

DBA VHD 10x42

Jeff Baker (February 2016)

I've been using the first DBA model that Opticron released for many years now. It is a binocular that has served me well and one which frankly I'd be loathed to give up using. I was therefore a bit dismissive of the new model I was asked to review as model 'upgrades' frequently seem to involve minor cosmetic changes only.

Having used the new VHD's for just over three months in a variety of places including heathlands, woodland and coastal habitats in a mixed bag of weather conditions, now is probably as good a time as any to report my findings.

I'll confess I didn't fall in love with these binoculars at the beginning. New binoculars take getting used to. Maybe it's a mental reluctance to embrace the new favour of the faithful and reliable you've used for many years. However the more I used and wore them the more comfortable they became and when one day I used my old DBA's on a birdwatching outing not only did they feel awkward but optically I noticed the difference compared to the new model.

To look at and compared to the earlier DBAs, the DBA VHD look very different. The open bridge design is the obvious big change in the external build but also the adjustable eyecups are larger – much larger; the whole body therefore appears 'chunkier' than the first model and I think this is one of the reasons it took me a while to warm to them. I'm still not a big fan of the bigger eyecups, though the multi-stage twist-type adjustment is a feature that has greatly improved from the original model. The twist mechanism now has three predetermined settings that lock in place – a very useful feature. The focusing wheel is very smooth and takes 2 full turns to focus from close focus to infinity. I found I was having to refocus quite a lot when birdwatching in, for example, woodland though this wasn't a problem because of focus wheel is so smooth. The dioptre focus is also built into the focus wheel as it is in many other binoculars today.

The features of the new DBAs as described above are mostly to do with the mechanics of the model and, of course, ergonomics – how it feels. The biggest difference is the optical performance. I calculate the sharpness to be a little better than the old model, but it is the colour saturation that is the most striking – a very significant improvement - delivering such natural colours with virtually no colour cast. The image is bright, and even in very dull conditions the light gathering capability is extremely impressive.

This top of the range binocular from Opticron boasts great optical quality and is comparable to some of the top end brands at three times the price – outstanding good value – but then Opticron have always produced high quality optics great prices!

Jeff Baker has worked for the BTO for over 40 years in a variety of senior positions. He is currently Head of Marketing. Author of several papers on bird migration as well as identification guides (Warblers of Europe, Asia and North Africa, Identification Guide European Non Passerine).