

MMS 160 Travelscope

Steve Young (July 2017)

I have to admit that when I opened the box it took me a little while to work out what I'd been sent to review; it turned out that it wasn't a telescopic sight or a distance rangefinder, but a very small "fit in the palm of your hand" telescope which got slightly larger when the eyepiece was fitted, but was still small enough to fit in any coat pocket; a detachable carry hand-strap is also provided, plus two batteries.

Batteries for a telescope I hear you ask? Well yes, because this mini-scope has an image-stabiliser (IS) system built-in that is powered by these two small CR2 batteries; the MMS 160 is supplied body-only at £299.00, but is compatible with a choice of eyepieces. My review model came with the 40862 HDF T providing a magnification of 7x-21x. The focus ring is at the end of the Travelscope so I used my left hand to focus and the right to change the zoom magnification.

A quick glance out of the window at the garden birds brought a young Blackbird that was skulking in the shrubbery feeding on apples and pears into focus. The colours were bright and clear and the image was very sharp; as I zoomed through the range to the maximum setting I noticed the image starting to shake so I switched on the IS. The difference was instant as it clicked into action and the shake was visibly reduced to virtually nothing at all. I left the IS permanently on after this whenever I was using the scope, but try to remember to turn it off when it's not in use and it will drain the batteries.

Moving further afield than the garden I headed off to see a Buff-breasted Sandpiper at one of my local reserves; the bird was never close so the Travelscope came in very useful in a crowded hide, bringing a distant naked-eye blob into a recognisable sharp bird. When many others were setting up tripods and standing up I was on a bench just hand-holding my tiny Travelscope; the weather on this day was particularly awful with heavy cloud and plenty of rain so it was good to see that the MMS still performed well with good colours and sharpness. Obviously when compared to a full sized telescope with its superior light gathering power there is a difference in the image quality, but for a very compact lightweight alternative the results are impressive.

On trips abroad there is always the problem of what to do with your tripod; take a chance and put it in the hold and risk it arriving at the other end with only two working legs or add it to the hand-luggage weight; using the Travelscope on those trips eliminates the need for a tripod and will also reduce that luggage weight as this model just goes in your pocket.

If you hate carrying a large telescope and tripod around with you, and dread the extra weight this entails, especially when travelling abroad, then the MMS 160 could be the perfect alternative.

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.