

**TECH**

# Optics Opticron MM3 80 GA ED spotting scope



**By Drew Lyness**

Founded in the UK in 1970, Opticron has satisfied tens of thousands of customers looking for binoculars and scopes that are both affordable and of good quality. With this reputation in mind, it was a pleasure to test-drive the company's latest addition to its arsenal of spotting scopes in the 'mid range' price bracket. At £479 for the scope body, plus an additional £169 price tag for the recommended HR3 20–60x zoom eyepiece, this combination certainly isn't the cheapest on the market, but it offers everything you'd expect from a spotting scope especially in comparison to alternatives retailing at a similar price.

Upon unboxing, the scope appeared sturdy, armoured and of high quality. The addition of a smooth precision dual-action focus wheel to really fine-tune the image also looked to come in handy. While on the slightly heavier side, it felt reasonably comfortable to carry even when using a Mulepack or similar, and for an 80-mm lens it was surprisingly compact, which was most welcome.

But was it any good in the field? There was only one way to find out, and where better to test it than on my local patch at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen. In good mid morning light from the reception hide, I was able to use this scope to confidently identify a circling male Sparrowhawk at nearly 2 km range, affording for good views using this scope on maximum zoom. This feature became a theme of this scope – it performs exceptionally on a sturdy tripod with the lens set on a higher magnification, and the field of view becomes wider. At close range, the views of Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies perched on a reed stem were exceptional too, with an excellent display of true colour and sharpness showcasing the scope's lens quality and pinpoint focus wheel.

Returning to my patch in tougher conditions – a dark, overcast and windy day – a few minor frustrations started to

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crop up. The rain guard on the front of the scope is permanently attached and this did tend to flap around in the wind. However, it was again evident how well this scope performs when the lens is on a higher magnification. Zooming in provides a larger field of view, and while the image softens slightly, it still retains light well (unless on maximum magnification). Even in tough conditions, you can be sure you'll have a good chance of identifying that mystery wader at the back of a pool 500 m away, which in this case was a juvenile Redshank. A sound tripod pairing is highly recommended to get the best results here and avoid image shake though. When the rain set in, this scope's nitrogen waterproofing and retractable lens hood came into their own, although as with most scopes I'd still avoid risking use in the heaviest of downpours.

In summary, this would make an excellent scope for anyone who is looking to enhance their birding but doesn't want to splash their cash on a high-end model. When paired with a sturdy tripod, this scope offers a high-quality, bright image in all but the harshest of conditions and would make a good birding partner on any casual birding trip. ■

Price	£479 (plus £169 for HR3 20–60x zoom eyepiece)
Value for money	●●●●●●●●
Weight	●●●●●●●●
Image quality	●●●●●●●●
Build quality	●●●●●●●●
Ease of use	●●●●●●●●
<b>Overall</b>	●●●●●●●●

SPARROWHAWK: PHILIP CROFT/BTO