlds-vr-after-all/

TCL’s German QLED ban puts pressure on TV brands to be more honest about QDs

“Some products marketed as ‘QLED’ use conventional backlight architectures (standard phosphors, optical films, diffuser plates) and rely on picture modes or software tuning to create a more saturated ‘vivid’ look,” a January whitepaper by TÜV Rheinland and QD supplier Nanosys reads. The whitepaper, “Re-defining a ‘true’ Quantum Dot Display,” also points to devices that have QD material at “trace levels, or in packaging and integration designs that limit excitation and light extraction of certain wavelengths.”

“In these cases, the display may still achieve competitive headline gamut coverage, yet the measurable optical signature of an effective QD system is absent or minimal,” the whitepaper says. “The spectrum, color, volume behavior at high luminance, chromaticity stability, and temporal response can remain similar to those of non-QD LCD solutions.”

For now, the German ruling brings needed scrutiny to “QLED” and other potentially misleading display terms.

A clear understanding of what constitutes QD displays is also essential for QD-OLED displays and will only become more important if true quantum dot electroluminescent displays ever take off. (These displays, using a backlight-free technology, are also known as QDEL or QD-LED.)

“A quantum dot display should be defined by a combination of measurable material concentration and TV performance outcomes in terms of color purity, color gamut et cetera. Ideally, in a way that is understandable by consumers,” Virey said.

TÜV Rheinland and Nanosys’ whitepaper argues that QD displays should meet certain performance requirements that go beyond color gamut: “The display must deliver the optical advantages associated with quantum dots, including spectral precision, tunability and stability, improved color accuracy behavior across luminance (not just a single 2D gamut number), and, where applicable, temporal performance under backlight modulation.”

With TV marketing remaining murky—and often misleading—digging into detailed performance reviews remains the most reliable way to gauge how a display might perform in the real world.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/tcls-german-qled-ban-puts-pressure-on-tv-brands-to-be-more-honest-about-qds/

Firefighting drones head to Aspen—can they suppress a blaze before humans arrive?

Similarly, California's state-level wildfire agency, CAL FIRE, notes that six of the state's most destructive wildfires have occurred within the last decade.

Two of these (the Palisades and Eaton Fires, which both took place in Los Angeles County) burned within the last 18 months. But it's worth noting that during the first 12 hours of both blazes, the winds were so intense that no traditional firefighting aircraft could fly, much less drones.

In recent years, numerous wildfire agencies have expanded their use of cameras, infrared sensors, and mapping tools.

However, the act of putting out a blaze—"suppression," in industry parlance—fundamentally remains a function of how many humans can quickly starve the fire of oxygen, heat, and/or fuel.

The basics behind fighting wildfires haven't changed that much over the last century, and they primarily rely on manual labor: digging lines, removing fuel, and to a lesser extent, aerial drops of water.

Seneca founder Stuart Landesberg told Ars that his drones aim to supplement the equipment that wildland firefighters already have.

“The goal is: how do we supercharge what our firefighters are capable of?” he said. “We have this incredibly talented, incredibly devoted group of public servants. We want to give them the best technology in the world.”

Aspen Fire’s Chief Andersen added that, currently, his agency doesn’t have its own fleet of aerial resources. Calling in traditional aircraft from sister agencies can take hours.

“What we are getting is a trailer with five [drones, and we’ll drive it] as close as we can to the incident, and we will park and set up a little drone base,” he said, noting that if the initial tests are successful, he envisions permanent drone bases around the area.

“It would be ideal if we detect a fire and we can immediately launch one of these so we can investigate.”

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/firefighting-drones-head-to-aspen-can-they-suppress-a-blaze-before-humans-arrive/

Adobe settles DOJ cancellation fee lawsuit, will pay $75 million penalty

Canceling a software subscription is supposed to be easy—that’s what US law dictates. Adobe, however, has played fast and loose with its Creative Cloud subscriptions in the past. The company was sued by the Department of Justice in 2024 due to its practice of hiding hefty termination fees when

customers signed up. The case has now been settled, with Adobe agreeing to a $75 million fine and matching free services to users of its products.

Turning software into a monthly subscription is all the rage these days, but Adobe was way ahead of the curve. The company began offering its suite of editing tools, like Photoshop and Illustrator, as a monthly subscription back in 2013, and most of its customers migrated to the new system.

It was easy for Adobe to get away with that shift because CS6, the last perpetual license offered for its editing tools, started at $700 and went up to more than $2,600 for all apps. By contrast, paying between $10 and $70 per month seems like a good deal, and it might be in the short term. Although anyone who has been paying monthly since the change has spent thousands of dollars on Adobe software. And when people noticed that and decided they wanted to cancel, many of them were frustrated with the outcome.

Core to the government’s complaint was Adobe’s practice of hiding cancellation fees for its subscriptions in the fine print or behind hyperlinks. Adobe charges 50 percent of the remaining subscription term when you cancel, which can be hundreds of dollars on annual plans. In addition, the company used labyrinthine phone trees to make canceling more difficult.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/adobe-settles-doj-cancellation-fee-lawsuit-will-pay-75-million-penalty/

Subscribers to Amazon Prime Video with ads lose 4K support on April 10

Starting on April 10, Amazon Prime subscribers will pay $5 per month for ad-free Prime Video without ads, up from the current $3 per month on top of their Prime subscription, Amazon announced today.

On that date, Amazon will introduce a new ad-free Prime Video subscription tier called “Prime Video Ultra.” Amazon will also increase the number of simultaneous streams supported by the tier from three to five and the number of downloads permitted from 25 to 100.

Currently, Prime Video with ads is part of Amazon’s Prime membership, which starts at $15 a month. Today, ad-free Prime Video users can watch supported titles in 4K, but starting on April 10, a new Prime Video Ultra subscription will be required for 4K viewing.

You’ll also need Prime Video Ultra to use Dolby Atmos, though Prime Video’s cheaper subscription tier will include Dolby Vision, up to four simultaneous streams (up from three), and 50 downloads (up from 25).

For comparison, ad-free Netflix with 4K support is $25/month, and ad-free Disney+ with 4K is $19/month.

“Delivering ad-free streaming with premium features requires significant investment, and this structure aligns with other major streaming services while ensuring customers have the flexibility to choose how they want to watch,” Amazon’s

announcement said.

Amazon first forced ads onto Prime Video for all Prime subscribers in January 2024 unless subscribers paid the extra $3 monthly fee. Since then, Amazon has been increasing the number of ads subscribers see. In June 2025, AdWeek reported that Prime Video’s ad load was six minutes per hour, compared to an industry average ad load of two to three-and-a-half minutes, per a January 2024 report from The Wall Street Journal, when the ad tier launched.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/amazon-will-increase-ad-free-prime-video-prices-by-2-per-month-on-april-10/

M5 MacBook Air review: Still the best MacBook for almost everybody

The MacBook Pro retains some key functional advantages over the Air. All Pro models have more ports, including native HDMI and SD card readers. They get somewhat larger, considerably nicer displays, with high-refresh-rate ProMotion and HDR support, a much higher maximum brightness, and a matte nano-texture display option. Even setting the M5 Pro and M5 Max aside, the basic M5 version can be quite a bit faster than the M5 Air for some workloads because it has a fan to keep it cool. Storage can go as high as 8TB, and RAM can go up to 128GB.

But what these things have in common is that they're well above and beyond what most people, even many creative and technical professionals, are asking from their laptops. These days, the main reason to go with a MacBook Pro is that you affirmatively want one or more of those extra things. There are fewer reasons to be unwillingly upsold to a Pro because of one or two make-or-break features missing from the Air.

It's also mostly pretty easy to describe the kind of user each MacBook is *for*, which is a huge improvement from the Mac's mid-2010s nadir, when the aging non-Retina Air, the nice-but-underpowered 12-inch MacBook, and the too-expensive 13-inch MacBook Pro were all fighting over the same $1,000-to-$1,500-ish price band and all came with frustrating trade-offs and compromises.

Performance: Twice as fast as M1, mostly

The Apple Silicon era gave Apple's baseline Macs a huge performance boost compared to the low-voltage Intel processors of MacBooks past. That performance also came with dramatically extended battery life. As long as you were running Apple Silicon or universal binaries rather than relying on Rosetta's app translation, upgrading from an Intel Mac has always been pretty much all upside.

The upgrades since then have been strictly incremental, considered year-over-year. Each new generation of chip has brought some kind of low double-digit performance improvement over the prior generation, never enough to merit an upgrade all by itself. But they've stacked on top of each other year after year, and we've arrived at a point where the M5 Air is finally *just* about twice as fast as the M1 version.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/m5-macbook-air-review-still-the-best-macbook-for-almost-everybody/

HP has new incentive to stop blocking third-party ink in its printers

The third option is for manufacturers to make available, such as via the manufacturer's website, "to purchasers remanufactured cartridges, either manufacturer or nonmanufacturer branded, for, at minimum, registered products."

As of this writing, 38,291 devices are under the EPEAT 1.0 registry. There are 163 products registered under EPEAT 2.0, but none are printers. This all underscores how new the EPEAT 2.0 registry is and the likelihood that the GEC is still working to register more devices, like printers.

Still, the Int'l ITC is skeptical about HP ever following EPEAT 2.0's criteria, especially considering that "HP released firmware 2602A/B on January 29, 2026 across eleven printer models," the trade group said in a press release last week. (At least some of the firmware updates, including for the nearly 9-year-old OfficeJet Pro 7720, appear to have come out in February.)

"HP's recent behavior is emblematic of a larger pattern," the Int'l ITC's release said. "HP positions itself as a leader in sustainability, circular business models, and responsible product design, but instead of proactively aligning its products and practices with the highest environmental standards, such as EPEAT 2.0, HP puts profits first and waits

until external scrutiny or the threat of non-compliance forces change.”

In an email discussion with Ars Technica, Tricia Judge, the Int’l ITC’s executive director and general counsel, pointed out that HP’s firmware update succeeded the launch of the EPEAT 2.0 registry. She explained why the Int’l ITC’s press release called out HP but no other printer manufacturers:

> *HP is the only one with lockout chips that are triggered using firmware “upgrades” that claim “security” as a justification for their existence. HP is the only one that misleads and frustrates its own customers when locking out the environmentally superior competition. The others have made some interesting attempts in the past to create a competitive advantage.*

In 2023, the Int’l ITC wrote a letter to the GEC requesting that the GEC revoke at least 101 of HP’s printers from the (original) EPEAT registry, largely due to Dynamic Security. GEC denied the Int’l ITC’s request.

“EPEAT 1.0 was very basic (no interference with the use of remanufactured cartridges), and HP claimed that its statements (buried in its marketing materials and/or on its website) that it didn’t interfere with the use of remanufactured cartridges was a loophole that the GEC decided was acceptable,” Judge said. “We were trying to close that loophole with EPEAT 2.0. We didn’t get it as airtight as we hoped, but it is better.

HP didn’t respond to Ars Technica’s request for comment for this story.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/hp-has-new-incentive-to-stop-blocking-third-party-ink-in-its-printers/

Apple’s MacBook Neo makes repairs easier and cheaper than other MacBooks

Apple’s MacBook Neo is the company’s first serious effort to break into the sub-$1,000 laptop business, challenging midrange Windows laptops and Chromebooks with its $599 starting price and its focus on build quality rather than high-end performance.

One less-advertised change that may make the Neo more appealing to businesses, schools, and the accident-prone is that its internal design is a bit more modular and easier to repair than other modern MacBooks. That’s our takeaway after spending some time thumbing through the official MacBook Neo repair documentation that Apple published on its support site this week.

Replacements for pretty much any component in the Neo are simpler and involve fewer steps and tools than in the M5 MacBook Air. That includes the battery, which in the MacBook Air is attached to the chassis with multiple screws and adhesive strips but which in the Neo comes out relatively easily after you get some shielding and flex cables out of the way.

But the most significant change in the Neo is that the keyboard is its own separate component. For essentially all modern MacBooks, going back at least as far as the late-2000s unibody aluminum MacBook designs, the keyboard has been

integrated into the top part of the laptop case and is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to replace independently.

Apple refers to this big, unified component as the “top case,” and anyone who has ever had to pay to repair one out of warranty can attest to how expensive they are. For the old M1 MacBook Air, a top case from Apple’s first-party self-service parts store will run you about $220 after you send the old defective part back to Apple. For the 14-inch MacBook Pro, Apple will only sell you a top case replacement along with a battery, which costs a whopping $440 after you send the old component back to the company.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/03/more-modular-design-makes-macbook-neo-easier-to-fix-than-other-apple-laptops/

14,000 routers are infected by malware that’s highly resistant to takedowns

Researchers say they have uncovered a takedown-resistant botnet of 14,000 routers and other network devices—primarily made by Asus—that have been conscripted into a proxy network that anonymously carries traffic used for cybercrime.

The malware—dubbed KadNap—takes hold by exploiting vulnerabilities that have gone unpatched by their owners, Chris Formosa, a researcher at security firm Lumen’s Black

Lotus Labs, told Ars. The high concentration of Asus routers is likely due to botnet operators acquiring a reliable exploit for vulnerabilities affecting those models. He said it's unlikely that the attackers are using any zero-days in the operation.

A botnet that stands out among others

The number of infected routers averages about 14,000 per day, up from 10,000 last August, when Black Lotus discovered the botnet. Compromised devices are overwhelmingly located in the US, with smaller populations in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Russia. One of the most salient features of KadNap is a sophisticated peer-to-peer design based on Kademlia, a network structure that uses distributed hash tables to conceal the IP addresses of command-and-control servers. The design makes the botnet resistant to detection and takedowns through traditional methods.

"The KadNap botnet stands out among others that support anonymous proxies in its use of a peer-to-peer network for decentralized control," Formosa and fellow Black Lotus researcher Steve Rudd wrote Wednesday. "Their intention is clear: avoid detection and make it difficult for defenders to protect against."

Distributed hash tables have long been used to create hardened peer-to-peer networks, most notably BitTorrent and the Inter-Planetary File System. Rather than having one or more centralized servers that directly control nodes and provide them with the IP addresses of other nodes, DHTs allow any node to poll other nodes for the device or server it's looking for. The decentralized structure and the substitution of IP addresses with hashes give the network resilience against takedowns or denial of service attacks.

https://arstechnica.com/security/2026/03/14000-routers-are-infected-by-malware-thats-highly-resistant-to-takedowns/