

# It's a Syn!

**Nick Howes** reviews the Sky-watcher Synguider and wonders if a computer is no longer necessary?

**A** long standing bug bear of many imagers at star parties and especially those with DSLR cameras not connected up to a computer, is that they either have to spend from £450 to over £1000 to get a standalone autoguider solution (and even then they typically have cryptic displays and no image of the stars and field-of-view you are aiming for), or cart a laptop with them.

With the Sky-Watcher Synguider, this is now a thing of the past. Unlike almost all other standalone guider solutions on the market, the Synguider differs in that it has a fully functional LCD screen that shows you the stars in the field-of-view, along with a plethora of menu options and settings that will guarantee you find and get a guide star every night. Using standard ST4 cables, it connects directly to your mount, with the only other cables being for the power supply, which can be from a 12V cable or the supplied battery pack, and the cable to its small and neat handbox, which allows you to plough through the available menu options. It comes with a parfocal ring and 1.25-inch nosepiece to connect straight to your telescope.

On boot-up, it conveniently goes straight into preview mode, and here you can adjust your guidescope focus, as well as change exposure settings. The screen splits into two, with the left side giving you the data, and the right the star-field. Exposure time to get guide stars using the very sensitive Sony

▼ **The Synguider provides nicely round stars in this five-minute guided shot of the globular cluster M3.**  
Image: Nick Howes.



ICX404AL sensor can be set up to four seconds, however in practice I found that one second was always enough to obtain a guide star. Cross hairs can be set and a star locked into the guider, and you can even zoom in on the star to ensure you get good focus. Its auto calibration routine will be familiar to those who have previously used applications like *PHD* or *Maxim* in that it calibrates your mount's positional and set-up characteristics, and you

can even configure the backlash compensation between mount and guider. Volume reduction also can be deployed to reduce any noise from the CCD.

Firmware updates have already been added, making this yet another 'non static' product from Sky-Watcher, and with the nice red screen on the display you won't get 'laptop fury' at a star party when your PC or Apple Mac computer starts lighting up the field like Blackpool's illuminations.

My only gripes with the product were the fact that the screen is integrated into the main body, and some minor set-up quirks from the prototype manual I had. The fact that the screen is not a separate unit (maybe an idea for the future would be to allow it to connect to a pocket LCD/TV) makes it tricky to aim at high guide stars when your mount is set low, but considering the price that isn't really a deal breaker. It's simply brilliant in both use and design, and I think it should find its way into almost every DSLR imagers', and indeed maybe some regular CCD users', arsenal of kit.

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