

Sky-Watcher Explorer 130P

The Explorer 130P is an f5, 5.5-inch Newtonian reflector, tripod mounted on an EQ2 equatorial. Well packed, assembly took little time using the clearly illustrated manual and supplied tools. I followed the directions given on how to balance each axis (an essential task to avoid sudden and disastrous accidents) and, within half an

hour of opening the box, I was ready to observe. A fine adjustment bolt made polar alignment easy too.

The telescope comes supplied with good quality 25mm and 10mm super modified achromatic (MA) eyepieces, delivering magnifications of x26 and x65. I was also pleased to see the inclusion of a red-spot LED finder, which I find much easier to use than a small aperture refractor finder-scope.

With a beginner's requirements in mind, the accompanying manual does not confine itself to assembly. In

addition to sections on maintenance, use of magnification, observing conditions etc., I was pleased to see an accomplished introductory guide on manipulating an equatorial mount. The latter can often be a conceptual hurdle for beginners used to the 'altitude and azimuth' common-sense world. Grappling with equatorial contortions can dampen the first flush of astronomical ardour so a description of the celestial co-ordinate system and diagrams of the mounting in use will no doubt speed comprehension and familiarity.

First light happened to be Mars. It was a respectable 17 arcseconds in diameter and, using the supplied 10mm eyepiece (at x65) I found I could easily discern the pale eye of Solis Lacus, the dark band of Mare Erythraem leading off from it like a long dusky smudge. Using my own eyepieces, seeing conditions were sufficiently good to comfortably push magnification to x260 without loss of detail. The pale orange disc stayed crisp and bright.



Image courtesy: Optical Vision.

The manual slow motion drive permitted smooth tracking of the planet. Even at the higher magnifications, driving the telescope betrayed no backlash or jerky accelerations with the image.

Returning to the supplied 10mm eyepiece, I tried the standard resolution test of seeing if I could split the 'double-double'. This is Epsilon Lyrae, a double binary star system that contains four stars. And yes, I did see double, twice. Whilst I was in the region, I gently dipped to the Ring Nebula. This tiny smoke ring was nicely picked out. It lost nothing on a higher power, which only served to enhance the contrast of the central void.

Observing star fields using the wider field of the 25mm eyepiece showed them nicely resolved almost to the edge of the field; no doubt facilitated by the parabolic (rather than spherical) primary mirror, an unusual and welcome attribute in this price range. The telescope also features ultra-thin secondary mirror supports to minimise

the resulting diffraction pattern of the optics. Primarily improving the resolution of the instrument, this measure is of benefit to planetary and deep-sky viewing.

Surmounting a very firm adjustable (71cm–123cm) aluminium tripod, the (albeit spindly) EQ2 equatorial mount is more than capable of handling the weight of the optical tube. I tapped the tube to see how the mounting would handle the vibration and it stabilized within a highly respectable three seconds. The setting circles on the EQ2 are a little small, but are capable of assisting navigation of the sky to accuracy within the field of the low power eyepiece. If you are looking for an upgradeable telescope and mount, the EQ2 can be fitted with an optional single axis motor drive.

Nice touches, like a collimation spot on the main mirror, piggyback photo stud and the inclusion of a red-spot finder, make the Explorer 130P a very thoughtfully put together package.

Steve Ringwood



| Image: Steve Ringwood.