

# Low cost, high quality

## REVIEW

### Kowa BD 8x42 XD Prominar binocular

**JAPANESE** brand Kowa has for many years been a highly respected name in sports optics, making its initial impact in the birding sector with the introduction of high-quality telescopes at the top end of the market. The same level of quality is also found in its binocular collection, of which the BD-XD series forms a part, albeit at the lower end of the Kowa price range.

I chose the popular 8x42 specification to field test and I wasn't disappointed with its performance. The model is solidly built and, despite the 42 mm objectives, feels compact and chunky. The magnesium body makes it relatively light in weight and it's generously covered in hard green rubber armour, which is lightly textured throughout the length of the inner half of each barrel – that's the part which comes into

contact with your fingers and thumbs. Lightly raised ridges divide the different areas of textured rubber above and below; unfortunately, I found those on the underside of the barrels mildly uncomfortable where they came into contact with my thumbs. Aside from this, the binocular is well balanced and otherwise easy to operate, while the semi-recessed strap-lugs do not significantly obstruct holding or focusing.

The gently contoured, rubber-covered eyecups are very comfortable, twisting out smoothly to click-stop decisively in three optional settings above the fully retracted position. Immediately below the right eyecup lies a chamfered single eye adjustment ring, which turns smoothly against a basic five-point incremental scale. The central focusing wheel is broad and closely stippled, turning

through 1.8 anti-clockwise rotations between an impressive 1.5 m close focus and infinity.

A quick check on the field of view specification reveals an increase in value of approximately 20 per cent over Kowa's previous BD model, and I discovered this is without any obvious distortion or significant softening at the edges. Similarly, I was pleased with the low level of chromatic aberration, which is noticeable only in the outer 15 per cent or so of the field. Against a generally warm colour rendition, a bright image returns rich, natural colours with a high degree of contrast – nothing less than I would expect from the brand, and this model is one of the lowest priced within the range.

The BD-XD comes with a padded neck-strap, articulated rainguard, slip-on tethered objective covers and a soft, padded case. **Mike Alibone**



## FURTHER INFO

- **Price:** £499
- **Size:** 132x126 mm
- **Weight:** 660 g
- **Field of view:** 131 m at 1,000 m
- **Light transmission:** not available
- **Close focus:** 1.5 m
- **Gas-filled:** yes
- **Waterproof:** yes
- **Guarantee:** 10 years

## VERDICT

- ✓ Low level of chromatic aberration
- ✓ Bright images with natural colours
- ✗ Raised ridges caused some discomfort

# Brand new heavy

## REVIEW

### First Horizon 8115 2-way heavy-duty tripod

**THIS** tripod's 'heavy duty' epithet should not be underestimated. Manufactured in Taiwan, First's Horizon 8115 is a seriously robust piece of equipment designed to support telescopes with objective sizes up to 100 mm, as well as conventional camera/long lens combinations – or anything else you may care to throw at it.

When fully extended, the tripod has long enough legs to support an angle-bodied telescope at a comfortable viewing height for a six-foot (1.83 m) observer without the necessity to raise the centre column. I found it extremely stable and it supported the large, 100 mm Celestron Regal M2 telescope – reviewed on page 20 – with ease. Its stability results not only from the solidity inherent in its overall weight but also from the ability to screw-lock the bracing on the extended legs, at any angle, to the fixed tube that houses the centre column.

There is no foam or rubber

coating to the upper sections of the three aluminium legs, which means that over-shoulder carrying for a tripod weighing in excess of 3.5 kg over long distances is not to be undertaken lightly, particularly with a large telescope attached.

Deep, rubber-clad twist-collars lock each extended leg section firmly and securely in place, and the tripod sports broad, self-levelling rubber feet with screw-out metal spikes for in-hide or outdoor use in any terrain. If required, there's a spirit level built into the sturdy neck of the tripod at its apex.

The neck also incorporates both a handle to raise the centre column (although it can also be pulled up and lowered manually) and a large-diameter locking wheel to secure the column in its desired position.

As far as tripod heads go, this one pretty much ticks all the functionality boxes, with the exception of providing a

counterbalance. It features tension adjustment wheels in both the pan and tilt planes, which is really useful if you are using a heavy scope with a camera attachment for shooting video. Two winged knobs allow the head to be locked independently in both the vertical and horizontal planes, and a third allows adjustment of the angle of the pan handle, the latter seemingly the perfect length for manoeuvrability.

Scope attachment is via a quick-release plate which includes an anti-rotation pin and slides, rather than drops, in and is held in place by moulded catches before being further secured by a spring locking mechanism, the default position of which is locked. This means whatever you mount on the tripod is not likely to become detached.

Although it's heavy I liked the Horizon, which represents a tremendous amount of tripod for just £90. **Mike Alibone**

## Birdwatch

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*Guide to Optics 2015*  
(22)



## FURTHER INFO

- **Price:** £90
- **Material:** aluminium
- **Collapsed length:** 780 mm (including head)
- **Extended length:** 1,500 mm (height, excluding column)
- **Column extension:** 450 mm
- **Weight:** 3.58 kg
- **Maximum loading:** see above
- **Number of leg sections:** 3
- **Leg locking system:** collar
- **Guarantee:** 1 year

## VERDICT

- ✓ Very stable and sturdy
- ✓ Good value for money
- ✗ Heavy, with no rubber coating on the legs