

## SCOPES

### OPTICRON TRAVELSCOPES £678 & £778

Reviewed by David Chandler



Opticron MM4 Travelscope 50ED straight and angled at 45° models

A decent travelscope provides good enough optics in a package compact enough and not too heavy to travel with. Ideally, it will fit in your hand luggage if you're flying. They are also a good option if you simply don't want to carry something bigger and heavier, wherever you're birding.

#### Two from Opticron

The MM4 Travelscope range includes 50mm and 60mm objective scopes in straight-through and angled versions. I was sent an angled 50mm and an angled 60mm to review. Both have ED glass and a polycarbonate and alloy chassis, with a rotating tripod sleeve. Both are rubber armoured, nitrogen-filled and waterproof, with a tethered,

removable, rubber objective cover. Neither have a lens hood. And both have dual-focusing – a fast focusing wheel and a fine focusing wheel, one turn of the fast equalling nine of the fine.

I tested them with the SDLv3 zoom eyepiece. At £349, this is Opticron's most expensive and best quality zoom. If you buy it you need to add this cost to the cost of the scope body – the 50mm body costs £329, the 60mm £429. Other Opticron eyepieces are also compatible with these scopes.

#### Build and handling

The 60mm of course, is bigger and heavier. You would expect it to perform better...

With the eyepiece attached,

the 50mm weighs 879g and measures about 25x15x6.5cm. There isn't that much scope in front of the prism housing and it's rear-heavy on a tripod – it tips backwards if left to its own devices. The 60mm with eyepiece weighs in at 989g (only 110g more) and measures around 30x15x7.5cm. On a tripod it is very well balanced. Both feel robust and well-made and have two attachment points (same thread size) on the tripod plate.

The focusing wheels are exactly the same size (about two fingers wide – fast and fine combined) and move very smoothly through just under 5½ turns clockwise towards infinity, against fairly light

resistance (fast focuser) and very light resistance (fine focuser). Focusing precision is very good on both, though perhaps a tad trickier on the 50mm.

The eyepiece screws on, has a twist zoom (a bit noisy) and a twist-up/down rubber-coated eyecup with two intermediate positions. Occasionally, the eyecup twisted out of position, inadvertently.

#### The view

The main field testing was done on an overcast day with a little rain, and a fine performance from a Hobby en route. The objective size affects the magnification: 12-36x on the 50mm and 15-45x on the 60mm.

36x is plenty for most situations, but the 60mm gives more. The table to the right tells you more about the eyepiece on each scope.

Both deliver a very good view throughout the zoom range and the view isn't claustrophobic. In the field, both had impressive sharpness at all magnifications, though the 60mm seemed to have a slight advantage. The lack of edge softness was impressive as well – again, the 60mm seemed a bit better. I also did some work with a resolution chart. Optical theory says a bigger objective resolves more detail. That was obvious at the low end of the zoom range (but I was comparing 12x to 15x) but much less obvious at mid and high magnifications. Confusingly, with both set at 30x or thereabouts, the 50mm seemed better! This was at fairly close range though – the field test may be a better indicator.

I didn't detect any colour fringing with either scope and brightness was very good on both, even in overcast conditions. Of course, they don't have the light gathering of a larger objective, and on a bright day, post-sunset, as you would expect, the 60mm held out longer than the 50mm.

With close-focusing the 50mm is better – I measured it at just under 2.5m, which is very good. The 60mm came in at a bit less than 3.7m, still impressive and the difference is only relevant if, for example, you're looking at close insects.

#### The 77mm?

With the SDLv3 eyepiece the 77mm MM4 is about 36cm long and weighs 1,519g – not bad for a 'big' scope. Some people might consider taking that on their travels. My review of that scope was in the Autumn 2021 issue.

## SPECS

### Opticron MM4 Travelscope 50ED

- Objective: 50mm diameter
- Magnification: 12-36x
- Field of view (m@1,000m): 56.7-37.2
- Field of view (°): 3.3-2.1
- Eye-relief: 20-18mm
- Eye-cup 'stages': 4
- LxWxD: 68x52x52mm
- Weight: 260g
- Waterproof?: Yes
- Where made: Japan
- Guarantee: 10 yrs
- Price – eyepiece and body: £678
- Close focus (quoted): 2.5m
- Weight (body): 619g
- Length x width x depth (body): 205x100x64mm
- RRP (body only): £329
- Where made: Japan
- Guarantee: 30 years

### Opticron MM4 Travelscope 60ED

- Body: 60mm
- Magnification: 15-45x
- Field of view (m@1,000m): 46.9-30.5
- Field of view (°): 2.7-1.8
- Eye-relief: 20-18mm
- Eye-cup 'stages': 4
- LxWxD: 68x52x52mm
- Weight: 260g
- Waterproof?: Yes
- Where made: Japan
- Guarantee: 10 yrs
- Price – eyepiece and body: £778
- Close focus (quoted): 3.5m
- Weight (body): 729g
- Length x width x depth (body): 260x100x4mm
- RRP (body only): £429
- Where made: Japan
- Guarantee: 30 years

## VERDICT

These are well-made scopes and both deliver very good images. Optically, I think the 60mm is a bit better, and it does have higher magnification. But the 50mm is smaller, a little lighter, less expensive and focuses much closer. If you're making the choice, choose which of those features is more important to you.

## TROUSERS

### PÁRAMO MEN'S HALCON TREK TROUSERS, £150

Reviewed by David Chandler



The Halcon Trek trousers are part of the Naturally Páramo range, "quiet, high performance outdoor clothing" that gets you "closer to nature", and are designed for "wildlife and fieldwork activities". They are made from Nikwax Wind Resistor, a water repellent, wind resistant, stretchy polyester.

I found them well-made (in Vietnam), quiet and comfortable, with very good pocketing and not too much of it. There are two zip-up mesh hip pockets which are a good depth, and two gusseted cargo-type pockets on the front of them, each with a double-poppered flap. All of those pockets are large enough to take a softback Collins Bird Guide, but I wouldn't recommend it(!). The waist fastens with two poppers, there are belt loops large enough for a 4cm belt, and if you need more security, loops for braces.

Each leg has a long zip on the thigh to provide ventilation. I spent nearly two hours in the Halcons in 27°C in early September, with Chiffchaffs singing and Willow Emeralds on the wing. The leg vents helped even with very little air movement. There's no mesh inside the vents – that improves airflow, but would allow biting beasties in. On that day, the Halcons were a little warm at times – I wouldn't want to wear them if the temperature was much higher. Páramo describe them as three season trousers – but I think they would be suitable for not too extreme winter use, too.

Freedom of movement was good and reinforced areas on the knees and backside provide protection when you kneel or sit – keeping my buttocks reasonably dry sitting on damp ground. There is also reinforcement on the lower inner legs and zips enabling the ankles to open a little wider. I wore the Halcons to do some proper fieldwork – surveying dragonflies. We had to push through vegetation to access the pond. The plant kingdom enjoyed a victory or two – some nettles stung me through the trousers and Cleavers clung to the fabric for a bit of seed distribution. I don't see that as significant criticism – nettles and Cleavers are good at what they do. Páramo say the fabric is "suitable for use in many different environments without damage". My use produced just two very small glitches in the fabric – where Cleavers or other vegetation pulled at it perhaps.

The blurb describes these trousers as quick drying and water repellent. They do repel some water but aren't waterproof – too much and they get wet. I sprinkled them with a watering can and they were more or less dry after 30 minutes in bright sun. Nikwax aftercare products are recommended for cleaning and renewing water repellence.

Available in the 'capers' colour only. S-XXL. 492g. 30°C wash with Nikwax Tech Wash. [paramo-clothing.com](http://paramo-clothing.com)

## VERDICT

These are not inexpensive. But they are well made, and feel good to wear, have very good pocketing and could see active service through much of a UK year. I like them.



Opticron MM4 Travelscope 60ED straight and angled at 45° models