EYES WIDE OPEN

Most observers find binoculars easier to use than a telescope. Enter the binoviewer, an accessory with an internal prism that sends light to two eyepieces, letting your telescope mimic binoculars. When I unpacked the Denkmeier II Powerswitch Binoviewer, I thought, “If this thing matches the way it looks and feels, Denkmeier Optical has a real winner.” When I looked through the binoviewer, my thought changed to “Oh, wow!”

I pointed my Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope (SCT) at the First Quarter Moon. I quickly called my wife and a couple of neighbors over to enjoy the view. All concurred with my “wow” assessment. I then spent the next few hours enjoying the most spectacular views of the Moon, Jupiter, and Saturn I have ever seen through this scope. And all without the “face-muscle fatigue” that plagues every astronomer who has spent serious time at an eyepiece.

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Binoviewers are not new to the world of amateur astronomy. Denkmeier Optical, however, has taken telescopic binoviewing to a new level with the features incorporated in (or attached to) its Denkmeier II Binoviewer series. The specific binoviewer I reviewed was the Denkmeier II Powerswitch for SCTs.

My admiration started with the binoviewer’s eyepiece holders, each of which has a self-centering feature and a diopter adjustment. The self-centering feature keeps the two eyepieces parallel, which establishes a single image. It does this with a firm feel, yet the adjustment easily moves to accommodate the next observer. The diopter adjustment works equally well, and it was a snap to micro-focus each eyepiece independently without touching the telescope’s focus knob.

The next feature — and it’s a great one — is a patent-pending innovation called the "Power x Switch." This device provides low, mid-range, and high magnifications with a single set of eyepieces. The Power x Switch accomplishes this with slides that extend on either side of the Binoviewer. If you are using an SCT, then nothing else needs to be attached. If you are using a refractor or Newtonian reflector, you must add a second optical component called the Multi-Purpose OCS Cell, which is included. The Power x Switch creates different magnifications depending on the telescope used. The included instructions provide details for each telescope design.

I also used Denkmeier’s new Power x Switch Star Diagonal #S2 with the Denkmeier II Binoviewer. This device incorporates both a focal reducer and a Barlow lens into a top-quality 2” star diagonal. Denkmeier claims this setup will be standard equipment with all SCTs in the near future, and I agree with the idea.

With Denkmeier’s 21mm wide-field eyepieces (optional) installed in the binoviewer, a simple slide brought the focal reducer into the optical path. This effectively transformed the 21mm eyepieces into 42mm ones. With the other slide, I was able to “double up” the eyepiece magnifications, emulating 10.5mm focal lengths. This brought a new dimension to my lunar...
THE DENKMEIER II BINOVIEWER lets you keep both eyes open when using your telescope and minimizes eye fatigue. With the Power x option (shown), you can select from three different focal ratios, effectively tripling your eyepieces.

ALL PHOTOS: ASTRONOMY: WILLIAM ZUBACK

observing, and I was knocked out by awe-some views of globular and open star clusters. Jupiter and Saturn (even low on the horizon) were virtual showstoppers. Both the eyepieces and the star diagonal provided outstanding contrast and sharpness to the edge of the field of view.

Denkmeier manufactures several models of diagonals and binowers. The different configurations assure one binoviewer will work with your telescope. To find out which one is best for your application, visit Denkmeier’s web site at deepskybinoviewer.com. It’s packed with useful information to help you make your choice. The web site also has information on focal reduction, eyepiece selection, and binoviewing in general, plus downloadable product manuals.

One factor you have to consider about this system is its weight (20 ounces). You’ll need to protect your drive motors by properly balancing your scope, especially fork-mounted Schmidt-Cassegrain telescopes. Your telescope’s manufacturer or an astronomy equipment dealer will provide you with options for adding counterweights.

Unlike other binoviewer manufacturers, Denkmeier provides many options to suit pocketbooks of almost every size. You can spend as little as $349 for a Most Basic Standard Binoviewer, or as much as $2,000 for a complete system that adds a Power x Switch Diagonal and eyepieces.

But there’s no argument that the quality and craftsmanship are superb in all aspects, even down to the machined lens caps. After using the Denkmeier II Binoviewer system for a few weeks, I judge it well worth the investment. In fact, with all the magnifications possible if you purchase both sets of eyepieces — the 21mm and 14mm — you’ll seldom use anything else.

THE DENKMEIER II BINOVIEWER

DENKMEIER’S POWER X SWITCH DIAGONAL
can be added later if you choose a binoviewer without one.

EYEPieceS fit into self-centering holders, and each focuses individually. Denkmeier sells 14mm and 21mm eyepieces specially made for its binoviewers.

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