

Countryman BGA HD + 8x42

Paul Brewster (April 2018)

I have often wondered if the Countryman BGA series being the entry level Japanese optic in the Opticron range represent possibly the best value binoculars in the market combining high performance and a 30 year warranty. I was therefore keen to test out the new Countryman BGA HD+ to see whether the improvements to an already impressive model were noticeable.

The external appearance showed little change. The robust, top-hinge roof prism binocular has the same textured black rubber armour exterior which, as in previous models, gives them a pleasant 'safe' feel in the hands. A weight of only 682g, allied with the short barrel length, gives a light, compact feel and ensures they are well balanced while in use. The twist-up eyecups have a three stage adjustment which, in my opinion, would cover all adjustments that the user would require. The lockable dioptre adjustment is excellent, and stops your settings being lost either when taking the binoculars in and out of its carry case, or when borrowed by a friend!

The binoculars were tested in dull and dreary northern UK weather conditions and performed excellently. The 7° field of view was great for getting onto birds in flight really quickly, and for searching the tops of the pine woodland which is part of my recording area. A smooth and reactive focus knob allowed me to focus in rapidly, and I added a new bird for my recording area for 2018 when I got onto two Yellowhammers in flight. I was glad to have such good optics with me to handle this situation; I would have been cursing if I had had to let the sighting go without having being able to identify the birds.

Having previously used the older version of the Countryman and having had the opportunity to test both versions side by side, I found a marked improvement in the 2018 model over its predecessor. The image seems sharper due to the increased light gathering of the HD+ optical system in the latest binoculars. The image is also crisp across the field of view which a real bonus when scanning through a group of birds. There was no noticeable colour fringing during my testing, even when looking up at the sky when a rare glimpse of the sun broke through during the mainly dull day.

Amazingly it never rained during testing but the nitrogen-filled Countryman's are guaranteed to be waterproof down to 3m, so a bit of rain, or even a deluge, would be no problem. Washing them under a tap after sea watching to remove any salt residue would be an added advantage of their waterproof construction.

In summary, I love these binoculars and I would gladly go out on my recording area with them every day after these tests. Many of Opticron's competitors charge a similar price for Chinese-made binoculars, sometimes with only a couple of years warranty, so when a Japanese optic built to a much higher specification, and with a 30 year warranty is available without spending more money I am not sure why anyone would even consider anything else!

Paul has been birding over 35 years enjoying all aspects of the hobby from local patchwork to twitching and is now working in his hobby, as Manager of Focalpoint Optics near Northwich in Cheshire. He is a keen digiscoper, which he has enjoyed for over 10 years and has taught it as well as leading on birding holidays. He was Assistant County Recorder in Greater Manchester, Rarity Committee Member, Bird Report Editor and has done BTO Surveys and recorded for the Cheshire Breeding Atlas. He has written for birding magazines and is a freelance Environmental Consultant when time allows.