

Explorer WA ED Oasis-C+

Lee Thickett (April 2018)

Retailing at £219 and \$299 Opticron's Explorer WA ED Oasis-C+ 8x42 (let's just call it Explorer) enters the market at a tempting price point. It costs enough to promise a decent performance but not enough to make your eyes water. In the UK it competes with Vortex's Diamondback at £199 and Hawke's Endurance ED at £210, while in the States it faces Nikon's Monarch 5 at \$277 and Bushnell's Legend L at \$280. Both of these are priced somewhat higher in the UK at £250 and £270-£320 respectively.



Comparing fields of view, at 131m and 393ft it equals the Vortex, betters the 129m / 387ft Hawke and comfortably exceeds the Nikon's 110m / 330ft while all of them trail behind the Bushnell's 142m / 426ft.

At 140mm / 5.5" long it is as compact as the Bushnell with the others all being a little longer by 3-7mm / 0.12" - 0.28". To put these in perspective, Swarovski's EL is 160mm / 6.3" long which means all of these models are very compact and in the same league as the 'king of compact', Leica's Ultravid HD+ which measures 142mm / 5.59"

Weight-wise the Explorer scales at 670g / 23.6ozs which means it is the heaviest here, the other models coming in at 666g / 23.6ozs for the Bushnell, 590g / 20.8 ozs for the Nikon, 652g / 23ozs for the Hawke and finally, 618g / 21.8ozs for the Vortex. However, the range from the lightest to the heaviest is only 80g / 2.8 ozs, and of course one man's bino that is a bit heavy is another man's better-built bino.

As usual I have some critical remarks about the rainguard. It only attaches at one side whereas if it could attach at both it would give everyone a choice of left-handed, right-handed or both-sides attachment, and the strap does not allow enough room to pull the guard up and away from the bino, so if you are right-handed it is always dangling down in the way of your right hand as you try to grab a quick view of a fast bird. Moreover, while the deep cups of the rainguard give great protection during transport and storage they have too-small an internal diameter and suck onto the eyecups so strongly that you can pick the binos up by the rainguard and shake it about and the binos will not drop out. This means during rain, getting the guard quickly on and off the eyecups is a struggle. However, there are many straps and rainguards available on the accessories market so this is hardly a factor to deter anyone.

As usual the Explorer comes with a cleaning cloth in a neat plastic wallet with sound cleaning advice on it - a neat and helpful touch.

Picking them up and handling them they have the usual neat and comfortable feel of an Opticron and their compact dimensions mean they handle comfortably. The focus wheel turns smoothly and without free-play and focuses at a nicely judged speed of 1.0 complete turn to refocus from my test object 4km / 2.5m away to a target in my office just 2m away. This is about the same speed as a Zeiss SF or Bushnell Legend M. The dioptre adjustment is on the right-hand optical tube in the usual place and the collar has a small protuberance on it that enables your thumb to take a more active role in moving it. The setting was reliable and didn't shift during field use.

The eyecups have three positions and all of them were reliable in use and down at the other end it was noticeable that the objectives are well-recessed which is good for glare control.

Out on the heaths, marshes and reed-beds of the English county of Suffolk a look at tree tops against bright pale clouds revealed that chromatic aberration is very well controlled, with just a tiny bit at the field edge, which was a nice surprise at this price level. The view is bright with realistic colours as amply demonstrated on my first day out with them when they captured a Peregrine Falcon coming in off the sea and looking like a bandit with its dark hood and moustaches. The Explorer clearly has good contrast and sharpness, and it dealt nicely with the subtle and complex plumage of a Short-eared Owl that obligingly wafted over the marsh in the late afternoon. The delicate buff of the underwing was clear and the black

crescents about halfway along the underwing stood out in the low sunlight like huge parentheses as it floated away from the marsh and circled to investigate an old pile of cut reeds, no doubt looking for a vole or two.

A few days later the Explorer once again demonstrated its capabilities when a perfect Reed Bunting decided to perch and enjoy the spring sunlight about 10 metres away from me. As with the Peregrine the contrast between the black hood and throat patch with the surrounding white plumage was stunning and the complex mantle plumage of warm browns and blacks was all sharply rendered.

The Explorer delivers a neat performance in a compact package. Is there anything that I would improve? Well, there are things that could be improved on all binos and when this product is upgraded in the future I would ask Opticron to increase the size of the sweet spot a bit. I don't want to make too much of this though as it never entered my mind when I was watching all the birds mentioned above and the Marsh Harriers, Great White Egrets and Goldeneyes that I saw on other days.

In short the Explorer represents an attractive prospect for those with a budget of just over £200 or just short of \$300 and looking for a compact 42mm bino. If this sounds like you, then put Explorer on your short list and try it out.