

*A Review of Zeiss Victory Pocket 8x25
By
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April 2018*

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Some years ago I had an unhappy experience with a pocket binocular having two loose hinges and one stiff focuser. I couldn't move the latter without moving the former. It had to go and was replaced eventually by a Zeiss Victory Pocket 8x20 which was a much more satisfactory having only one firm hinge and a smooth, easy focuser. Much more recently Zeiss replaced the 8x20 with the Victory Pocket 8x25 and so did I. While I don't use pocket binos as intensively as bigger binoculars I decided to do a mini-review of this compact newcomer.

The specification promises much as it surpasses the old 8x20 on two important counts: field of view is 130m/390' compared with 118m/354' and the official close focus is 1.9m/6.23' compared with an official 2.6m/8.53'. I am indebted to Alexis for pointing out that he has measured the close focus of the old compact at 2.0 and in turn I have checked my Victory Pocket and it focuses down to 1.5m, so the official specifications are quite conservative. The Pocket also trounces Swarovski's CL 8x25 whose field of view is almost exactly the same as the discontinued Zeiss Compact at 119m/357' and it's a similar story with the close focus with the CL at 2.5m/8.2'. Leica's Ultravid 8x20 comes with the following: fov 113m/341' and close focus 1.8m/6'.

But how compact are these pocket rockets? As it turns out the Swaro and Zeiss are fairly close at 110mm and 112mm respectively while as usual, Leica is the 'king of compact' at 93mm.

The retail prices in the UK show more differences though with the Zeiss the most expensive at £548 and the prices for the Swaro and Leica following almost in line with how their fields of view compare with the Zeiss at £515 for the Swarovski and £479 for the Leica. So if you take the price of the Leica and divide it by its fov in metres you find each metre costs £4.2389. Multiply this by the Zeiss's 130m and you get £551 which is pretty close to the Zeiss's street price of £548 which means, in field of view terms, you get your money's worth with the Zeiss. A similar calculation for the Swaro would price it at £501 rather than its current street price over here of £515, but hey, Swaros have never been cheap.

Over in the USA things are very different. Here, the Zeiss is the least expensive at \$750, with the Leica one step up at \$779 and the Swarovski the dearest at \$819.

What are the Zeiss's like to use though? I would struggle to claim they looked brighter than the Victory 8x20s but my goodness what a difference the field of view makes. The old compacts had a fov of 6.73deg whereas the new pockets come in at 7.41deg. For a tourist these pockets put a lot of landscape or cityscape in front of your eyes and for me out on a marsh in east Suffolk, a huge amount of reed bed.

Scanning the tops of ancient oaks, still lacking leaves this early in the year, and checking for chromatic aberration against the bright but clouded sky, and I am struggling to find any. The merest scraping of it is there right at the edge of the field of view but this is a stellar performance.

Over the marsh, various Marsh Harriers were cruising at a medium height but over the wood on the hill called Dingle Dell there came a Common Buzzard. I really didn't need to glass it as they are so familiar to us from a visits to Scotland, but I wanted to use the Pockets and my goodness I was glad that I did because the Buzzard performed a 'sky dance'. This is where a bird of prey flies along then suddenly closes its wings and plummets down, only to spread them again and soar up to the same height on the momentum of the dive and then, without taking a breath they dive again, and again. The Buzzy did this 4 times in a row, something we have only seen once before and then it was performed by a Hen Harrier. The dark Buzzard didn't have the slightest hint of CA as it switch-backed across the pale sky.

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The following day, a glimpse out of our cottage's back window revealed a Green Woodpecker on the ground only about 15 metres away digging in the sandy soil for ants and by the look of its tongue sliding back into its bill at intervals it was finding some. The nearest binos happened to be the Victory Pockets and through them the Woody's black mask and vivid crimson crown and malar stripe were just stunning. Even its plain green plumage didn't look plain at all but seemed full of subtle tones as the bird shifted, digging the ground like a manic pneumatic drill.

Using them like a tourist and having them in pocket or around my neck but tucked inside my gillet, they were light and with just the single hinge to manipulate they were quick on the draw.

The Pockets are an accomplished set of binoculars, bright and sharp, in fact for all practical purposes they were sharp right across the field and with excellent colour rendition and contrast. What's not to like? The weird strap and the lack of a rainguard, that's what, but these are easily remedied.

Folding pocket binos are still not my favourite format but these are excellent performers and worthy opponents of Swarovski's excellent CL and Leica's still-competitive Ultravid.