



A Review of GPO Passion 10x50 HD
By
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This is the first time I have reviewed a 10x50 although I have ventured even larger in the past, having reviewed Swarovski and Zeiss 56mm models a few years ago. GPO's 10x50 arrived looking very much like the 8x42 I reviewed a few weeks ago and that is to say it is produced to an extremely high standard of finish, quite possibly higher than any other brand I have handled. Priced at \$1250 and €1250 (there are no distribution arrangements for the UK yet so £GBP prices are not available) it occupies an almost solitary corner of the bino world. Searching around for competitor models within a similar price bracket I could only locate Vortex's Razor at around \$40 more or Pentax's ZD ED for \$100 less.

I will discount the Pentax immediately since its field of view of 261ft / 87m is way below par. The GP's field of view is 309ft / 103m and so pretty much in the same ballpark as the Vortex's 315ft / 105m.

Talking of the Vortex leads me to the subject of weight. The GPO weighs 960g / 33.9ozs and so is a little lighter than premium models such as Leica's Ultravid HD (1,000g / 35.3ozs) and Swarovski's EL (999g / 35ozs) and Meopta's discontinued B1 (1,020g / 36ozs). The Vortex, however, is in a whole different ball game at 797g / 28ozs, or 197g / 7ozs lighter than the average of this group. Now, Vortex definitely do not have a reputation for inadequate build quality but this difference is so dramatic I find myself wondering whether Vortex is to be congratulated or asked what it is they left out that 4 other brands felt was necessary.

Eye relief of the GPO as measured from the top surface of the top eyepiece lens (this is stated in the specifications) is 19.5mm. Vortex gives 16.6mm for the Razor. I found the GPO had perfectly fine eye relief either with or without glasses. When it comes to IPD the GPO only just accommodated my 58mm distance with its range of 58-76mm, so I was going to criticise it gently but this is competitive with the Vortex at 57-74mm, Swarovski at 56-74mm and Leica at 58-74mm. Instead I will criticise them all for their IPD range: if Zeiss can offer 54-74mm on the Conquest HD 56mm series then this lot should really have done better with their 50s and don't think I am letting Zeiss off the hook. Given the range on the Conquest 56s, their premium status HT 54mm should really have done better than 58-76mm which exactly equals the GPO.

The eyecups are made from machined aluminium (as on their 8x42) with 3 very positive click-stop positions and a smoothly precise action that actually allows the eyecups to be positioned wherever you like, without moving out of position. The rainguard that sits on top is not beyond criticism however, the inside diameter of the individual cups needs to be enlarged somewhat as the current dimensions mean the cups sit far too snugly around the eyecups. As it is, the guard resists quick removal and replacement and thus fails to perform adequately in rain. I will also mention here that the neck strap is the type that hangs from the back of your neck and while it is quite adequate, one is more often finding binos equipped with tailored straps that lie flat around one's shoulders and for me at least, are more comfortable. Still there are plenty of aftermarket rainguards and straps to choose from, but I would urge GPO to take a look at these accessories. The semi-hard case supplied is first class by the way.

The focus action is really excellent being both smooth and precise, and goes counter-clockwise from near to far. This is the opposite direction to most models on the market place although the list of counter-clockwisers is growing. If a GPO is to be your only bino then the focus direction will not be something you dwell on, but if you use other bins with the more conventional focus direction you may encounter 'muscle-memory' confusion when swapping from one to the other. This will surely vary from individual to individual and may be a trivial issue to some. And take a look at Vortex. Most of their full-sized roofs are counter-clockwisers and it hasn't stopped them becoming one of the most popular brands in the USA.

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Moving outdoors I took the binos to a place on a high moor near home to search for the Red Deer that have taken up residence there, but despite searching every bush and fold in the ground for tell-tale antlers sticking up, I was unsuccessful. However there were two upland bird species to compensate.

A Curlew appeared over the nearby horizon, set its wings and glided gradually down, trilling that fabulously evocative song. Against the fluffy white clouds it was a silhouette without chromatic aberration in the centre-field, and just a touch when at the edge of the field of view. Out of the corner of my eye I glimpsed a fast-moving shape and turning to look saw a Wheatear land on a stone gatepost that had long ago lost not only its gate but also the wall that had been its home. The Wheatear turned around and as the sun came out I had a terrific view of it. Through the GPO the subtle buff of its breast and clean grey of its mantle were beautifully rendered and the black mask and white supercilium looked freshly painted and sharply differentiated. These binos can reproduce both the subtle and highly contrasting.

Moving to another moorland site with a medium sized pool I was rewarded with a dragonfly, a Four-spot Chaser or *Libellula quadrimaculata*. It zoomed around the pond alternately hawking high for insects and searching low for females and at last it perched on a thin twig. Through the 10x50s the dark patches with golden streaks on the wing roots next to the abdomen (that identify this as a *Libellula* species) were clear and sharp. Satisfied with this I nevertheless wanted something a bit more colourful and preferably with some bright blue and red. A Kingfisher would fit the bill but it was to be another 2 weeks before I saw one and by then I had almost given up on the idea. But there I was scanning over a beautifully clear river searching for Water Voles and not finding them, when a sound came down the breeze and made me turn and lift the binos. Coming upstream at a cruise was a Kingfisher and I got the bins on it as it flew by and landed a short distance upstream. OK, this dazzling bird would flatter most binoculars but the GPOs did the business and delivered the full experience with nothing left out, rendering its patchwork of white, orange and blue beautifully.

I would say that the view through these 10x50s is identical to the 8x42s I tried and reviewed some time ago in terms of colour rendition, contrast and perceived sharpness and that means very good indeed. Going back to that earlier review I ventured that the 8x42 Passion HD might be the best finished bino I have seen and this 10x50 lives up to the same very high standards. Just handling this unit is a pleasure and the eyecups are to the highest standards as is the feel and precision of the focus. If GPOs are being distributed in the country where you live and you are in the market for a \$1200-\$1300 / €1200-€1300 50mm model you owe it to yourself to check-out what you get for your money with GPO's Passion HD models which include 8.5x and 12.5x as well as the 10x tested here.

<http://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?p=3594401#post3594401>