

PRODUCT REPORT

iOptron MiniTower & MiniTower Pro – [Really Excellent mounts](#)

I have to say in all honesty that I have never really been into Alt Azimuth mounts mostly because I was brought up on equatorials and have requirements for astro-photography. But from a viewing comfort standpoint, they are a lot more enjoyable to use especially if they have motorised tracking.

As is our policy, we like to put new gear to the test before putting our name to them and so we tested both the iOptron Mini-Tower (10kg capacity) and the iOptron Mini-Tower Pro (15kg capacity)

Packaged in two cartons (the mount and controller in firm padded “impressive” all metal case in one and tripod in the other carton) the first thing I found pleasantly surprising was the ease of set up. Being my first time, it took about 10 minutes including unpacking from the cartons and cross checking with the manual. Seen at right is the Vixen AX103S (weighing in at about 6 kg with accessories) on the MiniTower. The mount had absolutely no problem handling this telescope and indeed a smaller second scope may be mounted with the included additional dovetail receiving arm (not shown here).

Instead I opted to just use the included 4 kg counterweight.

Also included in the excellent carry case is a regulated 12VDC power supply, USB interface cable, Hand Control and a CD with everything you need to get going – even the ASCOM drivers for operation with planetarium software. I used Cartes Du Ciel. As one of the southern hem testers for the hand control unit for its developer in China some years ago, it has indeed come along way although the very detailed data default display could be a little daunting for some first timers. Like other GOTO systems it offers a simple 1 or 2 star alignment after first pointing the mount south and parking the scope as seen at right. At maximum slew the MiniTower basic is a little noisy so beware of that if you're on an apartment block balcony at 1am taking in a few celestial wonders.

Also, some long refractors with draw tube out may encounter a tripod courtesy of the star diagonal so careful checking is needed to ensure this won't occur. Another feature I found very handy are the 3 fine level adjusters situated between the tripod head and bottom of the MiniTower head. Using the handy built-in bubble level one can simply do rough levelling by extending the tripod legs then finetune by turning these three nuts by hand.

With a built-in GPS the mount knew within seconds from power ON where it was on the Earth and after initial time and daylight saving option set up, I was under way within a minute.

Slewing to various different objects, I found nearly all fell inside the field of view of a 22mm (65° AFOV) eyepiece after initial star alignment. Objects that were slightly off can also be re centred which also refines the systems accuracy. One of the things that really impressed was after parking and powering the system down, I came back an hour later, powered up and without any new star alignments, selected M42 and the object was located without difficulty.

Among it's numerous features and huge object catalogue, built in RS232 to USB converter for instant PC interface, the hand control features a handy built-in red LED torch plus LCD display brightness and contrast adjustment. It can also be updated to latest operating version by down loading new software releases.

In short, I am sincerely impressed so if you are looking for a portable, compact, lightweight GOTO mount in a grab and go style then you really can't go past the iOptron Mini-Tower both base model and heavy duty Pro. They are excellent value, and performance (load baring and operational) for a complete no fuss GOTO system.

