

Meopta MeoStar S2 HD Angled / Meopta 30-60x WA: A Review By Lee Thickett



*Lee Thickett
MeoRev002
June 2016*

At the 2015 British Birdfair I spent some time trying out spotting scopes from some of the big names and along the way came across the S2 scope from Meopta, a company that has been swimming around the periphery of my perceptions for some years. I was impressed enough to file away the name 'Meopta' as a target for testing at some point in the future. An opportunity duly arose and I was offered the MeoStar B1 8x32 and the S2 to test: perfect.

Meopta is based in the Czech Republic, with a subsidiary company in the USA, and has been producing a wide range of optical products since 1933. For more information about the full range of products and technologies visit: <http://www.meopta.com/en/>. They are strongly rumoured to produce high quality components and even full products for other brands and when you learn that they have a staggering 40+ vacuum chambers for coating lenses and prisms at their factory in Prerov, you can believe it.

In the UK Meopta nature observation instruments are handled by Avisum (go to: <http://www.avisum.co.uk>) and are sold through selected dealers.

I have already reported on the MeoStar B1 8x32 on the binoculars pages and found it to be a very well made instrument that was delightful to use, so I looked forward to trying out the S2 scope. I used the S2 in a variety of situations including my usual review site where there is a large lake and abundant waterfowl. I also took it on an expedition to Ardnamurchan in west Scotland where we stayed on the coast overlooking a small salt marsh, a tidal basin and a rocky shore.

The S2 is an attractive instrument with a smooth and graceful outline that bears some similarities with Swarovski's ATX scope. For example they both share a focusing ring that forms the narrowest part of the barrel and that falls readily to hand when needed. The resemblance finishes there, however, as the Swarovski is a modular system allowing the fitment of different objective lens modules to the straight or angled eyepiece units, the magnification obtained changing with the size of the objective. This versatility comes at a price of course and I don't just mean in monetary terms. Swarovski's 85 mm body weighs in at 1910 grams (68 ozs) and while the larger diameter objective certainly plays a part in this, it is worth noting that Zeiss's 85 mm Diascope weighs 1810 grams (65 ozs) and the Meopta 1815 grams (65 ozs). All of these weights include eyepieces.

I tested the S2 with the wide-angle 30-60x eyepiece that maintains a constant apparent field of view of 66 deg throughout the magnification range, whereas the alternative 20x-70x eyepiece varies from 45 to 63 deg apparent field of view. There have been reports of some folks experiencing some mild distortion when panning at lower magnifications with this eyepiece but in normal use I just couldn't see this myself. However when panning with the view seriously out of focus I could see the effect, but this was hardly an issue. The eyecup screws up and down to accommodate spectacle wearers and the adjustment action was smooth and sufficiently stiff to stay-put at any setting (there are no click-stops). At the objective end there is an integral sun shade that slides out and stays in position and did a good job in Scotland when the setting sun was shining low across the sea.

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The focuser is smooth and precise with no back-lash / free play and the speed an excellent balance between getting on target quickly but not overshooting. As for the view, well, it is just superb. I couldn't find any chromatic aberration in the main field of view and just a tiny bit at the field edge in high contrast situations. Colours, contrast and apparent sharpness were all brilliant.

In front of our cottage on Ardnamurchan is a tiny salt-marsh at the head of a tidal basin through which a fresh water stream runs. At different states of tide this was visited by a pair of Greenshanks (a relative of Greater Yellowlegs), a pair of Common Sandpipers (just like Spotted Sandpiper, but without the spots) and many Meadow Pipits and Wheatears. The scope rendered the breeding plumage of the Greenshanks and the subtle tones of the Wheatear males and females perfectly. The fine markings hidden within the Sandpiper's mantle plumage were easily seen and the high contrast image made the dark eye-stripe and supercilium so prominent that with a careless glance I could have mistaken it for a Wood Sandpiper. These were all viewed at 30x but further out in the bay were Great Northern Divers (Common Loons) and twisting the smooth-acting zoom eyepiece around to 45x was enough to reveal their breath-taking plumage and dark red eyes. When they surfaced to swallow their fish or crabs and looked around, the dark band at the base of their necks gleamed a metallic green in the sunshine.

Using the scope to slowly scan the sea-weed fringes of rocks for signs of otters I noted that the field of view was sharp to just short of the field edge and it handled glare from low off the water due to the lowering sun with ease, a quality I have noted also with Zeiss's Diascope and found lacking in Swarovski's ATX.

We also took with us some kit to convert the scope for digi-scoping. This was a full-sized kit to accept a DSLR rather than a pocket camera. The equipment required is the Photoadapter itself and a converter ring for both fitting it to the camera and the scope, so, three items in total, and you can see the set-up on the accompanying photo.

Unfortunately our lightweight tripod was not steady enough for any serious photography and the rocky shores too uncertain of footing to risk such a valuable borrowed instrument. However I can say that all of the kit fitted together securely and felt really well-built.

In the UK the Meopta and its top competitors are approximately priced like this:

Meopta MeoStar S2 82 mm with 30-60x wide angle eyepiece, £2325

Swarovski ATX 85 mm with 25-50x wide angle eyepiece £3070

Zeiss Diascope 85 mm with 20-75x eyepiece £2,225

Leica APO Televid with 25-50x eyepiece £2,000

In the USA the prices are approximately:

Meopta as above \$2300

Swaro as above \$4740

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Zeiss as above \$3400
Leica as above \$2550

Take care when comparing prices though as these scopes differ in their objective lenses, eyepieces and other features such as Zeiss's two-stage focusing incorporating a fast focus and a slower fine focus, and of course Swarovski's modular arrangement. More than ever this is a case of try before you buy, but to conclude I can say, hand-on-heart, that the S2 is right up there with the offerings from Zeiss and Swarovski (I haven't sufficient experience of the Leica APO-Televid to comment) and should be on the short-list of anyone considering buying one these high-end instruments.

