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Is Mac OS 9 Still a Player?

Mac OS 9 Compatibility, Upgrades, Hacks, and Resources, 2006 Edition

[A 'Best of Miscellaneous Ramblings' Column](#)

[Charles Moore](#) - 2006.05.15 - [Tip Jar](#)

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This has been one of the most popular columns in the history of Miscellaneous Ramblings. This article has been superseded by [Low End Mac's Compleat Guide to Mac OS 9, 2008 Edition](#). *dk*

Last Friday's [The Future of PowerPC Macs in the Intel Era](#)

pointed to support of Classic mode as one of the primary

reasons to stick with PowerPC-based Macs. That raises the question: Is OS 9 still a useful, productive operating system?

It depends. My recommendation at this stage of the game is that if you have the hardware to run OS X with reasonable performance (my personal, arbitrary threshold would be a 500 MHz G3 with at least 512 MB of RAM), then it's time to join the X-perience.

On the other hand, if you have a slower PowerPC Mac, I think OS 9.2.2 is still your optimum operating system choice - although in the case of 601 and 603 PowerPC Macs up to, say, 166 MHz, you're probably better off running Mac OS 8.6 or even OS 8.1.

I still have OS 9.2.2 as the main boot system on our [233 MHz WallStreet PowerBook](#), on which it provides lively and dependable performance, but all of my production machines now are running OS X 10.3 or 10.4.

I also still use OS 9 every day in OS X Classic mode, mostly to run the fast little [WannaBe](#) text browser, for which I've found no satisfactory substitute in OS X native software. I also have 1000 or so archived Word 5.1 documents that open best in Word 5.1 itself, which still is happily supported in Classic mode. And thirdly, for certain types of editing I do, I find the old [Scrollability](#) auto-scrolling add-on indispensable, and none of the auto-scrolling utilities offered for OS X match it for function.

Consequently, Classic mode stays up and running on my production machines.

Ultimately, I will make the leap to Macintel, and then I can pitch around the Word.5.1 support without resorting to MS Word for OS X (it opens Word 5.1 files with formatting intact, but I am loathe to use it), and I hope broadband Internet service will eventually be available here, which will make WannaBe's lightning speed less of a must-have.

I'm not very optimistic about Scrollability ever being offered in an OS X version, but perhaps someone will develop a utility with similar characteristics for OS X (hint to software developers). Other users will have different reasons to need Classic mode.

Anyway, those are the main reasons that I'm not ready to kiss OS 9 goodbye yet. It's also very convenient to be able to boot directly into OS 9 for troubleshooting and disk maintenance on my machines that still support dual booting. I find it more than a little ironic that Intel Macs can dual-boot Windows with Apple's blessing, but not OS 9.

[Browsers and Email: Two Reasons to Go OS X](#)

Beyond the backwards-compatibility usefulness of Classic mode, however, I think these sun is setting on OS 9 as a main boot system. It's still very fast, and there are lots of excellent production programs like word processors and image editing software that run very satisfactorily for serious work, but the biggest shortcoming of OS 9 now is the lack of a really satisfactory and up to date browser, and no major email clients are still being developed for the classic OS. With Eudora 6.1 or, if you must, Outlook Express 5.2 still available for Classic, the latter is not a big problem yet, but the browser issue is.

The only browser still being actively developed for OS 9 is [iCab](#), which is my first choice when running in Classic, but it's just not in the same league as the several really superb browsers available for OS X.

Mozilla 1.3 works with OS 9 as well, but it's pretty buggy. There's Netscape 4.8, which feels positively

Low End Mac Reader Specials

[TypeStyler For Mac OS X](#) is Now Shipping! Download The Free Fully Functional 60 Day Tryout at [www.typestyler.com](#)

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prehistoric these days.

While it pains me to say it, when iCab isn't a viable solution, the best alternative is probably Internet Explorer 5.1, which installs by default with OS 9. I find IE for Classic tends to cause stability problems, and I hate using it, but it does still work on most sites. Consequently, if there were no other compelling reason for upgrading to OS X, the browser issue could be it.

Certainly, you can still get along quite happily with OS 9 if you're content to work around its increasing limitations with the passage of time and use of software from the OS 9 era. However, it's becoming more and more marginalized, and OS 9 users are shut out of an awful lot of cool new stuff that OS X supports.

Hardware/OS Compatibility

Apple has posted a [handy compatibility table](#) outlining which Mac models, from the '040 Centris machines of the early 90s through the new aluminum PowerBooks, are supported (or not) by the Classic Mac OS versions 8.x and 9.x. It's worth a look if you have questions about what OS versions your older machine can handle.

For example, the chart shows that my late-in-the-production-run "[Pismo](#)" [PowerBook 2000](#) will support OS 9.1 through OS 9.2.2, while my 3-1/2 year old [700 MHz iBook](#) can only boot into OS 9.2.2 (and, of course, OS X - it currently has OS X 10.4.4 installed as its main boot system).

No current Mac model is capable of booting directly into any Classic OS version, but the remaining G4 and G5 machines still support OS 9.2.2 in OS X Classic mode, although Apple has phased out default installation of OS 9.2.2 for Classic mode support.

OS 9 is not supported at all on Intel-based Macs, and unless some third party develops an emulator, it's unlikely that it ever will be.

Software Updates

Apple has posted a [Knowledge Base article](#) describing the updates available for Mac OS 9 and the order in which they must be installed. You must install all prerequisite software before installing any update. For example, when updating Mac OS 9.0 or OS 9.0.4 to Mac OS 9.2.2 the updates must be installed in this order:

1. Mac OS 9.1 Update
2. Mac OS 9.2.1 Update
3. Mac OS 9.2.2 Update

Note that the free downloadable Mac OS 9.1 Update contains fewer updates and extras than the Mac OS 9.1 CD-ROM disk. This reduces the amount of data that must be downloaded at once.

The downloadable update contains core system software updates, Apple Remote Access (ARA) Client Server 4.0, and QuickTime 4.1.3. The Mac OS 9.1 download may only be used to update a computer that has Mac OS 9.0.x installed. It's available from [Apple Software Updates](#).

The Mac OS 9.1 disk includes additional updates to Mac OS that are not a part of the downloadable Mac OS 9.1 Update. Some of these additional items are available separately at Apple Software Updates or from third-party (non-Apple) webwites. The disk may be used for full installation or clean installation.

You can find out more by reading [Mac OS 9.1: Downloadable update versus Mac OS 9.1 disc](#).

Also note that with the Nubus motherboard architecture Power Macs ([6100](#), [7100](#), [8100](#), and related models, such as Performa equivalents and derivatives), upgrading to OS 9.1 requires a Mac OS 9.1 Full Install CD, as Apple did not support these oldest OS 9 compatible Macs with its free updaters. For more information on this see [Mac OS 9.1: Start Up from CD to Install on Original Power Macintosh Computers](#).

Apple recommends that "You should use the latest version of Mac OS 9" that your hardware supports. Pre-G3 Macs only support up to OS 9.1. IMHO, this is no real hardship in most instances, although there are some applications that require OS 9.2.2.

Unsupported Installation

However, there is an installer patch hack that allows you to install 9.2.1 or 9.2.2 on certain "Old World" Macs that Apple has decided to drop support for. OS 9.1 is the final version that Apple allows to install on anything previous to the Beige G3.

The [OS9 Helper](#) hack works with all of the "PowerSurge" models, including the [Power Mac 7300](#), [7500](#), [7600](#), [8500](#), [8600](#), [9500](#), and [9600](#). The [6500](#) seems to work as well. They also work on the [PowerBook 2400](#), [3400](#), and [original G3 \(a.k.a. 3500 or Kanga\)](#). The NuBus Power Macs (6100, 7100, 8100 series, and the [Duo 2300](#)) have only had limited success with the patch.

OS 9 is not supported at all on Intel-based Macs, and unless some third party develops an emulator, it's unlikely that it ever will be.

Obtaining OS 9

A question that crops up fairly frequently is where to obtain an OS 9 install CD. One way is to purchase a copy of OS X 10.3 or 10.4 (or a new PowerPC Mac, as long as they are still available) after which Apple will sell you an OS 9.2.2 install CD for \$19.95.

If you can find one, the OS X 10.1 package includes an OS 9.2 CD.

Several resellers list OS 9 CDs, but often at prices that won't save you much, if anything, over going the conventional route of paying \$129.95 for OS X plus the \$19.95 surcharge for OS 9.2.2. [eBay](#) is another potential possibility. Here are some online sources. Visit the respective Websites and run a search for OS 9 or OS 9.1.



- **Other World Computing.** OWC still has OS 9.1 and OS 9.2 install disks available at the best prices I've found: [Mac OS 9.1 full install CD](#) OEM gray (compatible with a Mac or clone that either has a stock G3 processor or has been upgraded), \$34.99. [Mac OS 9.2 full install CD](#) OEM gray (compatible with a Mac or clone that either has a stock G3 processor or has been upgraded with either a G3 or G4 processor), \$37.95.
- **HardCore Mac.** HardCoreMac's Yahoo store also has an assortment of OS 9.x full install CDs available, but at considerably higher prices than OWC: Mac OS 9, \$149.99; Mac OS 9.0.4, \$149.99; Mac OS 9.1, \$149.99; Mac OS 9.2.1, \$159.99; Mac OS 9.2.2, \$159.99

Note well that *any version* of OS 9 – including OS 9.0, 9.0.4, 9.1, 9.2, and 9.2.1 – can be upgraded to the ultimate 9.2.2 using free updaters that can be downloaded from Apple's software support site (except for the above-mentioned NuBus machines).

**Any version of OS 9
can be upgraded to
9.2.2. using free
updaters.**

New PowerPC Macs still come with OS 9.2.2 on the Software Restore CD, although it's no longer installed. If you choose to install it, it only supports Classic mode, not booting into OS 9.

If you install, it's a good idea to drag a fresh copy of the OS 9 System Folder to backup media, which will allow you to restore it by simply dragging it back to your hard drive instead of the tedium of running the software restore CD or DVD. 

Other Resources

- Link: [Low End Mac's Mac OS 9 List](#)
- Link: [OS 9 Forever](#)
- Link: [Low End Mac's Swap List](#)

Charles Moore has been a freelance journalist since 1987 and began writing for Mac websites in May 1998. His [The Road Warrior](#) column was a regular feature on MacOpinion, and he is a news editor and columnist at [Applelinks.com](#). If you find his articles helpful, [please consider making a donation to his tip jar](#).

Recent Columns by Charles W. Moore

- [Charles Moore's Pismo Has a Near Death Experience](#), 'Book Value, 10.05. The Pismo wouldn't wake from sleep, manifested a crashing sound at startup, and refused to boot. Going back to the original G3 resurrected it, but with a lot less power than the G4.
- [A 'Good' Mouse Is Subjective, RAM Disks for Classic Macs, a Street Musician Playing an iPad, and More](#), Charles Moore's Mailbag, 09.30. Also Flash navigation issues with PowerPC Opera, the waning days of PPC browser support, loving Opera 10.62, and a Zip drive tip.
- [Texting While Driving: A Deadly Epidemic](#), Miscellaneous Ramblings, 09.27. Drunk driving is universally reviled, phoning while driving is just as dangerous, and texting far more dangerous than that.
- [Opera Issues Resolved, at Least for Intel Macs](#), Miscellaneous Ramblings, 09.24. Good news: Clearing out some old support files got Opera 10.62 working nicely. Bad news: The 10.6 branch is the end of the line for Opera on PowerPC Macs.
- [More in the Miscellaneous Ramblings index](#).

Links for the Day

- Mac of the Day: [12" 'dual USB' iBook 500](#), May 2001 – This compact, squared off, all-white, 500 MHz iBook was nicknamed the iceBook.
- Group of the Day: [Mac Network](#) deals with all aspects of Mac networking.
- [October 8 in LEM history](#): 98: Unix to the core – 99: Legacy Macs and the professional photographer – 01: Cause and effect: Apple's stock price – To Qwerty or not to Qwerty – 02: Much more to life than

Macs – When to buy a new or newer Mac – 03: POPmonitor 2 – 04: Adware, spyware, and security updates – Text and typography – 07: FastMac 8x SuperDrive and BurnAgain DVD – 'Quicksilver' Power Macs in the Age of Leopard

- [Support Low End Mac](#)

Recent Content on Low End Mac

- [MacBook Air Shortage as Replacment Rumors Persist, iPad Devouring Netbook Market, and More](#), The 'Book Review, 10.08. Also Hitachi's 750 GB notebook drives, two-thirds of poll respondents using MacBooks, avoiding 'Toasted Skin Syndrome', and more.
- [OS and Browser Market Share, OS No Longer Matters, iMac Touch Rumors Snuffed, and More](#), Mac News Review, 10.08. Also What Linux does better than OS X, looking back at Macintosh TV, Pixelmator first to support Google's new WebP image format, and more.
- [Better Audio Output from Macs without Digital Audio](#), Dan Bashur, Apple, Tech, and Gaming, 10.06. With the right hardware, any Mac with USB or FireWire can output multichannel and digital audio.
- [More links in our archive.](#)

Recent Deals

- [Best iPod touch Deals](#), 09.03. Used 1G/32, \$199; 3G/64, \$300; refurb 3G/8, \$149; 3G/32, \$230; 3G/64, \$339; close-out 3G/8, \$174; 32, \$249; 64, \$339; 5G/8, \$223; 32, \$288; 64, \$383.
- [Best iPod nano Deals](#), 09.03. Used from \$79; refurb 5G/8 GB, \$99; close-out, \$129.54; refurb 16 GB, \$149; close-out, \$158 to \$160; 6G/8 GB, \$144; 16 GB, \$172. Shipping included.
- [Best iPod shuffle Deals](#), 09.03. Close-out 2 GB, \$49; 4 GB, \$65; new 5G/2 GB, \$49. Shipping included.
- [Best Power Mac G5 Deals](#), 09.02. 1.6 GHz single, \$200; 1.8 dual, \$300; 2.0, \$350; 2.3, \$400; 2.5, \$500; Quad, \$730.
- [Best MacBook Air Deals](#), 09.02. Used from \$969; refurb 1.86 GHz/120 HD, \$1,249; 128 SSD, \$1,349; 2.13, \$1,549; new 1.86 GHz/120 HD, \$1,428; 2.13 GHz/128 SSD, \$1,707.
- [Best Mac mini Deals](#), 09.01. Used 1.25 GHz G4, \$250; 1.5 Core Solo, \$325; 2.0 Core 2, \$439; close-out 2.66, \$699; 2.53 Server, \$819; new 2.4, \$669; 2.66, \$849; Server, \$949.
- [Best iBook G4 Deals](#), 09.01. 12" 1 GHz Combo, \$200; 1.33 GHz, \$250; 14" 1 GHz, \$285; 1.33 GHz, \$320; 1.42 GHz, \$448; SuperDrive, \$500.
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