

AVIAN ED82 MAGNESIUM

On paper it looks like good value, but does it pack a punch optics-wise? Matt Merritt finds out

There's a good lens hood, with sighting device, completing the all-round feel of excellent build quality

The ridged helical focus wheel was a big plus point in cold weather – it's easy to use while wearing gloves

Two eyepieces – zoom and wide-angle – are available. They screw into the body, eliminating any danger of accidental release

Rubber armoring protects the lightweight body – this is a robust, well-built scope, but not too heavy to enjoy in the field



Ace Optics' Avian range has quietly built up a fine reputation for quality equipment at very competitive prices, so the launch of its first ED spotting scope was always going to be of interest to anyone looking to buy a good all-round scope without breaking the bank.

At first sight, with its two-tone colour scheme and helical focus wheel, it resembles something from the Nikon Fieldscope range. Those scopes often divided opinion in terms of looks, and I suspect the same might be the case here, with the appearance best described as chunky, and robust, rather than ultra-streamlined as the fashion tends to be these days.

Of course, though, good looks are both subjective and (almost certainly) pretty low down on most buyers' list of desirable qualities for a scope.

No, the optics are what really matters, and it's there that the ED82 scores highly (much the same was true of the Nikons, I seem to recall).

There are two available eyepieces – a 25-75x zoom, and a 30x wide angle. I tried the former first (it comes with the scope), and was both impressed and slightly frustrated.

FACTFILE

Price: £599 with zoom eyepiece (wide-angle eyepiece £139)

Dimensions: 390mm x 90mm x 155mm

Weight: 1950g

Close focus: 5m

Field of view: Wide-angle 42yds

(@1,000yds)

Eye relief: 14.8mm-

16.3mm

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Impressed, because the image is bright and sharp. The contrast is good, too, and the colour natural, and that old bugbear of optics in the budget and mid-priced ranges – chromatic aberration, or colour fringing – is all but absent.

So far, so good, and my frustrations, I should say immediately, have little to do with this make or model of scope, and everything to do with a personal dislike of zoom eyepieces. In all but a very few (and very expensive) zooms, the field of view, to me, feels rather claustrophobic and restrictive, and that was the case here.

The zoom itself was fine, although after around 40x magnification, I started to see the optical quality dropping off a little. You'd have to decide just how much you need that extra magnification, and that might depend on where you do most of your birdwatching.

So, what about my preferred type of eyepiece, the 30x wide-angle eyepiece? Well, it was a pleasure to use, in every respect. It's comfortable, for a start, even in very extended use, and best of all it enables you to get every bit of value from that ED glass.

All those positives noted earlier – bright, sharp, good

contrast and natural colour – are there again, but what's immediately noticeable is that there's little or no fall-off in image quality right up to the edges. That gives it a walk-in feel (field of view feels wider than the quoted 42yds@1,000yds, and makes scanning large flocks, or great expanses of mudflat, a much more relaxing experience).

Focusing is precise but easy – I didn't have to search too hard for it at any stage.

Again, colour aberration was notable by its absence, while viewing in murky conditions was extremely impressive. It's a totally personal call, but that low-light performance is always going to be a bigger draw for me than some extra magnification – to me, the 30x eyepiece makes the most of the scope's very considerable virtues.

Both eyepieces attach securely by screwthread, all part of what's generally excellent build quality.

The focus mechanism falls into the same category. Helical wheels are another feature that often split birders, but I have no problem with them. When they're well made, as here, they're a positive boon in colder weather. The helical surface made it easy to grip while wearing thick gloves, and the wheel travelled smoothly and never too loosely (it took 0.75 clockwise turns from close focus to infinity).

There's a good lens hood, a rotating collar with a satisfyingly chunky adjusting nut, and an excellent stay-on case for the whole thing, although I should also add that the glass shrugged off rain well, and was easy to clean when necessary.

Despite my reservations about zooms (and there will be times when any birder is glad of one), this adds up to a very good value package. For £600, you get a well-built ED scope and zoom eyepiece – at that price, you could easily add the wide-angle eyepiece (£139) and stay-on case to have all bases covered, and still pay considerably less than with some of the alternatives out there.

First week with the Avian ED82 magnesium

