

Group test

BEGINNERS' TELESCOPES

Overall winner Sky-Watcher Explorer-130

With Christmas nearly here, you might be thinking about buying a beginner's scope for a relative, or you may be looking to enjoy the night sky through a new scope yourself. It's therefore good to know that you can get quality optics for under £150. All eight telescopes did the job by and large; only the Bresser really fell any way short. The quality varied, but overall the standard was good considering the low prices. The niggles we mentioned in each review should be considered alongside the bargain price you are paying for a telescope.

The Phenix took us by surprise with the quality of its optics and it might have scored higher but for the play in the mount and finder scope – if these were rectified it would be up there with the high scorers. Optically, the

rest of the scopes also fared well. It was the smaller but still important items that knocked points off: too much flexibility in the tripod, insecurely fixed axes even when clamped, and finderscopes that were awkward to use all contributed to detract from the final scores.

To pick a winner it came down to which telescope gave the most satisfying experience from a beginner's perspective. The two reflectors were up there with quality optics, but the great views coupled with ease of use meant the Sky-Watcher Explorer-130 edged them out to take top spot in this *Group test*. ☉

Next month

We put four top-quality altazimuth mounts to the test



At-a-glance guide

MANUFACTURER	Bresser	Celestron	Meade	Orion USA	Sky-Watcher	Celestron	Sky-Watcher	Phenix
MODEL	Pluto	AstroMaster 90EQ	114FQ AST	StarBlast 4.5 EQ Reflector	Explorer 130	AstroMaster 130EQ-MD	Evostar 90	D114F1000
PRICE	£99.99	£139	£98.99	£149.99	£129	£149	£149	£95
APERTURE	114mm	90mm	114mm	114mm	130mm	130mm	90mm	114mm
FOCAL LENGTH	500mm (f/4.4)	1,000mm (f/11.1)	1,000mm (f/8.8)	450mm (f/4)	900mm (f/6.92)	450mm (f/3)	900mm (f/10)	900mm (f/8)
OPTICAL TYPE	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector	Reflector
FINDERSCOPE	Red dot	Red dot	Red dot	Red dot	Red dot	Red dot	6x30mm	5x24mm
WEIGHT	14kg (30lb)	10.43kg (23lb)	7kg (15lb)	11.3kg (25lb)	13kg (28lb)	10.89kg (24lb)	10.5kg (23lb)	11.3kg (25lb)
MOUNT	German equatorial	CG-3 equatorial	German equatorial	German equatorial	FQ2 equatorial	CG-3 motorised equatorial	FQ2 equatorial	EQ3 equatorial
SUPPLIER	Telescope House	David Hinds Ltd	Telescope House	Widescreen Centre	Optical Vision Ltd	David Hinds Ltd	Optical Vision Ltd	Sky's the Limit
VERDICT	72%	89%	82%	82%	90%	84%	88%	81%