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HELIOS MISTRAL WP4

Great close focus for under £100. Definitely worth a look...



When a company offers a wide range of models in the 'standard' birdwatching configuration of 8x42, with relatively little price difference between, it's interesting to try to work out what the unique selling point of each model is.

You're left in no doubt what it is where the Mistrals are concerned, though – the close focus figure of 1.2m is very prominently displayed on the bridge.

A quick try-out reveals that it isn't an idle boast at all – I managed 1.2m pretty comfortably, so for those of you for whom bugs, moths, butterflies and dragonflies are as important as birds, there's an obvious attraction.

They're a little more compact than the Ultrasports, but with their more traditional roof prism design, they're noticeably heavier too, tipping the scales at 747g. They're very solidly built, though.

The image felt duller and rather yellower than on the Ultrasports, with noticeably more edge softness, but that's not to say it was at all bad for a pair of £100 binoculars. The field of view is pretty much exactly the same as on its more expensive stable-mate.

There was an increase in colour

fringing, too, but even on these it was only when viewing against really strong sunlight – you won't find yourself getting particularly distracted by it in normal use.

Focusing was precise enough, but a bit harder work than on the Ultrasports, with the focus wheel (just over a finger wide) quite stiff, although it does travel smoothly. It takes just short of a full turn from close focus to infinity.

The rubber-covered twist-up eyecups have four (very distinct) positions, with a maximum 14.5mm eye relief, and the diopter ring is on the right barrel – it sets easily and stays in place well.

Interestingly, I thought the accessories were rather better than on the Ultrasports. The click-on objective lens covers are more to my taste, and there's a really decent neoprene strap. The rainguard fitted better, too.

In the end, I think that highly impressive close focus figure is what's really important, though.

Even if you've got an expensive pair of bins for your day-to-day birding use, you might well want to invest £100 in these for close-up work on insects, and they're solid performers at greater distances too.

FACTFILE

Field of view: 130m@1,000m

Close focus: 1.2m

Dimensions: 140 x 126 x 49mm

Weight: 747g

Price: £99

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