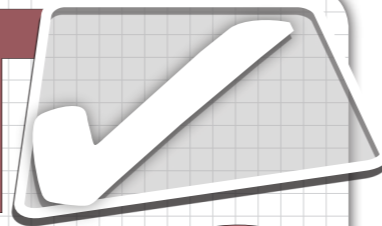


EXPERT REVIEWS



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Birdwatch
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Cutting-edge technology

Sharp optics with a smooth finish – does this new binocular from Vortex live up to its name? **Mike Alibone** trials the Razor UHD.

REVIEW Vortex Razor UHD 8x42 binocular

At this year's Birdfair, Vortex took a big step closer towards the high end of the optics market with the launch of a new model: the Razor UHD. This new binocular effectively combines the base specifications of the HD (reviewed in *Birdwatch* 273: 70-71) with an updated design, geared to significantly improve optical quality.

At first sight, the product jumps out as appearing quite large in comparison to many 8x42 models currently available in today's market. However, all things are relative and when its size is measured against some acknowledged top-tier binoculars, the difference is negligible.

So what's the reason for the size increase? Quite simply, the prisms used in the UHD are Abbe-Koenig which are larger and differently shaped to the Schmidt-Pechan prisms in the majority of binoculars. They are longer, which necessitates the longer-barrelled design, and it's widely acknowledged they deliver higher light transmission – albeit marginally and dependent on prism coatings.

In this instance, the 92% light transmission quoted by Vortex is up there with the best and there was no doubt when I started to use this new UHD that the image was indeed splendidly bright.

the Razor delivering a high level of image sharpness combined with an admirably accurate colour rendition.

On initial impressions, this was a binocular I wanted to spend considerably more time with from the outset – which I subsequently did. For me, continual field use with the contoured and comfortably padded neck strap presented no problems, but for some birders the weight of 913 g, compared to the 686 g of the 'regular' HD, may well require the use of a binocular harness instead.

Unsurprisingly, then, the UHD package does include a harness – but there's a twist: this connects to a newly designed external, semi-rigid case, referred to in some quarters as a 'chest rig', which houses the Razor. In this respect, it is the binocular equivalent of the stay-on case of a telescope, adding protection and keeping 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. A standard binocular harness, for use without the case, is available as a separate purchase.

Additional protection comes in the more regular form of an articulated rainguard, which I found fitted easily and neatly, and

tethered objective covers, which clipped inside the circumference of the lens housing and showed no signs of becoming detached in the field.

The UHD's chassis is

magnesium alloy, overlaid with smooth rubber armour. There is no contouring, apart from the very shallow thumb rests and an aesthetic area of narrow ribbing on the inside of the barrels, towards the objectives. The length of the barrels provides more than enough surface area for grip and to achieve



58 December's photo challenge

Often seen as just an orange an blue flash, Common Kingfisher is your photographic target this month.

59 What's up doc?

From border walls to pole dancing – two new bird-related documentaries hit Netflix recently.

59 Birds in your pocket

A concise field guide to Britain's birds packs an information-laden punch.

60 A winter of geese

A fascinating look at the species that make their home in Britain during the colder months.

60 Alien invasion

This new book provides a comprehensive survey of those species that have been introduced to Britain.

61 What's new in the Bookshop?

Learn all about the birds visiting your garden with our Book of the Month: *RSPB Garden Birds*.

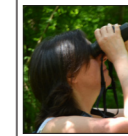
THIS MONTH'S EXPERT PANEL



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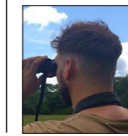
REBECCA ARMSTRONG is *Birdwatch's* Editor. She has a wide-ranging interest in all wildlife.



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a comfortable and balanced holding position, facilitated by a commendable design that places the strap lugs above and away from the focusing wheel, enabling comfortable, straight finger contact with the latter.

Covered in milled, non-slip rubber, it turns very smoothly, with approximately 2.75 anticlockwise rotations from 1.37 m to infinity. This represents a lot of turning. However, the focusing range is not linear, with most of the 'turning work' required to focus from its closest at 1.37 m up to 15 m, with only approximately 0.7 turns required to focus from 15 m to long distance – what may be

referred to as standard viewing range. Since most observation takes place in this spectrum, this feature does not appear to be a problem.

The dioptre ring is mounted on the right ocular. Single-eye focus is easily achieved even when the eyecups are fully retracted, by pulling the ring up, twisting it and setting it against a simple +/- scale before pushing it back down to lock it in place. Crowned in soft rubber, the eyecups are comfortable against the eye and twist out to lock in two positions above the base setting.

Returning to that all-important image, with 140 m at 1,000 m the new 8x42 Razor UHD has a much wider field of view than the equivalent HD model, at 129 m for the same range. It's wonderfully crisp – although not right to the edges – has a nice, almost '3D effect' and chromatic aberration is pegged to a minimum. I liked it.

I was impressed with the standard 8x42 HD, which will continue to form part of the range, but this new model is on a higher level and certainly worth checking out. Other products in the UHD range are 10x42, 12x50 and 18x56. ■

Further info

- Price: £1,599
- Size: 178x142 mm
- Weight: 913 g
- Field of view: 140 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: 92%
- Close focus: 1.37 m
- Gas filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: unlimited lifetime

Verdict

- ✓ High level of sharpness combined with accurate colours
- ✓ Very bright image
- ✗ Relatively heavy weight could be uncomfortable for some users

Pocket to me

REVIEW

Country Innovation Aperture jacket

"A unique multi-pocket jacket that is waterproof and perfect for photography," said the marketing blurb attached to this very smart-looking jacket from Country Innovation. That's quite a bold claim.

It does look good, and the brown colour made a change from the usual green. The medium size is a generous fit, with plenty of room for a fleece or thick jumper underneath for those cold winter days. There are pockets everywhere – 12 in total. I struggled to find two of them until I realised they were inside the larger lower pockets; these are ideal for storing spare memory cards or batteries. The two inside zipped pockets are perfect for wallet and phone, while the four roomy outer ones will easily take a big DSLR camera body and even my 300 mm lens.

All good so far, and with the classic detachable Country Innovation hood firmly in place I knew I would be protected from all the weather could throw at me. As I walked out the door and the rain started to fall, I hoped the jacket would live up to expectations.

I needn't have worried. As anticipated, the jacket proved to be fully waterproof and I stayed dry, despite much trudging around locally photographing nothing, while the hood also protected me from blowing sand a couple of days later as I struggled to find Leach's Storm Petrels along the Wirral shoreline. On a trip to see the Eastern Black-eared Wheatear



at Pilling, Lancs, the ample pockets carried everything I needed (spare camera, converter, water and food).

But why do you need so many pockets, I hear you ask. If, like me, you would rather carry your kit in pockets than in a camera bag, things knock against each other. I tend to put a converter and a small lens in one pocket, with a camera body in the other. The lens and converter always bang together; even worse is carrying a drink and finding out it has leaked. But with the Aperture jacket I can use one pocket for each item.

Despite me trying not to agree, I have to admit this is a very nice jacket and is quite rightly described as "perfect for photography". **Steve Young**

Further info

- Price: £275
- Colour: brown
- Sizes: S-4XL
- Weight: 1,500 g
- Contact: call 01934 877333 or visit www.countryinnovation.com