

## Have refractors hurt the hobby?

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**From:** RichA (*none\_at\_none.com*)

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In the Dec. issue, the editor of Sky and Tel in December discusses Christmas present telescopes. He of course makes mention of the junk scopes, the 60mm 525x refractors and 76mm reflectors that are mechanically and optically (usually by their eyepieces) challenged and that they do more to turn people off the hobby than turn them on.

This is undoubtedly true. But forget the 76mm reflectors, the main culprit is the 60mm refractor on it's 9000 year old Tasco alt-az rickety mount that is by far the main culprit, along with it's dog crap little Huygen eyepieces and 3x plastic barlows. So, has the mere presence of these telescopes harmed the hobby, by driving many away from it.

I used to have the view that if someone couldn't maintain their interest enough to "live" with a 60mm for a few years until they sought out something better, maybe they didn't deserve to be in the hobby, that their interest was not genuine. But, after having watched the behaviour of amateurs over the past 35 years, I realize that some (more now than before) come into the hobby and can be turned off by bad equipment. Whether they "deserve" to be in the hobby is purely a judgment call on people's part.

So if most agree that the lowly cheapo 60mm refractor (or worse, the fully plastic 40 or 50mm trashfractor) has turned away potential devotees, what can be done about it?

About 17 years ago, Meade and Celestron tried to help out here. They both offered only decent (not great, but workable) 60mm refractors with reasonable 1-1/4" eyepieces and real finderscopes. This was a noble attempt by them to "upscale" the beginner. It worked for a bit, but ultimately, both companies for whatever reason decided to dispense with all pretense at being the hobby saviours and started selling the same garbage scopes Tasco and Bushnell and Swift, etc, had been selling. They needed the high margins these scopes offer. They probably help offset R&D and production costs of real scopes.

The editor of Sky and Tel offers up the usual advise (which is good) about trying educate people about bad versus good telescopes, but

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amateurs are too few in number to influence the bulk of telescope buyers who are looking generally for just another Christmas gift to offer up and who don't put anymore thought into it than someone buying a shirt for someone. In fact, someone is more likely to know a good clothing brand than telescope.

But what if the only scopes offered at the entry level are decent quality ones? Celestron and Meade tried this a decade+ ago, offering decent beginner scopes, 1-1/4" eyepieces, good finders, etc, but they couldn't sustain i