

Genesis revelation

A field test reveals the hidden attributes of Kowa's latest binocular. *Mike Alibone* is impressed with a remarkably high-quality compact model.

Review: Kowa Genesis33 Prominar 8x33 binocular

THE MOUTH OF the River Taff, where it spills into Cardiff Bay, provided the setting for my initial field test of the new Genesis33 Prominar binocular from Kowa. Unfortunately, I'd chosen the first evening the Bonaparte's Gull present during the previous few days decided not to show, but in the failing light, Mediterranean Gull, Slavonian Grebe and half a dozen northward-bound Sand Martins battling against a stiff March breeze provided ample opportunity to get a measure of this new 8x33 model.

This latest Kowa offering is based on a similar design to the XD44. It attempts to combine high-quality optics with low weight and compactness, and appears to have succeeded, adding a top-end small birding binocular to the manufacturer's exclusive Prominar range. It utilises the same coatings and lens system as the 44 mm model, which has been in production for the last two years.

Like the XD44, this unassuming small binocular comes across as a bit of a 'plain Jane' at first glance, but it quickly becomes apparent it's something of a beauty in disguise. Beneath the standard, rather subtle, green rubber armour, the nitrogen-filled, lightweight magnesium alloy body houses the latest Kowa C3-coated prisms and four-element lens system, along with well-engineered focusing mechanics.

I found this model well balanced and easy to hold for long periods, the high-contact matt body covering relieved only by shallow though extensive thumb-rests, which are designed to accommodate more or less the whole length of the user's thumb. The strap attachment lugs are semi-recessed and neither intrude nor conflict with the positioning of the finger operating the focusing wheel. In fact the latter rotates wonderfully smoothly, with approximately 1.5 finger widths across a high-friction surface, achieving a close focus to infinity range within approximately 1.6 turns.

The dioptre ring, for single-eye focusing adjustment, is located at the base of the right

ocular and, like the central focusing wheel, turns very smoothly and is operated by pulling it upward before rotating and pushing it down to lock it in the desired position. This operation can only be achieved with the right eyecup extended to the first position above

the base setting, after which the eyecup can be repositioned to its fully retracted position. There is a raised thumb-switch on the dioptre ring, which I believe facilitated the achievement of a more precise setting than would have been the case if the ring had simply been an uncountoured band.

Twisting up the generously rubber-clad eyecups reveals a click-stop mechanism which allows them to be set at four different levels and, importantly, the articulated rai nguard supplied with the model fits loosely enough so as not to alter the settings during its application and removal. The 15 mm eye relief offered by this binocular is about the

minimum for consideration if you are going to be using it with spectacles, but if the eyepieces had been designed for longer eye relief the field of view would have had to have been narrower.

As it stands, the 140 m at 1,000 m field of view is excellent – on a par with two other leading top-tier manufacturers' 32 mm models and beating a third in the same category. Kowa have thus billed this model as 'wide angle' and so it is. If the field is wide then the close focus distance is short at 1.5 m, although I managed to squeeze 1.4 m out of the test model. The depth of field is good, too, with very little turning of the focusing wheel required to cover birds in view over short- to long-range distances.

Taking a critical look at the image, the first aspect that jumps out is the combined brightness and sharpness. The light transmission appears to be very high and the image really is crisp across the whole field, losing only marginal definition at the periphery, where the curvature of field – distortion in which objects appear to bend – is also minimal. Even at dusk this small binocular delivered in terms of image brightness. The colour reproduction is also excellent, with true-to-life colours, good contrast and an overall close-to-neutral colour rendition.

The Genesis33 also comes with a broad and comfortable padded neck strap, which is not really necessary because of its general light weight. It misses being the lightest top-quality binocular by a only few grams, but at a list price of £989 it is easier on the pocket by more than a few pounds.

I really liked this model: it should be not be overlooked by anyone who is considering parting with around £1,000 for a top-tier smaller-objective binocular. ■

Eye relief of 15 mm is close to minimum for glasses wearers

Focusing wheel rotates smoothly and easily



Nitrogen-filled magnesium alloy body houses latest C3-coated prisms

Image is sharp across whole field

Tech spec

Price: £989
Size: 133 x 103 mm
Weight: 590 g
Field of view: 140 m at 1,000 m
Close focus: 1.5 m
Gas-filled: yes
Waterproof: yes
Guarantee: 10 years