

## Countryman BGA HD+ 8x42

Steve Young (March 2018)

Opticron's old favourite the Countryman BGA has been around in one form or another since 2001. The latest version has been introduced as part of a wider update for all the Opticron HD and VHD models during 2018 and I received my review pair during the coldest March in recent years.

Watching snow fall while fixing the strap to the binoculars was a new experience, and although the snow didn't last long, it was a nice experience to take a stroll through my local park with the snow crunching under my feet and a new pair of bins around my neck.

The Countryman BGA HD are manufactured in Japan using an HD or "high definition" optical system. The latest HD+ models have a new multi-coating applied to the eyepieces making them, in my opinion, brighter with slightly "colder" colours compared to other high spec BGA's in the Opticron range. The rubber armouring is smooth and easy to hold and has an easy-to-turn focus wheel that also houses the dioptre adjuster. The 8x42 has 4-stage rotating eyecups so there is a setting for everyone.

The snow certainly looked bright as I scanned through the gulls on the lake and watched Little Grebes diving at the deeper end that was still free of ice. Nuthatch, Jay and a Treecreeper were all added to the day list and all looked beautiful, crisp and clear on what was a pretty grim day. A Grey Squirrel scabbling in bright white snow showed no colour fringing even against the gleaming background. Light gathering and sharpness were excellent and at 682g and fitted with an excellent strap I had no problem with them hanging round my neck during the day.

Waterproofing was tested in a variety of ways. Putting them in snow seemed a good idea and while I couldn't test them to the claimed 3m I did stand them in a puddle on a very wet day a week later and let the rain pour down over them. As anticipated they passed both the snow and water tests with flying colours. There was no sign of any moisture inside and no steaming up when I took them from outside to indoors.

Wanting to see how well these 8x42's would cope in poor light, I decided to take them with me on a search for Woodcock at a local site I thought would yield a good chance of seeing them. The conditions seemed perfect for a sighting; quiet, damp & dark and while the bins coped extremely well with the poor light, seemingly making it look brighter than it really was, the search was fruitless albeit for a Great Spotted Woodpecker clinging to the side of a silver birch.

If you combine the quality, the feel and the features the latest Countryman is a compelling choice as well as a very competitively priced binocular at £350.

Model supplied with case, strap, objective lens eye caps, rainguard, cloth and a 30 year guarantee. Also available in 10x42, 10x50 and 12x50



*Steve Young is one of the UK's best known bird photographers; his work has been published in countless magazines and books and he is Photo Consultant for Birdwatch magazine. A keen bird watcher since the late 1970's Steve has used many different types of binoculars and telescopes over the years. He writes a monthly column for Outdoor Photography magazine, has written two books on bird photography, is the Photo Judge for Birdguides' weekly competition and was overall winner of the British Wildlife Photography Awards (BWPA) in 2010.*