

RTMC report

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I attended the RTMC gathering near Big Bear, California over the weekend.

Highlights:

1. Tom Osypowski's (Equatorial Platforms) 24-inch Dobsonian on his aluminum platform drive is once again the best telescope at the conference. I was able to see the central star of the Ring Nebula, even under a gibbous moon. One fantastic and surprisingly portable telescope.

2. I had a chance to view through Celestron's new 20-inch corrected Dall-Kirkham cassegrain. It seems to work well as I was unable to visually detect any coma at the edge of a wide field eyepiece. Could this surpass the mighty Ritchey-Chretien? Stay tuned! A very good engineering effort by Celestron, however, the \$40k price tag puts it out of the reach of most amateurs. Didn't quite see the central star of the Ring Nebula with this one.

3. Good talk by Phil Plait of the Bad Astronomy web page, except that the audio/video techs almost ruined his PowerPoint presentation with a malfunctioning (or just out of range) wireless keyboard. Instead, they kept on blaming Microsoft for the malfunction.

Lowlights:

1. Sky & Telescope decided to treat all of their major advertisers to an offsite dinner and drinking party which meant that the vendors were not at the conference Saturday evening (prime time) to demo their products.

2. The conference was a ghost town on Sunday. Anybody giving a talk on Sunday was just wasting their time. The RTMC organizers could fix this by simply moving the big Saturday door prize to Sunday, the I guess that that there are too many "I want in now!" whiners to allow for that. The RTMC conference is for all practical purposes a one-day Saturday event.

3. I was somewhat disappointed with the version 6 upgrade to TheSky. Some very nice improvements in visualizations, but only a few new astronomical functions. Most of the menu functions are the same. There was a partial fix with regard to the screen update problem in alt-az mode, but I wish that

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they would implement full tracking in alt-az mode. I don't know too many people who sit and watch the stars drift by in a fixed alt-az position, on the other hand, more and more Dobsonians are now fully driven. I would also like to see support for more of the natural satellites in the solar system.

Del Johnson