

*A Review of Meopta B1 MeoStar  
10X32  
By Lee Thickett*



**In Memoriam:  
Paul Rausnitz  
b March 9 1928,  
d November 11 2018.  
RIP.  
Owner of Meopta-Optika**

*Lee Thickett  
December 2018*

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Well, this is something I have never tried before: a 10x32. I have always been quick to dismiss the idea of a 10x32 when it was mischievous enough to suggest itself to me, as it seemed an impossibly compromised format. Some of you may have read the remark by Doug of Camera Land, in my interview with him, where he said: *“if we sell 2 or 3 10x32's a year it's a lot”*, and I have heard similar remarks from other dealers and brands. So it is clearly the most unpopular of the standard formats. Certainly the exit pupil of 3.2mm suggests a poor twilight performance and some spectacle-wearers could well find the small exit pupil trickier than they would like when lining the bins up with their eyes. And yet pocket 8x20 binos with EP of just 2.5mm have found a ready acceptance, and some people have even declared that the Zeiss Victory Pocket 8x25 is so good that it could be their only birding binocular, despite an exit pupil of only 3.125mm. In view of these latter remarks I thought it was time to find out whether the 10x32 format is really an Ugly Sister or a secret Cinderella.

I am a big fan of Meopta's MeoStar 8x32 so it was natural to turn to the 10x32 and find out if it offers the same rewards. As usual I will first set the Meopta into a context by looking for competitors at around the same price and I found the usual suspects. The Meopta is priced at around £710 while Leica's Trinovid HD comes in at around £728 and the Zeiss Conquest at £700. In the Euro Zone prices are more variable but the following are representative: €745 for the Meopta €899 for the Leica and €800 for the Conquest, while in the USA the prices look like this in the same order: \$980, \$950 and \$950.

In the hand the MeoStar feels compact and not too heavy, and this is borne out by its weight of 600g/21.2ozs and length of 133.3mm/5.2inches compared with Leica's Trinovid HD at 640g/22.58ozs and 130mm/5.12inches, and Zeiss's Conquest HD at 630g/22.2ozs and 132mm/5.2inches. Actually this group is so close on weight and length that you can't slip a feeler-gauge between them.

Turning to field of view and eye relief we find a similar situation with the following in the order Meopta/Leica/Ziess: fov 111m/333ft, 113m/339ft, and 118m/354ft, and ER 16.3/16/16mm.

Finally let's take a look at close focus and speed of focus. The official close focus distances are 1.5m/1.0m/1.5m in the same order as field of view. The speeds of focus are much more separated though with the Conquest being the fastest at twice the speed of a Zeiss SF 8x42, while the Trinovid is about 43% faster than the SF and the Meopta is just 10% faster than the SF. For reference SF is a bit, but a noticeable bit, faster than Swarovski's EL SV. As is usual with the MeoStars, the focus wheel feels stiff but smooth at first, then with use it gradually eases to a happy medium feel, similar to that of the Trinovid but never as easy, some might say as loose, as the Conquest.

As usual I am not a fan of the neck strap and rainguard, especially the latter with only one secure loop (the other side is split) as I much prefer to attach the guard at both sides and would argue that having two secure attachments allows folks to choose between left-side or right-side or both sides. However this is no deal breaker and I attached my own choice of neck strap and rainguard.

I usually don't like thumb-contours/cut-outs on the backs of the optical tubes as they hardly ever feel comfortable but the smoothly rounded contours on the back of the little Meopta's tubes seem designed to let anyone's thumbs, even mine, get comfy. The three-position eyecups move up and down with a feel of precision with just a little rotational free-play at full extension meaning I can't quite give them full marks. It's close though, and they work nicely in conjunction with the eye relief for me too, both with and without spectacles.

Checking for chromatic aberration I found the same results as for other members of the MeoStar family and that is no CA in the centre field and only the tiniest amount at the edge of the field of

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view. I usually check this using a black overhead-cable pole outside our house as well as the cables themselves. This is quite a severe test if there are white clouds above and these are the conditions I wait for. Out in the field there are usually other opportunities to check for this and sure enough, during field testing, a Little Egret flew slowly past me, quite close by, its white plumage illuminated by the winter sun, and set against a backdrop of black gloopy mud. There was not a trace of chromatic aberration. The bino picked out the yellow feet and I could even see the mud on them dripping off as it flew along. And, talking of the winter sun, despite its low position in the sky, I did not encounter any glare problems panning near to it.

Out in the field the MeoStars were comfortable and well balanced. To chase after butterflies and dragonflies I would like a faster focus but the MeoStar strikes a good balance for both birding and general nature observations. This enabled me to get the binos onto a swooping immature Peregrine as it chased a Teal. Unfortunately for the young Peregrine the Teal knew a lot more about evasive aerobatics and it escaped, but it left me with a fabulous view of the frustrated Peregrine as it cruised around looking for another potential victim. Talking of Teal, later the same day I was able to sit and watch a group of Teal, maybe a family, foraging in shallow water. They are a common enough duck but their plumage is worthy of a close look. The male in particular has such beautiful complicated markings and subtle background colours, not to mention the 'painted duck' head pattern. But above all the metallic green speculum on their folded wings shone out like the finest emeralds, and it was enough to take your breath away, and all the while their two-note 'plink' calls were hanging in the air. The Meoptas resolved the pattern details and delivered the full range of subtle and not so subtle colours with finesse. For perceived sharpness, contrast and colour rendition, I think Meopta's MeoStars can stand comparison with the best.

On another day I was walking by a mud scrape where Curlews and Redshanks were foraging when I noticed two Black-tailed Godwits in a nearby muddy channel and stopped to watch them. In winter plumage they aren't as immediately eye-catching as when breeding but the soft grey feathers on their mantle and coverts, with the dark line down the centre of the feathers, was still lovely. One stood on one leg and scratched under its chin as if doing a yoga pose, while the other grabbed a small crab with its long forceps-like bill.

But all of these observations were in full daylight. How did it perform when light was dimmer, with its exit pupil limited to 3.2mm? Yesterday, as I write this, I went for a walk locally and it was late in the afternoon. As I walked through the houses towards my favourite farmland route, I heard the sharp metallic call of a Great Spotted Woodpecker and sure enough there it was high in a tree. The Meoptas found it and gave me a super view as it called non-stop for a couple of minutes. I left it after a while and continued my walk, returning later in much reduced light and it was still there but no longer calling. Curious I once more lifted the MeoStars and there it was with colours still visible if muted. I watched it for several minutes, certainly until the light conditions deteriorated to the level at which I would normally call a halt to birding. So for me, this 10x32 would suffice for birding in the majority of birding situations even if it would not be first choice for owl or nightjar enthusiasts.

The only shortcoming I found was more connected with the format than Meopta's version of it, and I am referring to the relatively light weight of a 32mm. In badly gusting wind conditions I found the MeoStar's lightness meant that I could not hold their 10x magnification as steady as I can a heavier 42mm model. But of course in other conditions, having a 10x magnification available while carrying such a light weight around is a bonus. I have said before that using binos as small and light as 32mm models with wide fields of view is like having a bit of magic in your hands, and I feel the same way about having 10x magnification in such a compact and portable format.

Summing up, this has been a learning experience for me. For a year or two I have been able to foresee a time in the not too distant future when I will want to increase my use of 32mm models and decrease my dependence on 42s. In the back of my mind though I have always thought 'what about

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10x magnification, that can't really work with a 32 can it?' This experience has put my mind at rest on this question.

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