**Swarovski CL Companion binoculars**

I'm often asked, "What binoculars should I buy?" and my response is "How much money do you want to spend?" Few would argue that Leica, Swarowski and Zeiss (to list them alphabetically) make the best binoculars, but not everyone is able or willing to pay.

**TALKING TECH**

**Review**

The big three have responded by bringing out less expensive models. The new Companion has three strap/bag options: Wild Nature, Urban Jungle and Northern Lights, which have to be bought separately. Wild Nature is probably the most practical for birders (at least in Africa) and it is the cheapest, but at a little over R2000 it still adds about 14 per cent to the price of the binoculars! The Companion series has been around for almost a decade but was re-launched in late 2017 with a raft of significant design improvements.

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I also had no trouble using them in low-light conditions. The field of view (108 metres at 1000 metres) is 10 per cent narrower than the EL 10x32 (120 metres – the same as my Zeiss 10x52 Victory binoculars), but I soon got used to this slight handicap of the field of view is only slightly less than the much larger EL 10x42 (112 metres). If this is a real concern, you can consider the 8x32 model, which has a more generous 132-metre field of view. My main concern was the modest close focus distance (three metres), which is sub-par for modern binoculars. That said, the only time I struggled with this was when looking at insects.

Build quality has been substantially improved. Like the top-end Swarowskis, these binoculars are nitrogen-filled and watertight to four metres. The small aluminium and polycarbonate chassis has been replaced with a stronger and lighter magnesium housing. I used the loaned CL Companion for three weeks and had no qualms about subjecting it to the full range of birder rigours.

It was with considerable reluctance that I finally packed up the CLs and reverted to my own binoculars. I’ve always valued my Zeiss 10x32s because they are so small and compact, but they felt decidedly chunky compared to the CL Companion. At about R19 000, the Companions are not a cheap option, but they are only 60 per cent the price of the EL 10x32. They are aptly named – small and light enough to take everywhere you go. If Swarovski improve the close focus, I’ll be sorely tempted to choose them as my full-time binoculars.

PETER RYAN

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