

*A Review of Meopta B1 MeoStar
8x42
By Lee Thickett*



A Review of Meopta B1 MeoStar 8x42

By Lee Thickett



How did this happen? The 8x42 format has been my favourite since 2004 and I first reviewed a MeoStar in September 2016, so why has it taken 30 months to get around to reviewing Meopta's MeoStar version of my preferred format? I have no answer except to say that the universe works in mysterious ways.

So, at last, a borrowed MeoStar 8x42 arrived from Avisum who represent Meopta in the UK birding market and it got packed away and accompanied us to the Scottish island of Islay, where it was pressed into service almost every day and in all kinds of vile weather too. I had other binos with me but somehow the MeoStar wormed its way into my affections very quickly and apart from a few habitats where a 10x, it became my default choice almost every day. This is a good sign.

This model is present in a particularly lively part of the market being priced in the UK at around £830 which places it in direct conflict with Zeiss's Conquest HD at £848, Leica's Trinovid HD at £785, and Nikon's Monarch HG at £829, all highly respected models. In the USA the equivalent prices are approximately \$950 for the Meopta, \$970 for the Zeiss, \$950 for the Leica and \$880 for the Nikon, while in the Euro Zone the prices look like this: €920 for the Meopta, €1,145 for the Zeiss and €930 for the Leica, and €840 for the Nikon although this price might have been a limited offer.

So, on price these are close competitors, but on specifications there a big differences. For field of view the Nikon leads with 145m/435ft, with the Meopta next in line at 137m/411ft, then the Zeiss with 128m/385ft, with the Leica bringing up the rear with 124m/372ft.

If we look at weight the Meopta is the chunkiest at 897g/31.6ozs, the Zeiss next at 795g/28ozs, then the Leica with 730g/26ozs and the flyweight Nikon with 666g.24ozs. Length-wise the Leica is the shortest as usual at 140mm with the Nikon fractionally longer at 145mm and the Zeiss and Meopta identical at 150mm.

Close focus distance is 3m for the Meopta, with both the Zeiss and the Nikon offering 2m and the Leica focusing closest of all with 1.8m.

Bear with me, here comes the final statistic: Eye Relief. The Zeiss offers the most at 18mm and the others are grouped closely together at 17.8 for the Nikon, 17.4 for the Meopta and 17mm for the Leica. However do bear in mind that eye relief is one thing but *usable* eye relief depends on the design of the eyecup. For sure eye relief gives a guide but it is not to be relied on as a guarantee, especially when spectacles are worn.

The review model therefore is on the heavy side, has a somewhat old-fashioned 3.0 metre close focus, but by comparison with Swarovski's EL 42 it is relatively compact at 150mm compared with the Swaro's 160mm and certainly when put alongside Zeiss's SF at 173mm.

In the hand it felt compact and well-balanced and while heavier than I am used to, I had these around my neck for several hours on about 17 days and their weight was never a burden.

The first day I walked out with them a flock of about 30 Barnacle Geese flew overhead, calling, and the silhouetted geese provided a severe test for chromatic aberration against the bright white cloud and I struggled to see any at all, apart from a suggestion at the very edge of the field of view, which I later confirmed by looking at black rocks against a background of white sea foam.

As with its relatives, the out of production 7x42 the HD 10x42 and the compact 8x32, I immediately felt really at ease with the view through them. I struggle to find the words to adequately describe

A Review of Meopta B1 MeoStar 8x42

By Lee Thickett



how comfortable, transparent, detailed and colour-faithful these binos are, but I will return to this with a quote from my wife, Troubadoris, later in this review.

Glancing out of our French windows early in our holiday there was a huge bird hanging low on the strong wind with wings outstretched and the tips of the primaries curved upwards like a Boeing Dreamliner. I grabbed the Meoptas and got it in focus (they focus at the same speed as a Zeiss HT/Swaro EL, so a bit slower than an SF) but the bird was at the same height as us and we were looking more or less straight up its tail-end. Then it banked to the left and as it glided away I could see its huge yellow beak and darker yellow legs: White-tailed Sea Eagle! What a bird to 'break-in' a pair of binos!

Later the same day I was able to get decent views of a pair of Great Northern Divers in the bay, one with smudgy cheeks and one with cheeks as white as pure snow, both with hints of the wonderful checker-board patterns on their backs. The Meoptas gave me great views of Otters and Common Seals too. The latter were two seals loafing on rocks in what little sunlight made it through the clouds. One was a grey-brown colour but the other was almost a teddy-bear golden and the Meoptas sharply captured the fan of their whiskers as the sun briefly gleamed and caught them in a beam of weak light.

Colour reproduction is a strong point of the Meoptas as they captured faithfully the multitude of blues and greens in the sea, the browns, gingers and reds of the hillsides and the range of fading greens of the grasses. From a long distance I could easily make out the bright green grass of an Otter's washing and drying site. They need to wash the salt from their fur to maintain its insulation properties and one of the substances that washes off and rubs off onto the grass next to their favourite freshwater pool is the tacky coating off the seaweed they hunt through and this acts as a fertiliser of the grass, where the Otter rubs itself dry. The Meoptas reproduced all of these shades of colours in a realistic way which I found delightful.

A few days later and in pouring rain we were startled by a gull sailing by without any black on the wing-tips. Through the Meoptas and the rain it appeared a ghostly uniform pale shade across the upper wings and mantle, with a compact head and smallish neat bill: Iceland Gull! We don't see those every day of the week!

Most mornings and evenings the area around our cottage was visited by up to 3 Brown Hares. I should explain for American members that we call our small Lagomorphs Rabbits and our bigger ones (Brown and Mountain) Hares. These Hares would graze around the cottage and in the dim light through the Meoptas I could see that one of them had a small white patch on one shoulder. This allowed me to spot this individual on subsequent evenings. Talking of evenings, due to the time of year, we were often walking back to our cottage with a low and sinking sun in the sky and even looking close to it I never had any issues with glare/flare.

For perceived sharpness and for contrast I really can't fault these binos and along with their ease of view and colour reproduction they were a pleasure to audition. How do they compare with Zeiss's Conquest HD? Optically I would personally rank the Meopta a bit higher than the Zeiss in all respects, but this is as much a matter of taste as anything. On the other hand the Conquest is lighter and has a closer focus, while some Birdforum members say weight adds stability and durability and 3.0 metre close focus is fine for birding. Binos are a very personal choice.

Now, I promised you a quotation from Troubadoris and this is what she said and how it happened. The Meoptas were resting on a sofa near us late one afternoon when Troubadoris suddenly stood up, walked over to them and picked them up. This was startling as she normally take no interest in binos I have for review, being very satisfied with her Leicas. She took them over to the window and

A Review of Meopta B1 MeoStar 8x42

By Lee Thickett



had a look around the bay and towards the hills to the west. Knowing that she converted entirely to 32mm models several years ago to save weight, I fully expected her first words to be 'OMG these are heavy' but instead she said 'Aren't these nice? They aren't too big and they balance well and are just so nice to look through'. Can't put it better myself so I will close here and just recommend that you take a look through them when you get the chance.

