

*A Review of Opticron
Discovery WP PC 8x32
By Lee Thickett*



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Budget-priced 8x32s are swarming at the moment. No sooner had the Eden XP 8x32 arrived (see my recent review) but here comes another, this time from a familiar name: Opticron. Available in the shops for around £159/€250, like the aforementioned Eden exists the Opticron Discovery WP PC 8x32, is swimming in a very crowded part of the market, and for this reason I am again forgoing the temptation to pick 2 or 3 competitor units on the basis that there are many and it would be unfair on those not chosen.

So here are the Disco 8x32's vital statistics:

Field of view: 131m / 7.5deg
Eye relief: 17mm
Close focus: 1.2m
Length: 108mm
Weight: 391g / 13.8ozs
IPD: 52-75

So far so competitive, but I would pick out the weight of 391g as a stand-out light weight, and the IPD range extending down to 52mm is to be applauded, it making these compact and super-light binos suitable for folks with smaller IPDs such as younger kids and some ladies too.

These feather-weight binos accompanied us to the wilds of the extreme west coast of Scotland for a workout in the wilderness. In the hand they feel slinky and slim and seem to weight about as much as an over-inflated balloon. The eye-relief was fine with and without spectacles and the eyecups stayed in the selected position even when scrambling up slopes and crawling over rocks. The neck-strap is a slim one that manages the weight easily although using my usual attachment method the strap slipped out of the clip on one side and I only just managed to stop them heading for the ground. To be fair I hadn't used Opticron's recommended method (explained here:

<https://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=354882>) and when I did belatedly follow this guidance the binos stayed attached to the strap despite a good deal of provocation. The rainguard has apertures for the strap at both sides but as usual one is split, and seems dysfunctional, and at the risk of sending you all to sleep I repeat that I prefer guards that definitely offer secure attachment at either or both sides so the user has three choices.

The Disco has rather good control of chromatic aberration with only a tiny amount visible at the edge of the field, otherwise the view is pleasant and actually a bit better than expected for the asking price. But did it perform in the field?

The first thing it achieved was to send me into a dizzy puzzlement at the presence of a mixed flock of Pied and White Wagtails, maybe about 25 in total. Europeans will know that Whites are their subspecies and the Pied breeds in the UK. So what were these whites, with their pale grey backs separating the jet-black of the head and tail, doing on the west coast of Scotland? So early in the year there was no question of juveniles/immatures confusing the issue and it turns out there is a breeding population of Whites in Greenland the migrate through the UK in spring and autumn and to prove it there they were.

Out at sea a group of Razorbills lounged around taking the occasional dive below the surface. These auks are dressed like an old-fashion butler with a formal black cloak and dazzlingly white waistcoat (vest to our American buddies) and despite the distance to them I could plainly see the white strip along the bill and the transverse stripe near the tip of the bill. They really are smart birds.

Even further out, gliding birds rising and falling, tilting from side to side, in a long line of individuals, were Manx Shearwaters and diving through them from time to time were Gannets, their gorgeous dairy-cream yellow heads catching the sun. They might be common but my goodness when they dive from altitude and fold their wings back like an F-111 swing-wing fighter-bomber and enter the sea like monster darts they are a sight to behold. They have physiological adaptations to withstand the force of entering the ocean at such speeds and if you are even just mildly interested you should really read-up on them.

Talking of things military (that's the reference to an F-111) a few days later I witnessed the nearest thing to watching a Sidewinder missile closing in on its target on a 'pursuit course' and the Opticrons captured this nicely. A Sparrowhawk flapped and glided lazily across the remote bay to which we had hiked, and while all of the local Oystercatchers screamed and piped abuse at it, one of them decided to get physical. With its long wings doing that shallow-beating high-speed whirring, the Oystercatcher rocketed across the bay, closing in on the Sparrowhawk at high speed, with its orangey-red beak stuck out in front like a red-hot poker and right up until the last moment it appeared as though there was going to be a Sparrowhawk-kebab. At the crucial instant the hawk did a kind of aerial dance which had it slip to one side, and then somehow flip over the Oystercatcher, which was unable to slow down fast enough to follow the hawk, which glided away out of sight while the Oystercatcher flew back to its fellows no doubt claiming victory.

There were other fine observations too with the Discos delivering nice images of Black Guillemots (Tysties to some of us), Red-throated Divers, Sand Martins and more, but two more sightings showed the Opticrons at their best.

Late one afternoon while we slogged back up a tiny glen that is a favourite of ours for creatures such as Green Hairstreak butterflies and Green Tiger Beetles, a mewling call drew our attention to a pair of Common Buzzards circling around each other and around the summit of a hill. The sun was low by then and caught the underside of their wings as they circled and I could make out their complex plumage markings. They might be common but by golly they are fine birds. And finally on almost our last day I got a distant view of a huge 'barn door' flying over the ridge to the south. A White-tailed Sea Eagle and through the Opticrons I could make out the wisp of a tail and the big head thrusting forward carrying a formidable beak.

All in all I was quite taken with these wee binos but was there any down-sides? Yes, there was, but not too serious. There was the rainguard of course but also the test unit developed some free play in the focus. It wasn't much, and it didn't get worse, and I have to admit I am probably over-sensitive to this in much the same way as some folks can't tolerate blurry edges of fields of view or any trace of chromatic aberration. Talking of blurring at the edge of the field of view, this was present in the Disco and was clearly caused by a gentle field curvature as it could be brought into focus. Finally on some of those late afternoons with a low spring sun, looking very close to the sun brought some veiling glare in the bottom third of the field of view but it never caused the entire field to go 'milky'.

As with the Eden tested recently it would be wrong to suggest this Opticron delivered an optical performance anywhere near Zeiss's Conquest HD or Meopta's B1 MeoStar or even Opticron's own Traveller BGA ED 8x32, but these are all substantially more expensive. What they did deliver in spades was a solid performance that allowed me to concentrate on and enjoy the subjects I was viewing and not to be distracted by any idiosyncrasy of the bino.