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review

Leica APO Televid 82 with 25-50x WW zoom eyepiece

Leica is renowned for its high-quality optics, but for the past few years it hasn't offered a spotting scope. That gap has now been filled by its new Televid scopes, available in 82mm and 65mm objective models. Both are avail-

The Leica Televid is refreshingly light and compact for a scope with an 82mm objective. Leica has resisted the urge to compete with the Zeiss and Swarovski integrated zoom scopes, retaining a more traditional zoom eyepiece, but with an impressively wide field of view.

able with angled or straight-through eyepiece options and although more eyepieces are planned, currently only one is available: the 25-50x wide-angle zoom. I was able to put an 82mm model with an angled eyepiece to the test for this review.

I confess that in the past I had not been a fan of zoom eyepieces on spotting scopes. My main issue was the much narrower field of view compared to a fixed magnification wide-angle lens eyepiece. However, times have changed. The new Leica zoom doesn't feel at all claustro-

phobic. Indeed, the field of view at 30x is virtually the same as my old Swarovski 30x wide-angle eyepiece. This makes it far easier to find the bird you're looking for, even if it's in flight. Aiming the scope is assisted by sight guides on the extendable hood, which I found more useful than any other device the scope manufacturers have devised over the years.

As you would expect from Leica, the optics are superb, creating a bright, true-to-life image that is sharp right across the field of view. There is a slight drop-off

in brightness at higher magnifications, but this only becomes noticeable above 40x magnification. The scope performed well under a range of viewing conditions. The image remained amazingly clear and bright during twilight and even under streetlights at night and retained impressive detail and contrast on backlit birds when looking towards the sun. The main limitation came from heat haze as the day progressed.

As in most spotting scopes, the zoom is on the eyepiece and the focus wheel on the main body of the scope. This arrangement is somewhat less efficient than the recent top-end offerings from Swarovski and Zeiss, but for most scope users this will be what they are used to and thus easily accommodated. Focus is controlled by two wheels mounted on top of the body; a large, fast-focus wheel enables you to move swiftly over a range of focal lengths, while a smaller fine-focus wheel allows you to home in on the subject with precision. Close focus is a pretty impressive 3.5 metres for the 82mm model and 2.9 metres for the 65mm model.

The Leica Televid 82 is agreeably light and compact, particularly for a scope with a relatively large objective. The body is made of magnesium alloy and covered with a robust black rubber armour. The result is an attractive but tough scope that weighs a shade under 1.5 kilograms for the body and eyepiece combined. The eyepiece has a bayonet mount to the body, facilitating precise and quick attachment (not that you're likely to change the eyepiece very often). The combined unit is waterproof to five metres and nitrogen-purged to prevent fogging or fungal growth on the internal lenses.

The scope comes with a heavy objective cover and the objective lens is further protected by a plain glass protective lens. The eyepiece has a comfy rubber finish that locks at three different heights to offer a range of viewing distances. One minor concern was that the plastic cover for the eyepiece is not attached to the scope and so is likely to be mislaid.

For those wishing to use their scope to capture images, Leica offers an integrated system that links its TL mirrorless camera to a Televid scope. I'd love to play



with this set-up, but at about R35 000 for just the camera, it's not a cheap option for taking photographs. The digital adaptor can be used with other cameras, but probably requires a bit more fiddling.

A potentially nifty addition Leica has developed is a 1.8x eyepiece extender – just like the tele-extenders available for SLR telephoto lenses. This changes the 25-50x zoom to a 40-90x zoom lens, but it only works with the angled eyepiece body option. I didn't get one to test, so can't comment on its performance. However, I can't imagine too many birding situations in which you might want this level of magnification, which doubtless reduces the field of view and degrades the image quality to at least some degree.

There's no doubt that this is a great scope, in the classic mould. Compared to its main competitors, Swarovski's ATX 85 25-60x zoom and Zeiss's Victory Harpia 85 22-65x zoom, the Leica Televid 82 is considerably smaller and lighter; it weighs nearly a quarter less than the Swarovski and a third less than the Zeiss. Another big plus is that the Leica is also more affordable, coming in at a price 12 to 20 per cent lower than its competitors.

Out in the field... Susie Cunningham, Peter Steyn, Andre Demblon and John Graham compare the Leica Televid with Swarovski and Kowa scopes at Strandfontein Sewage Works outside Cape Town.

Birders for whom portability is a major issue might wish to consider the more compact 65mm objective model. Oddly, Leica lists the weight of the Televid 65 as being the same as the larger 82mm model and only slightly lighter than Swarovski's ATX 65, which, although it has the edge in terms of close focus distance, costs almost a fifth more.

Ultimately, your choice of scope will rest on a range of criteria: where you plan to use it, how far you need to carry it on a regular basis and of course how much you can afford to pay for it. The Leica Televid range is an attractive option for the birder who wants exceptional optical performance in a compact, robust package. Coupled with Leica's legendary lifetime warranty, which offers free repairs for any accidental damage, you're assured of many years of hassle-free birding.

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