Star Guide: Telescope tips for the experienced

By Tony Berendsen

Through all the years of my interest in telescopes and astronomy I've met many amateur astronomers who have progressed from novice to advanced. The usual progression involves purchasing larger and large apertures to see fainter and fainter objects through the eyepiece. I call this the search for the largest light bucket.

I have to say that I understand that journey. But telescope systems today offer much more than aperture. It's not just about the light bucket anymore.

A couple decades ago I would have never ever thought of purchasing a computerized telescope. I was completely abhorred with the idea of doing anything less than pulling out my Norton Star Atlas and star hopping through the cosmos for hours, guided by paper charts. I, too, was on the light bucket path, until I bought a computerized Celestron telescope, and the cosmos became bigger than ever, even with a modest size aperture.

Computerized telescopes not only offer a built in catalog of thousands of objects to pick from, they can take you on a computer automated tour of the night sky, providing information about what you are seeing through the eyepiece, and even suggesting interesting objects near to where the scope is pointing. I had no idea what I had been missing.

So for this Christmas, for someone with a solid intermediate interest in observing, I'd suggest purchasing a **Nexstar telescope**. For a modest price the Nexstar mount is very solid, and 6 inches of aperture will give good views of the best deep sky objects. If you add a **SkyPortal Module**, the scope can be

operated with a smartphone using the SkyPortal app enabling celestial navigation by touching a digital star map.

Telescopes help the experienced star gazer see better. Photo/Celestron

For the advanced interest in observing, I recommend the scope that changed my mind about owning a computerized telescope, the **CPC 1100 Deluxe HD**. I purchased a CPC 1100 about 10 years ago and it has accompanied me flawlessly to share views of the cosmos to thousands of people. From snow laden slopes of 18 degrees to warm summer temps on the shore of Lake Tahoe the scope has been rock solid. Its aperture of 11 inches offers about 1,600 eyeballs of light gathering power, and since its optical tube and mount are one piece, it is amazingly simple to setup. It’s not the 16-inch light bucket I’d been dreaming of having some day, but it is the scope that exponentially expanded my knowledge of our galaxy and beyond.

Finally, don’t under value the need for a quality telescope mount, for if a telescope’s optical tube is its eye, the mount is its mind and body. It’s not just for steady and accurate pointing for visual viewing, but for successful astrophotography. Celestron has fulfilled that need this year with a re-engineered German Equatorial Mount, the CGX.

Here’s what Celeston’s product manager Bryan Cogdell had to say about their new mount: “For me the best thing about the mount overall is the load capacity to weight ratio of the mount. That was a key design goal. In other words, for its size, it holds a lot more telescope than other mounts of this size range. The ergonomics are my second favorite part of the mount. From the carry handles to the new polar alignment adjustment that can be made with a full instrument load on the mount, I find it easier to setup and align the CGX than other mounts of this size, and on the performance side, the smoother drive system, with belt driven worms, the mount slews smoothly and more confidently even if the telescope is unbalanced.”

So, if you are looking to put something under the tree this holiday for an astronomy enthusiast, think about a telescope, or a new mount. Also, be prepared to be amazed with views of the cosmos with your proud backyard astronomer.

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