



GPO RANGEGUIDE 2800 10X32 BINOCULARS

A compact, powerful rangefinding binocular with serious features for today's mountain hunter

By Selwyn Smith

Following the success of their flagship 10x50 rangefinder line (NZRod&Rifle Vol 41, Issue 1 - 2019), German Precision Optics (GPO) have launched one of the best value compact rangefinding binoculars to hit the New Zealand market.

GPO are a mid-upper tier optics manufacturer who cleverly outsource the manufacturing of major components, then assemble in-house. This ensures best-practice quality control while benefitting from volume production of component parts through specialised manufacturers - a smart way to leverage the economies of scale of global specialists without having to invest in expensive fixed tooling. GPO can adapt and change models and features at will to ensure they're ahead of the curve with the latest features that discerning hunters demand.

Let's take a closer look at their latest model: the Rangeguide 2800 10x32 Binoculars.

UNWRAPPED

The factory box is typically European - quality construction and nicely detailed. Sliding the lid reveals a compact binocular, a sturdy strap with quick-detach fittings (a thoughtful idea given the growing acceptance of a binocular caddy), and a smart, robust carry case - again featuring a detachable shoulder strap. This compact case will easily slip into your day pack and is sturdy enough to protect against a serious fall or being dropped.

There are separate lens covers that provide solid protection to the all-important ocular and objective lenses; these attach to the binocular strap - another well-thought-out

feature, so they don't get lost.

THE BINOCULARS IN DETAIL

Black armour coating hides a magnesium body and hinge - this is a tough finish and will stand up to plenty of knocks such as being bounced around on the truck dash or hard field use.

Pull-out eye cups to suit those requiring bifocals are easy to adjust, and importantly, have a half notch for those who prefer this setting - I used this setting for most of the two weeks that I spent trialling these optics on the hills.

Both barrels have a separate dioptre adjustment ring behind the eye cups, with markings indicating a 'zero' setting along with a coloured indicator line showing the setting on the adjustment ring. Adjustment was firm and stayed put once set. It was great to see a real-world bino (not the ultra-compact where adjustment gets quite finicky) with ocular lenses able to be adjusted individually. For most of us, each eye's visual acuity differs, and this bino allows truly bespoke adjustment - an essential feature for anyone with glasses. There is still a parallax adjustment on the main adjustment wheel in the usual spot straddling the two barrels.

The main adjustment wheel was less rigid than the ocular lens dials. This meant adjustment was simple, but the wheel also moved every time I pulled the binos out of the bino caddy. Adjustment was so easy once the two ocular rings were set that initially, I actually enjoyed resetting the binos every time they saw daylight. Getting a sharp, clear and perfectly focussed image through these binoculars became seamless, so for those hunters who struggle to adjust binoculars to get a clear focus, these will have strong appeal.

However, despite the ease of adjustment, after a week of use, I was starting to lose a bit of patience with the need to keep resetting the main adjustment wheel at every glassing opportunity. My usual Zeiss 8x30 Classic and 10x42 Leica binoculars never needed refocussing after being hauled out of the bino caddy, so the adjustment ring needs to be stiffer. This seems a perfect option for a pull-out main adjustment ring that's pushed back in to lock the setting. Why have binocular manufacturers

not incorporated such a simple feature?

The upper left barrel has the GPO emblem embedded into it and the right barrel has two rubber buttons inset atop the black armour. The front button is the larger of the two and initiates the rangefinder. The smaller button right behind the main rangefinding button houses the adjustment mechanism. The CR2 battery is accessed by a protruding screw cap under the left barrel and is easily changed with a coin or knife blade.

Ergonomically, the binoculars were easy to hold - even with one hand - due to their size and lack of weight. Your index finger immediately settles on the rangefinding button, so positioning is spot on.

CLARITY

With a field of view of 112m at 1000m, they stack up incredibly favourably to the very best 10x42 binoculars (generally about 115m). Edge-to-edge clarity was very good, images were sharp and clear, and many hours of glassing saw no eye strain whatsoever. Alongside the Vortex 10x42 they were a real step up. The Leica Trinovid 10x42s and Zeiss Classic 10x40s - both top-end Euro optics - are in a class of their own; however, the GPO unit wasn't far behind them in clarity and image resolution.

Lenses are multi-coated, as we'd expect today, and importantly, feature HD lenses to help reduce glare and enhance contrast.

At just 690 grams, these binoculars are truly lightweight and noticeably lighter than virtually all other rangefinding binoculars. In comparison, Leica's 10x32 rangefinding binoculars weight 870 grams and fetch twice the price. Everyone who picked the GPO Rangeguides up for the first time commented very favourably on their compact size and lack of weight. ▶



ABOVE:

The GPO Rangeguide 2800 10x32 showing the rangefinding button (arrow) and settings button (M). Note the tiny laser aperture and receiver lens aperture - a truly powerful unit.

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LEFT:

Individual dioptre adjustment means any eyesight preference can be catered for. Note the sturdy screw underneath housing the battery.

ABOVE:

Rain ... hail ... dunking in a creek. The GPO unit has no issues with getting wet.



When spotting for another shooter or tracking a moving animal on a far hillside – being able to measure distance with both eyes while focussing on a distant animal in the tight stuff is where these binoculars really come into their own.

ABOVE:
Red OLED readings are clear and concise. The unit has numerous optional settings to suit any preference.

BELOW:
Readings from the top of Kaika Beach to the yacht and dinghy mentioned in the text – nearly 2.5kms with a tricky reflective background. Outstanding performance by the Rangeguide 2800.



THE LASER

Having dragged a separate rangefinder around alongside my binoculars for the last 10 years, incorporating a top-end laser rangefinder in a compact binocular was a real novelty. Most hunters have poor ability to judge distance with the naked eye – gullies, rolling ridges and lack of a clear reference point in big tussock country have made many a liar out of hunters trying to guesstimate distance on the hill. A rangefinder is now a critical tool for today's modern big- (and small-) game hunter to ensure shots are taken ethically and within the capabilities of the hunter and rifle-cartridge-scope set-up. Incorporating the ranging feature within the binocular speeds up target engagement no end.

Time and time again, I'd be in a position where the binos are out and I'd have merely a split second to get behind the butt to settle crosshairs before the animal is gone – precious time wasted trying to get a distance reading from a separate device has cost me on more than a few occasions where animals are flighty or have had too much hunting pressure. When spotting for another shooter or tracking a moving animal on a far hillside – being able to measure distance with both eyes while focussing on a distant animal in the tight stuff is where these binoculars really come into their own. This is far superior to trying to assess distances with a monocular rangefinder.

The laser is engaged by pushing the larger, forwardmost button on the top of the right barrel. One push of the button and an OLED red circle appears in the centre of view. Pushing this button again gives the distance reading and shows the angle of incline. Holding the button down allows rapid readings for moving

targets and will recalculate and measure four times per second, which is truly world class.

The smaller button directly behind the main button accesses the adjustment functions:

1. Choice of imperial or metric: users can switch between yards/metres.
2. Brightness: can be adjusted from settings 1-9, and there's also an option with auto-illumination control which self-adjusts depending on the ambient brightness – what a great feature. I tended to use #8 in low light and foggy conditions, while #5 was about right for most other situations in reasonable daylight.
3. Temperature (Celsius or Fahrenheit) as well as air pressure and humidity: more great features.
4. Scan feature: this can be set to either 'Best' or 'Last' – allowing the unit to settle on either the most powerful laser bounce or the last reading taken.

IN THE FIELD

Not only was I able to rattle off the distances of every animal we saw with the push of a button, but the ranging ability of this unit is also truly world class. I tested the unit on Stewart Island for a week and was able to sit on the hills overlooking Kaika Beach and measure the distance to a yacht moored behind Salty Beach (2312m). The dinghy on the beach to the rear measured 2472m and was the maximum distance I could get against the thick Port Adventure bush.

In the high country a couple of weeks later, I was able to range well beyond the 2800-metre advertised distance against schist rocks and flat-faced hillsides (needed to get a decent reflection of the class 1 laser). The maximum range was 2879m. Again, this is outstanding performance – many units I've used struggle to get anywhere near their advertised distances.

The distance measurement sits alongside the angle of incline and the temperature. The true ballistic range (angle/slope adjusted) is the most critical figure a hunter needs, so it gets a big tick for this being one of the measurement options the system can default to. Furthermore, barometric readings can be transposed straight to your app for accurate dial-up at longer distances. Another big tick.

The latest rangefinders have Bluetooth connectivity and a full assembly of options to feed into a ballistics app. While this is an expensive upgrade on many competing models, hopefully GPO add this feature to their next release.

Fog and clag are the nemesis of lasers, and when the easterly clag suddenly blanketed us, the rangefinder battled to get a reading past 50m; I found it best to wait until I got some reasonable visibility rather than trying to fight the clag.

SPLIT-SECOND READING

The following week, we were in bigger tussock country, and again it was raining. This caused no issues for this unit, as it's waterproof to 100 millibars. Fog drifted throughout the day and visibility was patchy. The 10x32s did their best in the poor light conditions, and we were able to locate six deer on the far faces ranging from just under 1km to 2.47kms away.

"1872m away – and it looks steep." That was the remark from Haddon as he poured over the 10x32s assessing the biggest stag we could see.

"Yep, no place for old men, Haddon," I replied as I threw my gear back into my pack and tore off down the slippery slope towards the river.

Haddon and Rob were talking to each other on the radios as I crossed the river to charge up the big face. "Looks like we may ►



ABOVE:
Fog is the nemesis of distance readings – it's best to wait until you get some clear air before testing the limits of a laser rangefinder.

BELOW:
Compact and powerful enough for the most demanding high-country hunter. Big stags are generally in the most remote high country where weight and performance are critical.



have lost the stag.”

“Yep, he’s drifted over the top.”

I picked up the pace to try and cut the animal off at the top of the rise. I was only 400m up the slope when I saw a set of ears, followed by a head peering over the tussock. I stood still. The inquisitive hind couldn’t quite figure me out. She strained her neck forward as far as she could over the tussock to get a better view. A yearling appeared beside her and mimicked her gaze. Then suddenly, some antlers appeared behind the nosy hind. I knew straight away this animal wasn’t a trophy and probably needed taking out of the gene pool.

I quietly dropped down behind the tussock in front of me and tried to get my rifle out of the scabbard, flick off the neoprene scope cover and chamber a round with some level of urgency – all while yanking the GPOs out to get a split-second reading: 334m.

The hind had decided to depart, with the spiker following. The stag was starting to drift after them. I hurriedly dialled, throwing the forend over the closest tussock. The

crosshairs settled on his shoulder, and I squeezed off just as the front shoulder was disappearing behind the hillside. The audible whack of a solid hit echoed back. I could see legs flailing and antlers thrashing above the tall tussock as I chambered another 7mm SAUM round ... just in case. The second round wasn’t needed.

“He’s down!” I announced over the radio. Rob and Haddon couldn’t see the action, but upon hearing the shot, quickly ran around the face to get a glimpse of the drama.

CONCLUSION

Compact, lightweight and boasting world-class laser performance, the GPO Rangeguide 2800 10x32 binoculars really do perform well beyond their size. Any serious mountain hunter looking for good rangefinding binoculars in an ultralight package would be hard pressed to beat these GPOs. At an RRP of \$2,249, they represent extremely good value. ■

RRP \$2,249

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