

BINOCULARS

VORTEX RAZOR UHD 8X32

£1,599

David Chandler

The Razor UHDs are the top-end offering from Vortex, a US-based company. Some say the larger models are too large and too heavy. That is not the case with the new 32mm models – an 8x and a 10x. I was sent the 8x to review, and it impressed.

Competing with the best

This Japanese-made binocular is, I would say, taking on the best in this niche from Swarovski and Zeiss, but at a significantly lower price point. The RRP of the Vortex is, respectively, £471 and £651 less. But is it really that good?

The package

The new Vortex comes well packaged, with some high-quality accessories. There are the bits you would expect and a couple of things you wouldn't – specifically, a Glass Pak Pro Binocular Harness and a small belt pouch. The former is a chest-pack for carrying the binoculars in, with pockets for some additional small items. I'm not sure what the belt pouch is for. There's also a broad, clip-on neck strap. The harness is a comfortable carry, but isn't for me. But if you are a cycling birder for example, you may well find it really useful. I used a regular strap. Enough of that, what about the binocular?

Glass Pak Pro harness is included in the price

Quality glass

This Razor UHD delivers a very fine view, that can feel like a 'no glass between us' experience. The view is wide, clean and crisp, with very good colour differentiation. Brightness is very, very good and sharpness is excellent. You won't be disappointed by its performance in low light. Twenty minutes after sunset, with a largely clear sky, this Vortex was seeing shades of green on distant trees and was easy enough to focus in close, poorly lit vegetation. There is a little bit of edge-softness, but I was looking for it. It's not an issue – most people will not notice. Colour-fringing is very well corrected – I saw none on a dark Marsh Harrier against a blue-grey sky, and the 9° field of view is exceptional. That equates to 157m@1,000m and is up there



with the best. Vortex claim 1.8m as the close-focus. I measured it at about 1.65m and was impressed with its up-close clarity, picking out key field marks on a Ruddy Darter (dragonfly) for example.

Build and handling

It weighs 622g – that is not heavy. It's not the smallest 8x30/32 but it's not a large binocular. It feels like a quality item and seems very well put together. It's rubber-armoured, waterproof and stuffed with argon as an alternative to nitrogen. Exterior lens surfaces are protected by ArmorTek, a scratch-resistant coating that repels mucky stuff. I didn't test this. There are thumb indents on the underside – I never feel the need for these but they're not a problem. This binocular is a little rear-heavy. That's not a criticism – it may well contribute to the notably steady view that it delivered.

Dioptr adjustment is via a calibrated, pull-up, twist to adjust, push-down to lock ring under the right eyepiece. The twist-up eyecups are rubber-rimmed, very comfortable against the face and have two intermediate positions

These Vortex bins are certainly punching well above their weight



Anti-clockwise turn of focus wheel might feel unintuitive

and a very good action. I did, once, notice a little movement on one of them but it hadn't dropped to a lower position.

The focus wheel is one finger wide and moves very smoothly with light resistance, anticlockwise from close dragonflies towards distant birds. This might be the opposite direction to what you're used to. There is a lot of travel in the focus wheel – a bit more than three revolutions. Pre-focusing will reduce its impact – if you know the approximate range you will be looking at, focus at that distance in advance – that's good fieldcraft anyway. But most birding will be covered by less



Above: Rubber eyecups are comfy against the face

Right: Design is slightly 'rear-heavy' but this may benefit stability

than three quarters of a turn, and often by about three eighths. Despite all that focus movement, I sometimes found myself overshooting when I was looking for the best focus – familiarity may minimise this. The gearing on the focusing is the one improvement I would suggest. **BW**



SPECS

Eye relief: 19mm
Field of view: 9.0°/157m@1,000m
Close focus: 1.8m
Weight: 622g
Size: 145x129mm
RRP: £1,599 (£1,649 for 10x32)
Warranty: Unlimited lifetime
Supplied with: Raininguard; tethered, removable objective covers; Glass Pak Pro Harness; belt pouch; neck strap; two lens cloths (one clips onto a cord on the binocular harness).
Web: newprouk.co.uk

VERDICT

This Vortex stands comparison with the best out there. If you hanker after the top end, but can't (or don't want to) spend that much money, you should try it.

RATINGS

OPTICS	★★★★★
HANDLING	★★★★★
PRICE	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★