

Group test

GO-TO MOUNTS AND TRIPODS **UNDER £1,350**



Sky-Watcher HEQ5 Pro SkyScan

VITAL STATS

- ▶ **PRICE** £879
 - ▶ **CONNECTOR** Vixen-style dovetail
 - ▶ **WEIGHT** 16kg
 - ▶ **LOAD CAPACITY** 16kg
 - ▶ **MAX SLEWING SPEED** 3.4°/second
 - ▶ **HAND CONTROL DATABASE** 13,400+ objects
 - ▶ **INTERFACES** RS-232; autoguider
 - ▶ **POWER SUPPLY** 12V external (supplied)
 - ▶ **MANUFACTURER** Sky-Watcher
 - ▶ **TEL** 01359 244200
 - ▶ **WWW** opticalvision.co.uk
- ▶ **FOR** Self-contained and versatile
 - ▶ **AGAINST** Power hungry

VERDICT

BUILD QUALITY	92%
FEATURES	88%
GO-TO ACCURACY	92%
TRACKING ACCURACY	94%
STABILITY	96%
OVERALL	92%

Keen readers of our *Group test* will recall that we first encountered the Sky-Watcher HEQ5 Pro mount in the September 2005 issue as part of the Evostar-100ED refractor package. This Pro version is a development of the Taiwanese optical giant Synta's HEQ5 mount, and it incorporates a number of motor and gear enhancements as well as a computerised hand controller. This is known in the UK as the SkyScan, though the instruction manual insists on calling it the SynScan.

Although it's just 4kg heavier than the Vixen and Celestron mounts on test, the HEQ5 Pro equatorial head and tripod feels far

more substantial. The 4cm (1.5-inch) diameter stainless steel tripod legs may not look as sturdy as the Celestron or the EQ6 Pro, but there doesn't appear to be a lot of difference in stability. Plus, there's no denying that it looks great: the striking white livery and clean lines flowing from the fully enclosed dual-axis drive system give it a high-tech, precision feel when it's set up. With our test 6-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope in place, we were impressed with the vibration damping time of just over a second.

Polar alignment built in

In common with the EQ6 Pro – the HEQ5's sibling mount – and Vixen mounts, the counterweight shaft retracts into the body of the mount, which is a real plus when it comes to transportation and setup. Another factor that we liked about the HEQ5 Pro is the built-in polar alignment scope, which makes it easy to get the polar axis of the mount precisely parallel to the Earth's axis of rotation. While you can still get good Go-To accuracy without paying too much attention to this important setup procedure, tracking will be impaired without it. When you look through the polar scope, there's a clearly defined grid that allows you to offset easily and simply from Polaris to the true north celestial pole. Another nice feature of the HEQ5 Pro package is that it comes with a rechargeable 12V power supply, which is just as well as this is a battery-hungry machine.

The menu structure of the SkyScan is easy to navigate on the two-line, scrolling LCD screen, while the alignment procedures with one, two, or three stars, are easy to implement. The three-star alignment accurately corrects for cone error, and subsequent Go-To accuracy was impressive: we found our test objects in the centre half to third of a 160x eyepiece field wherever we looked in the sky. Like the Celestron, remote control is made easy with the RS-232 serial port on the base of the handset; you just have to buy a cable to connect it to a laptop or desktop PC.

The SkyScan may not possess the capabilities of the NexStar, but the quality engineering of the HEQ5 Pro's bearings and gears make it a quieter, better choice for imagers – especially since the hand control supports periodic error correction and autoguiders.



PAUL WHITEFIELD