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BINOCULARS

OPTICRON AURORA BGA VHD 8X42 £799

Reviewed by David Chandler

Opticron offer more binocular choice than most brands, from entry-level models costing less than £100 to their top end offerings at about £800. The Aurora BGA VHD is their new top-end range. There are two models in this range – an 8x42 and a 10x42. I had the 8x42 for review. Opticron also sent me the 8x42 DBA VHD+, their previous top-ender, for comparison.

Very bright

My first impression, straight out of the box, was that this is a very bright binocular. Its light-gathering ability was evident after sunset, too. Twelve minutes after the sun went down, in a mostly overcast sky, a roof-ridge Song Thrush was very clearly

visible. I was still impressed five minutes later. I watched a Barn Owl with the Aurora 30 minutes after sunset on a clear night, and could still see shades of green in the surrounding countryside. Then came a silhouetted Tawny Owl 17 minutes later – and I could just about pick out different shades on the owl. Their performance was still impressive almost an hour and a quarter after the sun had set.

The view through this Aurora is very good – very sharp with excellent brightness. On an overcast day I could see grey, shades of brown and a hint of red on a Linnet about 35 metres away. The Aurora let me see the dark bill-tip on a fly-by Common Tern, maybe 20 metres distant. I found just a smidgen of

peripheral softness – but nothing you'll notice – edge to edge sharpness is very impressive. The view is certainly not claustrophobic – it feels wide and it is – 141m@1,000m, noticeably better than the DBA VHD+ (122m@1,000m). Colour fringing seemed very well corrected – unusually for me, I didn't notice any. I did, however, sometimes see some vignetting (dark edge shadows) when I was scanning, but it's not a major issue.



Japanese made, the Aurora BGA VDs are light but strong



The eyecups twist lock in four positions

Close focus is quoted at a perfectly respectable 1.9m. But don't believe everything you read. I could focus down to just less than 1.7m – which is closer than the DBA VHD+.

Build, mechanics and ergonomics

At 725g, the Aurora is not heavy for a full-size, top-end binocular and it didn't feel heavy around the neck. It has a simple, single bridge design (the DBA VHD+ is double bridged) and feels robust and well-made (in Japan). Personally, I prefer the ergonomics of the DBA – you might not though. As is par for the course, the Aurora is armoured, nitrogen filled and waterproof. To tweak the dioptre setting you pull up the



The body is more textured, which improves your grip

top of the focusing wheel, twist it to adjust, and then push it down to lock the setting. The rubber-coated eyecups twist up and down with 'good mechanics' and have two intermediate positions. At 20mm eye-relief is generous – this binocular should be good for glasses-wearers – if that's you, try it for yourself.

I did find myself 'hunting' for the best focus sometimes – a gentle touch is needed on the focussing wheel. The 1½ finger wide wheel moves through two revolutions, anti-clockwise towards infinity (the opposite direction to my regular binocular).

It moves very smoothly with moderate resistance, and seemed highly geared – only about ¼ turn will be needed for most birding – hence the gentle touch.

The provided strap has short sections that attach to the binocular lugs that the main part of the strap clips into. It means the rainguard has less movement on the strap than it would otherwise have, but is workable. Personally, I think I'd use a different strap.

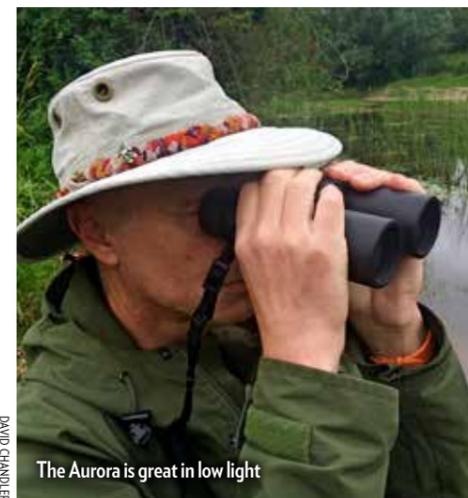
SPECS

- Eye relief: 20mm
- Field of view: 8.1°/141m@1,000m
- Close focus: 1.9m (quoted)
- Weight: 725g
- Length x width x depth: 152x132x51.5mm
- RRP: £799
- Warranty: 30 years.
- Supplied with: Cordura case, rainguard, tethered objective covers, neoprene strap, microfibre cleaning cloth.
- Web: opticron.co.uk

VERDICT

Opticron describe it as "one of the very best lightweight pro field binoculars available today". It is a solid, well-built, workhorse binocular that delivers a view that is hard to fault. The view is wide and low light performance is excellent. Be gentle with the focus, though.

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



The Aurora is great in low light



The view is wider than on the DBA VHD+

SHORTS

PÁRAMO MEN'S MAUI SHORTS

£65

Reviewed by David Chandler



When the sun shines, and preferably when the insects aren't biting, some birdwatchers wear shorts. Some wear shorts even when the sun doesn't shine. The Maui shorts are part of the 'Naturally Paramo' range and are designed for dry or humid conditions. At £65, they are not inexpensive – so what do you get in a premium pair of shorts?

The Maui are lightweight shorts – my review sample, a 'large', weigh a little more than 230g (8.1 oz) – but still feel like they have a bit of substance to them. They are made from "quick drying Parameta®A Cotton+ fabric" which is described as "cool, protective and durable". It provides protection from biting insects and from UV (UPF 50+) – on the bits of your legs that are covered that is. The cut has a slim look but the Maui don't feel tight or restrictive. On me, they are knee-length. The waist is button-fastening, has five good belt loops – easily deep enough for a 4cm wide belt – and two elasticated panels for added comfort.

These shorts seem well-made and provide good freedom of movement, thanks in part to at least a "tried and tested shaped gusset". The fabric is not completely silent but, for me, that wasn't a problem. There are five pockets – two hip pockets which I would have liked just a little bit deeper, a zip-up rear pocket – which will take a reasonably-sized wallet, and a long cargo pocket (with hook and loop fasteners on the flap) on the right leg. A 1:25000 OS map is a very good fit in this pocket. Or you could put a water bottle in there, your phone, or a notebook, or your phone and notebook. And inside the cargo pocket there is a zip-up security pocket – which is big enough for a passport.

The Maui are available in dark grey only – slate-grey I'd say. That's fine by me though a choice of colours might increase sales. The label says machine or hand wash at no more than 40°C and recommends using Nikwax BaseWash®.

Paramo have some good ethics. The Maui have a PFC-free water repellent finish and can be recycled when they are worn out – return them to Paramo and you'll get a voucher for some new gear. Paramo have also been instrumental in Greenpeace's Detox campaign, which seeks to eliminate hazardous chemicals from the supply chain, are committed to fair production standards and support a Fair Trade verified foundation in Colombia which empowers at-risk women.

S-XXL (30-44" waist). Manufacturing faults guaranteed for life of garment. paramo-clothing.com.

VERDICT

So there you have it. Well-made shorts that are comfortable to wear and allow easy movement. They look smarter than some shorts out there and have good, but not over the top, pocketing. I like them.