

Hot Products

BY THE EDITORS OF
SKY & TELESCOPE

Our 11th annual roundup of Hot Products highlights the most intriguing new astronomy gear in the worldwide market.

for 2009

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE the editors of *Sky & Telescope* have conducted an in-depth survey of products entering the astronomical marketplace, selecting ones especially noteworthy for publication in an annual roundup. And each year the release of our “Hot Product” list has become more of an event in the community. We begin our process by combing through hundreds of advertisements and websites looking for things that are new. But just because something is new doesn’t mean we consider it “hot.” To make the cut, we need to see a product as offering a new technology, a simple solution to an old problem, or sometimes just a remarkably low price. Whether or not you agree with our picks, we hope you’ll enjoy reading about the products that intrigued us the most.

● **DDM85**

U.S. price: about \$18,000
Astro Systeme Austria
astrosysteme.at

◀ **NO GEARS**

It may look like just another high-quality German equatorial mount from the outside, but a peak inside Astro Systeme Austria’s DDM85 is like glimpsing the future. DDM stands for direct-drive mount. There are no gears — the mount’s axes themselves are an integral part of the drive motors. In addition to doing away with common problems such as periodic error associated with worm-gear drives, a direct-drive mount can immediately correct unpredictable tracking errors caused by, say, wind gusts. Direct-drive systems are found in some of today’s most advanced professional telescopes, but this is the first time one is being offered in a commercial mount. The DDM85 can carry 65 kilograms (140 pounds) of equipment, and the company is planning to introduce smaller and larger versions in the near future.



BIG BARGAIN BINOCULARS ▶

Nothing seems to intrigue astronomical observers, novice and veteran alike, more than large-aperture binoculars. In addition to the comfort of letting you observe with both eyes, and the intuitive, correct-image views, binoculars let you drink in huge expanses of sky with a single look. And the 110-mm (4.3-inch) objectives on two new binocular models from Garrett Optical have more light-gathering power than any other binocular in their price range. The Signature 20x110 model offers a magnification of 20x and a 2.7° field of view, while the Signature 28x110 binocular covers a 2.3° field at 28x. An unusual feature of both models is their ability to use standard 1¼-inch astronomical filters, which screw into recessed threads around the eye lens of each eyepiece. The 21-inch-long binoculars weigh 16 pounds (7¼ kg) and are supplied with an adjustable mounting post, lens caps, a lens-cleaning tool, and a hard-sided carrying case.



● 110-mm binoculars

U.S. price: \$649.95
Garrett Optical
garrettoptical.com

◀ EASY TRACKING

The StarShoot AutoGuider from Orion Telescopes & Binoculars is so affordable that now even casual astrophotographers can justify the cost of being freed from the tedium of manually guiding a telescope during long exposures. Reviewed in last November's issue, page 43, the StarShoot AutoGuider is supplied with

● StarShoot AutoGuider

U.S. price: \$249.95
Orion Telescopes & Binoculars
oriontelescopes.com

powerful, yet easy-to-use software for stand-alone operation (you must supply your own PC computer running Windows XP or Vista), or it can be used in conjunction with popular camera-control software packages.



ALAN DYER

◀ DRIVE YOUR LIGHTBRIDGE

The folks at JMI Telescopes are famous for their innovative after-market accessories. There's no better example than the Train-n-Track (T-N-T) drive system for all models of Meade's Light-Bridge Dobsonians. Easy-to-install motors drive the telescope's azimuth and altitude motions to keep objects in the eyepiece without you pushing the scope. A small, rechargeable battery powers the system for up to 12 hours of operation. Other than a handful of small screw holes, installation of the T-N-T drive doesn't require permanent modification of the telescope,

● **T-N-T Drive**
 U.S. price: from \$424
JMI Telescopes
jimsmobile.com

and thanks to slip clutches, the system doesn't interfere with the scope's manual motions.



JMI TELESCOPES

PRECISION INDEXING ▼

Apogee's new motorized filter wheel for its popular Alta high-performance CCD cameras has a novel positive-indexing feature that precisely positions filters in the same location each time they are changed. This is important when you are making flat-field calibration frames, which produce imaging artifacts when dust specks and filter variations don't align properly with the corresponding light frames. Carousels are available for nine 50-mm round or seven 50-mm square filters. The unit can also operate independently via a USB computer connection.

● Apogee Filter Wheel

U.S. price: \$1,899
Apogee Instruments
ccd.com



APOGEE INSTRUMENTS