

Bird WATCHING

PRODUCT REVIEW Nov '99

ACE AVIAN 8X42 DCF-PC BINOCULARS

It could be argued that Japan is the source of the best value birdwatching binoculars so it's not surprising dealer lists are full of products from the land of the rising sun. Now there's another range of roof-prisms priced to make the opposition whince.

Bath-based dealers Ace Optics have launched the five-strong Avian DCF-PC range - and only one model costs more than £300. Currently available are the 7x42, 8x42, 10x42 and 10x50 products and the lightweight 8x32 model is due early in 2000.

So full marks for generosity, but how do they perform against the other products in the increasingly competitive sub-£400 section of the market?

I was sent the 8x42 DCF model to test.

SPECIFICATION

Model	8x32 DCF*	7X42 DCF	8X42 DCF	10X42 DCF	10X50 DCF
Objective	32mm	42mm	42mm	42mm	50mm
Magnification	8x	7x	8x	10x	10x
Fully multi-coated optics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phase coated, BaK4 Prisms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Waterproof	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nitrogen filled	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Field of view	7.5°	6.5°	6.5°	6°	5°
Eye relief	15.5mm	24.8mm	19.6mm	15.5mm	19.5mm
Close focus	-	1.89m	1.98m	1.98m	3.18m
Size (H)x(W)mm	123x125	145x125	145x125	145x125	170x132
Weight	635g	685g	695g	710g	820g



DESIGN AND BUILD QUALITY

Similarly shaped to other products coming from the same Japanese factory, the rubber armouring is well-shaped for a comfortable grip and easy access to the focus knob. Textured insets prevent slippage, even in the wet, and caked-on sea spray wiped off the following day without leaving a mark.

The twist-up eyecups lock in position, though the right eye-dioptre does not. In practice, it never wavered from the selected position.

Remarkably for such well-priced products, all the Avian models are nitrogen filled for complete waterproofing. I found the low weight and well-balanced design meant that the 8x42 model could be used all day without discomfort.

OPTICAL PERFORMANCE

The recent rave review for the Minox roof-prisms in Bird Watching magazine (see August issue) has become a benchmark for mid-price binoculars. David Uwins of Ace Optics was so confident of the Avians he offered to supply a pair of Minox for direct comparison, and was able to demonstrate that his own product delivered sharper images at the edge of view.

MECHANICAL PERFORMANCE

The large, deeply-knurled focus knob is moderately high geared, making it quick to switch from close focus to infinity, and the eyecups are stiff enough to stay in an intermediate position if that suits your eyes best.

ACCESSORIES

A padded neck strap, rainguard and soft pouch come as standard.



Of course I'm not saying that binoculars in this price range can out-perform the top-of-the-range models. In my telephone book print resolution test, I had to approach to within 24ft to read the smallest type clearly, compared to 30ft with the Swarovski EL 10x42 I was testing at the same time. But, if your budget is restricted, then mid-price models are definitely a viable option. In almost every respect the Avian performed beautifully, delivering bright, neutrally-coloured images in all lighting conditions via fully multi-coated lenses and Bak-4 phase-coated prisms. The field of view (given as 113m at 1,000m) and depth of field were both very good and I managed to pare down the close focus distance to a meagre 66in, which is great news if you are into insect watching.

TESTER'S VERDICT

Design and build rating	8.5/10
Optical rating	9/10
Mechanical rating	9/10
Value for money	10/10

Overall verdict

Five years ago, you would have paid £450 for this level of performance in a roof-prism binocular and thought it very good value. At £279 it's an absolute steal.

However, be warned: the yen is recovering fast against the pound and it might not be possible to buy Japanese products at this sort of price once existing stocks run out.

David Cromack

Price	£279
Guarantee	10 years

Ace OPTICS

ACE OPTICS
16 Green Street,
Bath BA1 2JZ, England.
Tel: 01225 466364
Fax: 01225 469761

www.acecameras.co.uk