

Re: Have refractors hurt the hobby?

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I agree with your evaluation and your sentiments – T O T A L L Y!

Jon Isaacs wrote:

> *Rich A. wrote:*

>

> > *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.*

>

> *Actually, Meade does produce such a telescope, 60AZ-A and it costs \$50 at*
> *Walmart. After reading the Sky and Telescope editorial, I decided I would see*
> *exactly how bad these scopes are.*

>

> *What do you get for your \$50?*

>

> *A color free 60mm F11.7 objective, a metal tube, and a surprisingly smooth 1.25*
> *inch plastic focuser. It comes with 2 decent 1.25 inch MA eyepieces, a 25mm*
> *and a 9mm, it has a full aperture, reasonably sharp 5x24 finder (unlike finders*
> *of the past that were stopped down), a real mirror diagonal, a chincy but*
> *workable barlow, and a mount that takes a while to settle down, probably a true*
> *5 second settling time.*

>

> *An experienced observer can see a variety of DSOs from Mag 3.5- 4 skies*
> *including the ring, the dumbbell and the Andromeda galaxy. It seems to split*
> *double stars rather nicely, Castor at about 4 arc seconds is doable though so*
> *far the double-double has eluded it even at 140X. It shows 4 stars in the*
> *Orion Nebula, the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, hints of the cloud*
> *belts, Venus and Jupiter in the same FOV on a morning like this....*

>

> *This scope also focuses to about 16 feet which allows it to be used as a*
> *spotting scope. Unfortunately my guess is that the long focuser drawtube*
> *necessary for this may restrict the aperture.*

sci.astro.amateur: Re: Have refractors hurt the hobby?

- >
- > *The good points are that the objective and eyepieces seem decent, the*
- > *eyepieces, including the barlow are nearly Parafocal, and the finder actually*
- > *works. It was really quite a surprise to look through the focuser and realize*
- > *that it was actually quite good. I also think the fact that the eyepieces and*
- > *barlow are parafocal is important for a beginner because it means after*
- > *changing eyepieces one can still see the target.*
- >
- > *The biggest problem with this scope is that the mount is quite shaky,*
- > *improvements are possible with various techniques, mostly patience on the part*
- > *of the observer, waiting for the shakes to end is actually possible. An*
- > *upgrade of the diagonal and barlow would probably be in order at some point.*
- >
- > *But the bottom line here is that this is a scope that a competent observer*
- > *(with the right attitude) can use and enjoy and it costs \$50.*
- >
- > *So, have cheap refractors hurt or helped the hobby?*
- >
- > *A couple of years ago Larry Gilstrap cautioned S.A.A. to be careful with*
- > *elitism. I remember this often. Certainly nice telescopes are nice to have.*
- > *Comparing my Pronto (which some would snub for not being an APO) provides far*
- > *sharper and brighter views than the Meade 60AZ-A.*
- >
- > *But that is not the issue. The issue is whether the Meade 60AZ-A is capable of*
- > *providing a glimpse of the universe that sparks a person into a life long*
- > *enchantment with the night sky.*
- >
- > *I believe it can.*
- >
- > *This scope is certainly far better than that \$5 garage sale special that*
- > *sparked me, the mount is sturdier, the finder better, the eyepieces far better.*
- >
- > *I am one who believes that it is not about the telescope, it is about the*
- > *observer. If such as scope cannot excite you, make you wonder, pleasure in the*
- > *view of a colorful double, gasp at the hint of nebulosity in Orion, wonder at*
- > *the moons of Jupiter, if such a scope cannot do this, then one is probably not*
- > *long for this hobby anyway.*
- >
- > =====
- >
- > *Second bottom line:*
- >
- > *I would never recommend that someone buy this scope if there were other*
- > *possibilities. And I would probably recommend that anyone with \$50 buy a set*
- > *of Orion World View 10x50s because they are a better overall quality*
- > *instrument.*
- >
- > *There is no doubt that this scope and scopes like it (and there are worse*
- > *scopes that cost more money too) have serious drawbacks and serious*
- > *limitations.*
- >

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- > *So, I encourage anyone and everyone to point people towards binoculars, Orion*
- > *scopes, Apogee Inc scopes, quality telescope vendors like OPT, AT&WB and all*
- > *the rest.*
- >
- > *But the reality is that there are going to be a lot of folks with 60mm*
- > *refractors this Christmas and that with some guidance and patience, they too*
- > *can actually use their scopes to tap into the joy and excitement that comes*
- > *from viewing those far away distant objects.*
- >
- > *It is my intention to follow Larry Gilstrap's path and rather than bemoaning*
- > *the quality and difficulties inherent in these scopes, I hope to provide*
- > *guidance and encouragement for those with these scopes.*
- >
- > *As I see it, as experienced amateurs, the worst thing we can do is snub these*
- > *scopes and thus the people that own them. If we want to encourage people to*
- > *learn the joys of astronomy then we need to embrace everyone regardless of*
- > *their equipment or their skills.*
- >
- > *One comment that is often made regarding these scopes is that they are far*
- > *better than the ones that Galileo used, this maybe a cliché but there is a*
- > *great deal of truth in this. A 12 inch scope gathers about 25 times more light*
- > *than a 60mm refractor.*
- >
- > *But a 60mm refractor gathers about 100 times more light than the human eye, and*
- > *that is what is important.*
- >
- > *So, I hope that rather than dismissing these scopes as junk, each of you takes*
- > *a second look.*
- >
- > *Last night I had the 10 incher setup and I spent a couple of hours with it.*
- > *When I put it away I took out the Meade 60-AZ-A and spent another hour just*
- > *looking.*
- >
- > *I had a great time.*
- >
- > *Jon Isaacs*