

I'm not a robot



As an avid backpack hunter and now guide/outfitter, I am always looking for creative ways to shed weight from my pack. However, sometimes the juice isn't worth the squeeze and some of the lightest gear just won't hack it when it comes to durability or functionality. This has led me at times to fall back on a slightly heavier piece of gear that just works better. Swarovski in my opinion has never been a company to sacrifice any level of quality for weight savings so when they released the new ATC/STC 17-40x56 spotting scope I was immediately intrigued.Swarovski ATC 17-40x56mm Spotting ScopeMy Experience With Small SpottersI have owned some of these "baby" spotters in the past, such as the Vortex razor 50mm and the Kowa 55mm spotter. Both of those small scopes left me wanting. The razor lacked clarity compared to alpha glass. And the Kowa had a narrow field of view with an eyepiece that felt similar to looking through a tunnel. Still, the Kowa 55mm was the best small spotting scope to date and I packed it around for a couple of years. It had great clarity, however, I just could never fall in love with the overall viewing experience. I reverted back to the tried and true 65mm spotting scope, with a Leica APO Televid 25-60x65mm.Swarovski's new baby spotter in the palm of my hand.Swarovski ATC!Then Swarovski announced the release of the ATC/STC line and I immediately purchased one on backorder. I knew that I would have to personally test this in the field against some of the top 65mm spotting scopes if I was going to consider packing it after my Leica. When I received the ATC, I was shocked at its compact size. It might actually be a bit of getting lost inside my pack! It weighed just a shade over two pounds naked. So far, so good, but I would need field time to really test it holr its own. Read more here on the Swarovski website.Swaro ATC vs Leica APO Televid: a late-season blacktail hunt. I took the Swaro ATC out to give some open country, comparing it against my Leica. I was immediately impressed with the clarity of the little spotter. It was sharp from edge to edge and even at distances beyond a mile, it seemed to deliver very crisp images of deer. The viewing experience through the wide integrated eyepiece was nothing short of fantastic. It was exactly the same as looking through a wide-angle 65mm spotting scope eyepiece. This thing was a pleasure to sit behind.In the twilight category, the ATC gathered light very well at dusk, however (and obviously), the 65mm won't in this field but not by much.As we know, the smaller the objective size in a scope of equal quality, the less light it will gather--there's is no way around this so if weight is not a factor then carrying the largest objective possible only makes sense. For me personally, the weight savings was worth the marginal loss in light. The Leica was getting the boot.Glassing up deer with the new ATC.Swarovski ATC vs Swarovski ATSFast-forward to a late-season fall black bear hunt with a client, and wouldn't you know he packed along a Swarovski AT5 HD 20-60x 65mm spotting scope! Another great opportunity to give the little ATC a head-to-head against a top competitor. To set the stage, we were glassing deer at about 1.5 miles away on an overcast afternoon. The scopes were side-by-side on tripods with both zoom set to 30x.Going back and forth I immediately noticed the larger field of view in the ATC and how buttery smooth the zoom and barrel focus adjustment were on this new scope. To my eyes, the clarity of the image seemed to favor the ATC as well, although just slightly. I'm not sure if this is due to there are updated glass coatings in the small spotter, or if it is because it is all one integrated piece without a removable eyepiece, or the fact that this particular scope is brand new. But it seemed to be just a touch sharper than the AT5. The viewing experience also was a little better in the ATC, but this may be due to the 20-60x eyepiece on the ATC being more "tunnel" like. It may have been a better comparison against the favored 25-50x wide-angle eyepiece from Swaro. Do note that the ATC only reaches out to 40x, so if maximum zoom is a factor then, the higher zoom range of the AT5 would trump the smaller scope and it will certainly gather a little more light being that the AT5 has a larger objective diameter. The ATC 17-40x56mm side by side with the AT5 20-60x65mm HD spotting scope.ConclusionI think Swarovski nailed it with this new spotting scope, it will be in my pack for years to come. There is no such thing as the perfect piece of glass; to gain in one aspect will be to sacrifice in another. However the small amount of light gathering and zoom given up in this small spotter is marginal compared to the weight and size savings that it offers. This scope punches far above its weight class and you can feel confident in packing it along. Order yours here.Feel free to reach out with any questions you might have here.Click here to learn more about Live Wild Outfitters.Read the rest of our optics reviews here. Released in 2017, the Swarovski BTX stormed the high-power binocular scene. In my opinion, the BTX is a revolutionary optic that changes how hunters glass for game. The BTX is really an eyepiece that attaches to Swarovski's modular ATX spotting scope system. Power depends on the chosen objective lens:30X @ 65mm& 85mm objectives35X @95mm& 115mm objectives(See an in-depth review of the ATX system here by Rokslide optics writer, Matt Cashell.)The BTX was born out of demand for a high powered binocular that Swarovski Optik first created nearly 30 years ago. Back then, they made a product called the Twin Telescope. It was two 30x75mm spotting scopes paired into a large binocular. It worked very well and a small cult of users fell for the Twin Telescope. But it was expensive, big, heavy, and not easy to transport, so a substantial number of these were never sold. Consequently, production stopped, but the demand in the USA still remained. With the creation of the modular objectives of the ATX system in 2012, Swarovski was able to answer that demand with the BTX.The AdvantageSo what does more than doubling the power of the 15X really do for a hunter besides keep him driving old trucks?I first discovered the value of the ultra high-mag bino on a high country scout back in 2019. My BTX (permanently left on my doorstep-signature required- just two days before I was leaving. It was big, heavy, a little cumbersome, but balanced well on a tripod, stood in my driveway and pointed it at a mountain located 13 miles (as verified by my onX Hunt App) south of town. Even at that distance, if an elk or deer would have been on an open slope or skyline, I knew I could have identified it. I quickly made space for it on my horse panniers then once on the mountain, my Stone Glacier Krux EVO 330two days later, sitting on a ridge at 9500 feet, I was finding and classifying bucks better than I could with a high quality spotter. With both eyes open, (the way God intended us to see) the BTX became a top tool in my optics kit.Two years later, and maybe 40 hours use, I've only grown to love the BTX more. I've glassed bucks at nine miles (couldn't see the antlers but by body size, behavior, and location, I knew what it was). I've found bedded and obscured bucks I'm sure I'd have never have seen with any other optic.The BTX picked up this nice buck bedded at 2.4 miles as verified by onX Hunt appEven though its power is 15X less than the upper end of my Swarovski AT5 25-50X80mm, with both eyes open, I just see more. Glassing effectively isn't just about power, but a comfortable viewing experience, keeping you on the glass longer and seeing more efficiently. With both eyes open, your depth perception is at play, and picking up detail is easier and faster. The amazing edge-to-edge clarity makes you think you're watching an HD movie on the big screen.The BTX does have a learning curve and some disadvantages that you need to consider before trading in the wife's new car.DistanceWhile I've used the BTX successfully at under a mile, I find it's real sweet spot begins there. Because the FOV is only 96° at 1,000 yards, (59% smaller than the 234° of my 15X SLCs) it's harder to effectively glass at under a mile. I'll use my 8x ELs or those 15x if I'm restricted to that distance. However, if I'm in a place where I've got a one to a five mile section of country to glass, this is where the BTX shines. While I've glassed those ranges with a 15x, the BTX just does it better.Glassing at four miles, the BTX is in its grooveAs I've said for years in my articles, when you start glassing that much country, you're odds skyrocket of finding game (Top 10 Glassing Mistakes)!I add the Magnification Extender (ME) 1.7X. I can go farther, but that accessory is better suited to classifying antlers or unknown objects (more on that below).FOV Advantages and Limitations!In not contradicting myself here, but the advantage of the BTX is the seemingly wide FOV. I say seemingly because it's actually smaller compared to the 15X as noted above, but with the design, the image seems larger than the area your eyes typically focus on. The incredible 21mm of eye relief on the BTX lends itself to maximizing FOV. The 15X SLC has "only" 16mm of eye relief. This makes it easier to settle in and scan across, or up and down the view than with my 15X.It could very well be that the smaller FOV of the BTX just forces me to concentrate more (the more I glass, the more I believe there is one lower brain stem--that is involuntary--input going on that makes completely understanding glassing difficult.) This helps me look at more detail in the image compared to other optics where my brain keeps telling me to move the optic. The incredible edge-to-edge clarity only adds to the usable FOV.To note, even with the generous 21mm of eye relief, I still couldn't see the max FOV when wearing my eyeglasses. That could be my particular eyeglasses, but do make sure you try the BTX before buying if you're a four-eye-kind-of-guy.MirageNot unique to the BTX, mirage is noticeable in all high power optics. I mention it because even if you find that great vantage with the one to five miles of country to view, if conditions aren't right, you might be limited by mirage. Not a lot you can do about it, but you'll thank the good Lord for days with high clouds and when you can be out at first and last light as those are often the best conditions for the BTX. I've found that if I can change my viewing angle, that can sometimes alleviate mirage until conditions improve.Edge of Daylight PerformanceI've only used the 95mm objective and can say with it's 2.7mm exit pupil, you won't be the last man standing 40 minutes after sundown, however, low light performance is still pretty good. With Swarovski's newly released mammoth 115mm objective lens, the exit pupil bumps up to 3.1, but still below the 15X SLC's 3.7. The BTX is very specialized and won't be a do-everything-for-everyone optic.Tripods/Heads/ConsiderationsThe BTX is best suited for Swarovski CT tripod and the 101 Head (my video review here). That's a big carbon footprint to pack around, but you'll find that the Outdoorsmans Standard (reviewed here) will do the job well, saving you ounces and bulk. The Outdoorsmans Pan Head is well suited for the BTX if all you own is the Micro Pan, with the BTX's great balance. You can get by,I've also used the BTX on my SLiK 624 tripod (review here) and on backcountry hunts successfully when paired with the Pan Head. In fact, that's what I prefer if I'm packing the set-up on my back.As the BTX is an angled optic, you'll save a few inches of tripod height compared to a straight optic.Swarovski BTX on the Outdoorsman's Standard TripodFinally,I've used my BTX a ton on the Outdoorsmans Window Mount (review here), probably totaling over half my use-hours. Paired with the Pan Head and setting myself on a pillow so I can get above the angled ocular lenses, it's a pleasure to break down a unit from various roads and even highways. 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