This much waited for and often postponed show managed, in the end, to attach itself to the Network for Business event. The show lasted three days with evening events limited to pub meets in the center of Birmingham, mostly organized by the local user groups.

Attaching to another event gave this show advantages and disadvantages. A larger audience was achieved by combining events, but you did have to find the right corner of the Network for Business show to find the opening to escape back into the Linux area. Or to find it originally if Linux wasn't your first reason for attending.

Compared to other shows, this expo had a smaller number of traders in attendance. I feel that the crowds might also have been down because the show was very much a weekday event. Saying this doesn't meant that those showing their wares were any less enthusiastic or inventive. Smoothwall was showing off their new corporate firewall, while Mart Technology talked about its MT Studio RAD environment.

Rising stars

The highlights of the show for me were the dasher project and the unbelievably small firewall hardware.

Dasher is a project that uses a unique screen interface for text entry designed for palmtop, wearable and one-handed operation or even with an eye tracking camera for accessibility needs.

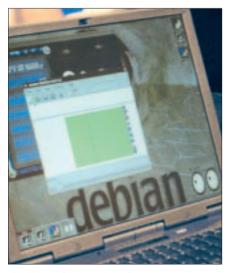Rockstone was showing off a small firewall with three LAN connections in a

Figure 2: Dasher input just about to start

Birmingham 2003
The Linux Zone

The end of June 2003 finally saw the first Linux expo to be held at the National Exhibition Center in Birmingham, UK. We took a walk around the show to find what everyone was talking about. **BY JANET ROEBUCK**

Figure 1: The .org village, co-sponsored by Linux Magazine

fanless hardware form. Small as a paperback book with little heat output.

The .org village turned out to be a circle of stands where different groups and projects presented themselves. These ranged from LPI talking about its certification program to AFFS and UKUUG. The Debian stand was, as expected, the busiest. It had more laptops running than any other stand.

The help clinic appeared empty, but maybe this just showed how everyone is able to use Linux.

Both IBM and HP had the largest corporate stands, each showing their latest big sexy computers. Their software partners took the greatest advantage of having such new hardware close at hand.

More than a chat

While it was possible to spend all of your time wandering around the stands and talking to people, you could choose to attend the talks that were occurring throughout the whole event.

The main conference started each day with Jon "maddog" Hall opening the session. The final day saw Malcolm Yates from SuSE, Alan Cox from Red Hat and Martin Michlmayr from Debian all give speeches. Previous days had seen speeches just as diverse ranging from Linux in the public sector to ARM-based embedded systems. As a supplement to these, there were a number of free talks in different areas around the show. The desktop and education center was very good if a little noisy sometimes.

Talking to people is always the main benefit of expos like this and everyone was willing to spend time and explain what they where currently working on and what other parts of the show you should not miss. DNUK and Sony should both be mentioned for their efforts to handle my questions with charm and understanding.

Freebies

So the real reason for attending – what freebies were on offer to the attendees. Apart from the usual paper and folders about products, expos are cutting down on the free booth gifts. The Network Solutions show produced blue LED pens and yellow pencil erasers, whereas the Linux area gave rise to rubber penguins (three different ones to collect), mints, sweets, biscuits, fruit, pens, CDs and beer. Yes that last item was right. UKFSN had a fridge with cold beer that they were giving away. It should be noted for the record that your intrepid reporter did not partake due to travel needs, but did appreciate the offer.

Music during the day was courtesy of the Rosegarden project stand.

It was a nice change to have an Expo outside London, but due to the small number of attendees, I fear it may be the last for some time. Would I attend again? Yes! Good fun all round.   ■