

CHOOSING A FIRST TELESCOPE

(The Important Questions!)

1) What do you want to use it for?

- Moon & Planets?
- Deep sky objects?
- Astrophotography?

Traditionally, refractors and cassegrains are considered better for the Moon and planets, whilst larger aperture reflectors are better for faint deep sky objects. However, this is by no means a hard and fast rule. Astrophotography really requires a driven mount, preferably equatorial. Any of the 3 main telescope types can be used for imaging.

2) Where do you want to use it?

- In town?
- In the country?

Viewing faint, deep sky objects in a light polluted area is difficult. The Moon and planets are not seriously affected by light pollution. Eyepiece filters, which get rid of a lot of the orange glow of streetlamps can be used and do help.

3) How portable must it be?

Will you be able to pop it easily into the car to go to the Astronomy Group or a dark site? Will you be able to lift it into the garden without giving yourself a hernia? Dobsonian reflectors above 6" are quite a challenge for one person to move around.

4) How much spare time do you have?

Nowadays you can choose if you want to spend time learning the sky and hunting down targets or press a button and have a 'GoTo' scope do it for you. Equatorial mounts need to be polar aligned to allow easy manual tracking of the sky. Reflectors need to be collimated every so often to make sure the optics are aligned. Depending on storage space and portability, you may also need put the scope together each time before use.

5) How much spare room do you have?

Some systems break down into a box for storage, whilst others collapse down into a much smaller volume. Some Dobsonians can't be and have to be stored 'as is'.

6) Is it for a child, adult or both?

The eyepiece on a Dobsonian can be quite high up, so a child may require a step to be able to see. The more complicated the setting up procedure, the less likely a child is to want to use it (this also goes for most adults too!)

7) How 'technosavvy' are you?

Computerised scopes can be a bit daunting at first, but once you become familiar with the hand controller they can be very straightforward to set up and use. They will require a power supply, preferably not AA batteries! Short exposure imaging can be done without a PC, but longer than a couple of minutes will require a computer or other gadgetry. Polar alignment also needs to be much better when imaging than when simply viewing.

8) What is your budget?

Telescopes from mainstream manufacturers such as Skywatcher or Celestron can be had for about £70 upwards. Generally, the more solid the mount and the better the optics, then the more pleasurable the viewing experience will be.

Remember, the worst scope you can buy is the one you'll never use (for whatever reason), but if you consider these questions before you decide then you'll be in a good position to make the right choice for you.