

EXPERT REVIEWS

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IT'S been five years since Vortex took a big step closer toward the high end of the optics market with the launch of a new 42-mm model duo, the Razor UHD. The company has now expanded this range with the addition of two smaller 32-mm models with 8x and 10x magnifications, both of which were launched in early summer this year.

While the general design follows the larger model, there are some size-related differences, the most significant of which relates to the prism system, which results in a differently shaped body. In order to ensure that the binocular is compact, the prisms employed are Schmidt-Pechan as opposed to the larger Abbe-Koenig prisms installed in the 42-mm models. The latter are widely acknowledged as delivering a slightly higher light transmission figure depending, of course, on the prism coatings used.

The light transmission figure of 92% released for the larger models is consistent with binoculars in the higher echelons of optics but the figure for these new, smaller models has not been revealed.

This in no way detracts from their performance in the field, as I discovered when I set out armed with the 8x32 model. Solidly built, the body is of magnesium alloy construction, overlaid with smooth rubber armour. There is no contouring, apart from the very shallow thumb rests and an exposed area of narrow body ribbing on the inside of the barrels, towards the objectives.

Unlike the 42-mm models, the smaller size results in some design compromises being made, which ultimately translates to a difference in ergonomics. Situated directly in line with the middle of the focusing wheel, the positioning

Downsize without compromise

Vortex has added a new, small binocular to its top-performing Razor Ultra HD range. **Mike Alibone** assesses its potential.

REVIEW

Vortex Razor Ultra HD 8x32 Binocular

of the strap lugs relates to the way the binocular is held. In order to prevent the lugs obstructing comfortable holding, it's necessary to move the hands very slightly down the body, which has an impact on where the thumbs make contact with the chassis.

Repositioning the thumb rests further down the body would solve this, as well as helping to make the thumbs further apart instead of being lumped together. In fairness, this is a potential problem faced by designers of any small binocular. As humans, of course, we all have different hand sizes and proportions, so this feature will affect some more than others.

Offering an impressive level of protection, the rubber body armour curves thickly and neatly around the objective housing, the objectives themselves being set deeply into the barrels.

The dioptre ring is mounted on the right ocular and is easily adjusted by pulling it upward, turning to the desired position and pushing down again to lock it against a simple +/- scale. This operation can be accomplished without the eyecup above it having to be moved. General focusing is achieved by rotating the broadly milled, rubber-covered central wheel,



Vortex's new Razor Ultra HD 8x32 binocular produces a notably bright and sharp image.

which turns very smoothly and can be easily operated using only one finger.

A hefty 3.25 anticlockwise rotations take the image from its closest point of focus to infinity, with the first 2.25

turns of this total required to move the image from close focus to approximately 10 m. A disproportionate half a turn more takes the focused image from this point to 'long distance', or what might be regarded as

THIS MONTH'S EXPERT PANEL INCLUDES:



MIKE ALIBONE is *Birdwatch's* Optics Editor. He has been testing binoculars and telescopes for more than 20 years.



JOSH JONES is Editor of *Birdwatch*. He has been an ardent birder since a young age.



DAVID CALLAHAN is a taxonomist and freelance nature writer based in north London.



ED STUBBS is *BirdGuides* and *Birdwatch's* Deputy Editor and has a keen interest in migration and patchbirding.

standard viewing range. The manufacturer's quoted close-focus distance of 1.8 m is spot on.

Loosely locking in three positions above the base setting, the eyecups have a nicely soft rubber rim, which makes viewing a very comfortable experience, and I found the full field of view remained visible when they were fully extended. The extremely flexible articulated rainguard supplied with the binocular sits firmly and deeply over the eyecups, but care is needed when removing it as the rather snug fit renders it liable to displace the eyecup extension setting.

At the distal end of the binocular, the tethered objective covers clip neatly inside the circumference of the lens housing and they did not become detached during my use in the field.

Drilling down into the image, its clarity, brightness and sharpness cannot be faulted, although the last wavers a little within a whisker of the edge of the field, where curvature is negligible. To my eyes, there is a virtual '3D effect' that is more evident than in many binoculars and comes to the fore when birding in woodland.

Natural colours are presented boldly and sharply to the eye and there appears to be an overall warm colour rendition to the binocular across all habitat types, although this is most evident when viewing cream and pale 'straw-type' colours. Chromatic aberration runs at a low level, from almost absent in the middle 50% of the image to being visible to a low degree in the outer 25%. Most remarkable, however, is the field of view – an excellent 157 m at 1,000 m, which beats the larger 8x42 model by 17 m.

The Ultra HD 8x32 of course comes with accessories aside from those mentioned above. A very comfortable padded neck strap is supplied but there is also the option to attach a harness connected



At 157 m at 1,000 m, the new model has an excellent field of view.



The binocular is sturdily built and offers a good level of protection.

to an external soft case which houses the binocular. This adds protection and helps to keep rain off the eyepieces with an attached, elasticated, pull-on/pull-off cover. The case also offers elasticated side pockets and an optional add-on pouch for small items.

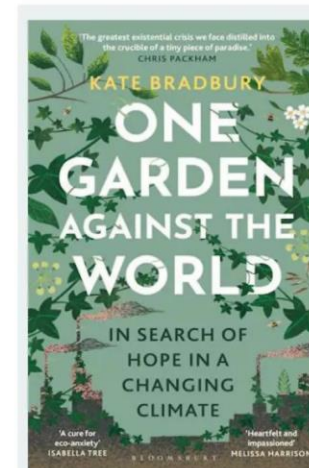
Given this model's weight of only 622 g, I personally feel that such an accessory is a little excessive for use with a small binocular, but of course other users may beg to differ. ■

More info

- Price: £1,599
- Size: 145 x 129 mm
- Weight: 622 g
- Field of view: 157 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: not available
- Close focus: 1.8 m
- Gas-filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: unlimited lifetime

Verdict

- ✓ Bright and sharp image
- ✓ Excellent field of view
- ✗ Ergonomics not ideal for some users



Gardening guru

IN this, her sixth book, Kate Bradbury takes us on a seasonal journey through her own garden near Brighton in 2022 and early 2023.

For those of you with short memories, 2022 was the year the climate crisis really began to make its presence felt. Indeed, Kate openly writes of how she cried when she heard that the threshold of 40°C had been broken for the first time on record in the UK.

In *One Garden Against the World*, Kate shines a light on the plight of the many creatures and plants which she shares her Sussex garden with and pours her heart and soul into caring for them however she can, and in doing so inspires us to do the same.

From recycling used water from showers and kitchen sinks to adopting butterfly caterpillars from threatened road verges about to be mulched, this book is full of little acts of kindness and hope, and should serve as a reminder that we can all make the world a little bit better, starting in our very own gardens. **Matt Phelps**

More info

- *One Garden Against the World* by Kate Bradbury (Bloomsbury, 2024).
- 304 pages.
- ISBN: 9781399408820.
- Hbk, £18.99.