

**TIME** passes quickly and it has been 20 years since we saw what, back in the day, were referred to as 'mini-scopes' entering the mainstream optics market. It subsequently became fashionable to label them 'travel scopes' but that widely adopted epithet seems to be in decline, as optics manufacturers now see these smaller models as integral to their product offering, often as extensions to existing ranges.

Birders pursuing that optical holy grail – the combination of light weight, compactness and a superior image, now have more products to choose from and, on the road to fulfil these requirements, Vortex has recently introduced its smallest model yet.

Designed to 'perfectly balance premium optics with an incredibly compact package', the Vortex Razor HD 13-39x56 was launched in August 2023 as an extension to the company's frontrunner Razor series.

With a choice of straight or angled bodies, these new scopes satisfy those criteria, as well as offering some features which are not included in other models in their current range.

The shape, dimensions and short body length to eyepiece ratio are what we would expect from a contemporary scope of this nature. Its polycarbonate body features dual-textured, unobtrusive, green rubber armouring and, to achieve the desired balance, the tripod foot is positioned between the helical focusing ring and the prism housing.

Attachment of the eyepiece is by screw thread and includes a milled fixing ring, which is easily tightened to secure the connection. It's worth noting at this stage that the 13-39x zoom eyepiece supplied with the scope is currently the only one in the Vortex range that is compatible with the body of the 56 mm.

Drilling down into the ergonomics and the practicalities of use in the field, the tripod foot has been designed in line with all Vortex HD scopes, which now come with an Arca-Swiss-style tripod foot as standard. This is, of course, advantageous inasmuch as it is compatible with numerous tripod heads without having to attach a quick-release plate, thereby increasing stability when mounted. Additionally, the foot includes a port to

# Lighten up!



## REVIEW

### Vortex Razor HD 13-39x56 telescope

accommodate an anti-rotation pin for instances in which a quick-release plate is attached to it.

The rubber-covered helical focusing ring, integrated into the body, is broadly-milled to increase grip but, in addition to this, four raised ribs, placed at intervals of 90 degrees around its circumference, offer a further element of traction, increasing contact and therefore the ease of turning the ring. This is a unique feature of this model and is not present on any other models in the range. It certainly adds positivity to the focusing operation and, quite frankly, I found it helpful because there is considerable overlap between the ring and the tripod foot which results in a narrow gap between the two. The effect of this positioning is that there is a tendency to catch thumbs on the tripod foot, preventing unimpeded rotation unless repeatedly repositioning the hand to continue turning.

The magnification adjustment ring on the eyepiece shares the same broad rubber milling and both rings turn smoothly and evenly, offering an acceptable modicum of resistance, which means they do not easily lose their positioning.

An index of magnification is clearly depicted on the above ring, although the line indicating its value is obscured by the

neatly recessed, detachable rubber loop, which forms the attachment for the eyepiece lens cover. This is not really an issue because this pointer is positioned exactly in line with the top of the scope's body.

A detachable, looped rubber objective lens cover is also supplied. I found it remained secure during field use and the lens cover fitted snugly and securely inside the recess of the objective rim. In common with a number of 'small' scopes, these 56-mm models are not fitted with an extendable lens hood, which is presumably a measure implemented to keep both weight and cost down.

Vortex's 'Armortek' ultra-hard lens coatings are in place as an added measure of protection against scratches, oil and dirt.

In terms of image delivery this scope performs very well. At both ends of the magnification spectrum it's nicely sharp across practically the whole field of view, with only barely detectable edge softening and virtually no curvature of field. The extendable eyepiece twists out to click-stop at two levels above the base setting and offers the full field of view throughout the entire magnification range. I found the close-focusing distance of 2.8 m quoted by the manufacturer to be spot on.

The image is bright and

delivers a high level of contrast with natural colours and at this point it's worth mentioning that anti-reflective coatings on all air-to-glass surfaces, dielectric and phase correction prism coatings are all in place to enhance these attributes.

I was able to detect a generally low level of chromatic aberration – more noticeable in the periphery of the image but also just visible in the centre, depending on what was being viewed. In general, it did not present any real problems.

This is a robust and neat piece of kit and is supplied with a black neoprene case. Perhaps a fixed magnification, wide-angle eyepiece may yet be added to the scope offering, no doubt a decision to be made depending on how sales progress with this new model. **Mike Alibone**

#### FURTHER INFO

- Price: £1,109
- Size: 264 mm
- Weight: 812 g
- Magnification range: 13-39x
- Field of view: 56-30 m at 1,000 m
- Light transmission: n/a
- Close focus: 2.8 m
- Gas-filled: yes
- Waterproof: yes
- Guarantee: unlimited lifetime

#### VERDICT

- ✓ Sharp and bright image quality
- ✓ Well-built design
- ✗ Lacks extendable lens hood