A review of the Vixen SG 6.5×32 WP ED binoculars

The Vixen SG 6.5×32 WP comes in a stylish dark cordura padded case with a Velcro fastening. The binoculars are of roof prism design with 32mm objectives and a rather unusual magnification of 6.5. However, this arrangement gives a wider field of view and under dark skies, a brighter image than the more usual 8x30's. The initial impression is of a solidly made product with a quality finish. Apart from the black coated metal focus adjustment rings, the body has a thin soft rubber covering with a pleasant tactile feel, as well as providing protection from knocks and the elements. Both the objective and eyepiece lenses are protected by soft plastic covers. Removing a small plastic cover between the barrels reveals a tripod mounting point. Ergonomically they are comfortable to hold and use, even with gloves on. Mechanically they are smooth and precise in operation.

Each eyepiece has individual focus and once set to infinity for a particular user, they can then be left alone. This is because these binoculars were specifically designed for astronomy, but this design would also work well for marine use as they are water proof or even aircraft spotting, but would not be so appropriate for birdwatching or sport, where constant refocusing is required. An ingenious variable speed focusing system allows a precise focus around infinity, which is helpful in obtaining pinpoint sharp stars. The closest focus is 6m, which again would not be ideal for birding and nature watching, but is absolutely no problem for astronomical use. The apparent field of view is not particularly wide at 54.2°, but due to the relatively low magnification, it gives an angular field of view of a full 9°. A generous eye relief of 20 mm means that wearers of glasses will have no problems and likewise the 56 to 76 mm inter-pupillary range will accommodate most people's faces.

The high quality optics and precise focusing give a clear image across the central 70% of the field. Thereafter, towards the edge of field the image softens somewhat. As this cannot be focused out it shows that it is not primarily due to field curvature. The last 15% or so of the field shows some astigmatism, but that said, the edge softening and astigmatism were no worse than my 8x30 Steiner Military R's and Nikon EII's, both high-quality binoculars. The small amount of pincushion distortion towards the edge of the field is actually positive in that it helps to eliminate the irritating rolling ball effect when sweeping the sky. Jupiter is always a tough test for binoculars, but all of its four moons were clearly visible and sharp and the planet's disc well defined, but with some spiking.

The use here of ED glass (extra low dispersion) for the objectives not only helps to provide high resolution, but reduces chromatic aberration to a very low level. When visible this produces coloured bands (typically yellow and purple) at the junction of high contrast light and dark areas. This can be particularly noticeable when looking at the Moon. Surprisingly, the Vixens had less chromatic aberration than my Swarovski EL SV 10×42's, one of the very best quality binoculars made and over four times the cost!

The glass for the objectives, prisms and eyepieces are all fully multicoated, phase coated and clearly of high quality. This results in sharp, bright, high contrast views. However, in viewing the Moon there was a trace of ghosting and moderate stray light, but no more than other binoculars in this price range. Ghosting and stray light were not noticeable with Jupiter or bright stars, so overall should not be a significant problem. The colour balance is very neutral, allowing the true colours of stars to be fully appreciated.

In conclusion, the Vixen SG 6.5x32 WP ED, whilst not replacing larger astronomical binoculars, are excellent for sweeping the Milky Way and hunting down other celestial objects with its wide field of view and high-quality optics. Yes, there are areas that could be improved, but at the price they can certainly be recommended.

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