

**Zeiss Victory SF 8x42 Black
A Mini-Review
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I have been using a black SF 8x42 recently and thought I would report a few impressions based on my experience of the older grey model. The obvious change is the colour of the armour and it looks handsome dressed in black, but I still rather like the grey look. On the surface the new armour appears to be in very similar to that on the HT. It feels a little firmer than the grey armour but pressing with my thumb it seems to have the same ridge and groove pattern on the underside for impact absorption, and Zeiss have confirmed this is indeed the case. I have heard a few complaints that some grey units had loose armour but I also heard that a few folks who thought their armour was loose had been misled by the slightly squashy feel to the armour resulting from the ridges and grooves. Whatever was going on there, the armour on this unit feels well glued-down.

The other change that Zeiss have reported is an improvement to the focusing mechanism. Most units of the grey models I tried were fine but one or two had a couple of tighter-feeling places along the focus travel. This black unit has a smooth feeling of great precision and consistency in both directions of travel. From my test target at 2.5 miles / 4km away to a point in my office 2 metres away is just about one single turn so there is no change in the gearing and it's a bit faster than an HT or Swaro EL and for birding feels great, allowing a fast enough target acquisition but slow enough for accurate fine tuning. For butterfly and dragonfly watching I prefer a faster speed than this but for birding this seems about perfect to me.

The eyecups appear to have the same design as before but have been given an extra position with 4 available now. The new click, one up from fully down, suits my spectacles just fine. However, although they do the job, as usual on Zeisses, the eyecups just don't feel as precision-made as they should, given the price of SF. I am referring to the small amounts of rotational free-play in each of the settings and the feeling that the click-stops aren't quite as positive as they might be. However I have used SFs for a year and a half now and they have never actually moved from the set position so perhaps I am being too fussy.

At a local beauty spot I had a Moorhen and was immediately struck by the vividness of its red and yellow bill. It looked as if it was illuminated from within. In a nearby farmyard some fantastically handsome ducks covered in a vibrant dark green plumage shimmered with electric blue where the light caught it. This effect was similar to that of a male Mallard's head plumage but much more intense. Moving to a small river valley in the nearby Peak District and scanning up the small river for possible Water Voles, some leaf-less small trees had branches that were almost red and stood out like strips of neon lights. They were Osier Willows and I have seen them in winter through SFs before but like the ducks and Moorhen mentioned above, the intensity of the colour was somewhat more than I was expecting.

Perceived sharpness, contrast and size of sweet spot appeared to be unchanged but I was intrigued by the small boost in colour reproduction and wanted to check it out further.

Back home I took both the black 8x and old grey 10x into our kitchen to watch for birds coming to our feeders mounted on a pole which, because our house is on the side of a hill, is actually below the kitchen. First to arrive were the stars of our local show: the Bullfinches. Called 'Bull' because for a finch they are chunky, the males are a bright pink with a jet black cap, while the females are a hard to describe brownish-greyish with a hint of pinkish. Alternating between the two bins I could see that the black 8x presented a slightly warmer image that was even noticeable on the female. In both cases their caps were a satisfying deep black. In between the Bullfinches dominating the feeders, the Blue Tits would swoop in and it took some time for one to stay still enough for me to be able to swap between bins a few times. The blue cap was definitely a little bluer through the black 8x. Note that I am talking about a subtle difference here although noticeable when comparing side-by-side. Could it be individual variation or have the T* coatings been tweaked?

I am sure that the move to black armour will be welcomed by those who were put off by the pale grey armour in which the model was launched and the tweaks to the focus and eyecup adjustability are definitely useful improvements.