

Re: Take a Tour of our free (but kinda old!) observer & eyepiece software

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On 4 Jun 2006 08:43:14 -0700, "RMOLLISE" <rmollise@xxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Hi:
If it was _free_ then, _or_ he used "ANN:" in the subject title of the article, I don't think anyone would've or would object.
Peace,
Rod Mollise
Author of _Choosing and Using a Schmidt Cassegrain Telescope_
and _The Urban Astronomer's Guide_

Yes, Ron: it was **always** free. We produced two versions at first, a totally free one with NO time restrictions but without some of the advanced functions. The other one that we charged for -- first, \$40 for one disk, and then later only \$12 for a much more comprehensive 3-floppy-disk version -- was sold commercially.

What caused the "flak", as I stated, was that Stephen liked to try to use the program to answer user questions. He would read a query from a beginner about the combination of a particular eyepiece and scope, and how it would show an object; he'd plug these into the program and then post the output information it generated, ANSWERING the **specific** question posed to the group. He always gave a link where the free version could be obtained. Some people eventually got the idea that this was an "abuse" of the group: a crassly commercial exploitation.

SRW tells me to pass this on as a detailed answer:

"The program will generate a good, practical close estimate of the EP's FOV, magnification, exit pupil, and suitability for particular filters and objects. The repeatability of this, based on a series of the well known and accepted astronomical and optical formulae that are found in any good resource, such as the Sam Brown book or any of the later ones for observers and ATM's, was, I feel, more useful than very general assertions often given here, such as 'yeah, I like the XYZ eyepiece for that' or 'the ABC telescope is better than the DEF scope'. Rather than get into THAT type of argument, which can never

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be resolved to everybody's satisfaction — since honest tastes and opinions differ — the program gives the concrete *ideal* parameters that a particular telescope aperture and EP combination would produce; the deviations from this that you would observe 'under the stars' would be unpredictable by any type of calculation derived from the simple physical properties that are advertised for commercial scopes and oculars. Those deviations are, of course: the accuracy of the optics and how they resolve images in actuality, compared to calculations based on ideal figures; the effect of misalignment; the subtle alteration of image quality based on central obstruction; lack of perfect internal baffling; differences in throughput due to varying qualities of optical coatings; imperfect user focus; dirty mirrors, lenses, and oculars, etc. The program we developed does not deal with those issues; it merely suggests what the IDEAL performance might be, based on comparative optical parameters of different types of scopes, filters, and eyepieces.

"The idea in developing this software was originally intended to dispel the advertising hype of certain manufacturers: the ones who will write glorious copy for *every one* of their scope models, from 2 inchers to 16 inchers, accompanied by color pictures of M42 that lead the buyer to expect to SEE such things; or the shysters selling department store grade scopes 'with a fantastic 700 powers of magnification'. If you put the parameters for the latter type of scope and its supplied cheap eyepiece into the software, and then select an object from the deep sky database — after defining whether you are observing near a city or in dark rural skies — it will analyze the whole shebang and tell you — in a scale from 'bad' to 'very good' — whether the object can be seen and visually appreciated satisfactorily (within the general constraints of typical good 'eye view' astronomy, compared to long exposure colorful photography.)

"Apparently some of the very advanced telescope users on the ng. took issue with various arcane details and subjective issues that no two people will ever see absolutely eye-to-eye about. The more I posted info from the program, the more they objected. This is to be expected, and is the spice of life of any good intellectual debate; but it was discouraging to us, since the motive of developing the software was primarily to get BEGINNERS over the hump and up to speed quickly. To wring one's hands over the exact passband width of certain filters in photographic applications, or issues of scientific precision and utterly flawless, universal accuracy of data, to two decimal points, in a program that contains databases of 600 double stars and an equal number of deep sky galaxies, nebulae, and clusters, seemed to us to be overlooking the normal human tendency to make small errors: you have only to look at Dr. Dreyer's original NGC versus the new RNGC, to have perfect evidence of this. (Or, at Sky and Tel's little embarrassing mistake in a chart in their new Pocket Atlas.) Yes: databases have small mistakes. They can always be corrected, as I've tried to do when errors in my program information were uncovered.

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"Finally, I stopped posting in the ng. altogether. I expressed my opinion about this in an article you may find on my website:

http://home.earthlink.net/~steve_waldee/faq.htm

"I show here how an attempt to 'debunk' our little unpretentious piece of software — developed in consultation with Dr. Jack B. Marling, using *his* recommendations for filter use — gave me a great deal of consternation, despite the fact that Lumicon *agreed* with me, and with the suggestions given in the program, and by me on the ng., with respect to color astrophotography with filtration.

"Anybody can ALWAYS disagree with SOMETHING. We all do it, day in, day out. This is a sort of marvelous fact of the incredible mental complexity of the human brain. But, to ascribe dark motives and disingenuous INTENT to another person, just because you disagree with him in an obscure way, is a huge leap that demands that you really *know* what you're talking about! That it is done all the time, today, all over usenet illustrates, sadly, how the medium has deteriorated from being a marvelous tool of exploration and communication, to one where mean venting and grumbling is always about to break out — often, over the most INCONSEQUENTIAL disagreements.

"I guess you might say that there is a distinct division between 'teacher/mentor' types, and 'obnoxious know-it-alls'. But, being human, we can all cross the line — I know that *I* did occasionally, in the heat of ng. battle.

"But, then, EVERYBODY loses (as I explain in my article, linked above.) The whole level of discussion turns ugly and useless, meaningful only to the direct combatants. Truth and sense are immediately abandoned, and the only victors are the negative-minded.

"But, to reiterate: our program was designed to HELP amateurs, not to shove narrow opinions down peoples' throats. The fact that we *had* to charge some money for the commercial version — in the days before large pieces of software were conveniently downloaded via the net, when we had to make up packaging, labels, disks, mailing envelopes, printed manuals, etc. etc. — galled a few of the people on the ng. who demanded that *all software be free, all of the time.* The program was developed before the open source movement had really got underway. Now that it has — and now that 'Eyepiece' is so obsolete technically, being a museum-piece of DOS engineering — we gladly give it away: the full original commercial version. You get what you pay for; it's free— but OLD. It's crude looking. There is no free-form multithreading. It's a clunky piece of step-by-step serial code that goes in its plodding way from one thing directly to the next. If you can do this, you can input your information and get back LOTS of useful stuff. If you can overlook the wretched 8-bit pictures (which weren't too bad on a tiny 13" VGA but are HORRIBLE on today's 21" CRTs with 16 million colors!) you might even be slightly amused at our attempt, fifteen years ago, to show some graphical depictions of

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eyepiece views of objects, versus color photos.

"I still use it, myself, all the time. I haven't found quite EXACTLY a replacement for it on the net or in a commercial package. I can make it run in an XP system, and have often employed it when I get a new scope or ocular, or do some optical bench experiments with objective lenses to test layouts for small spotters or finderscopes that I've cobbled together, and to see which eyepieces will give me a desired FOV."

Peace, and good seeing!

REGINA

My Lick Observatory Concert Experience webpage:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~regina-piano/music/concert.htm>

Eyepiece Page:

http://home.earthlink.net/~steve_waldee/index.html