

SPOTTING SCOPE

[recommendations and setup]

Next to the rifle, the most expensive single piece of gear most competitive shooters own will be a spotting scope. Since all the better scopes are expensive, it helps to research as much as possible prior to purchasing one. There should be no reason a scope can't stay with you as long as you shoot.

This is something I've put more thought into, and had experience with, over the past few years than probably any point in my shooting career. There are several very good scopes on the market and I recently have had a chance to spend an extended amount of time with several of them.

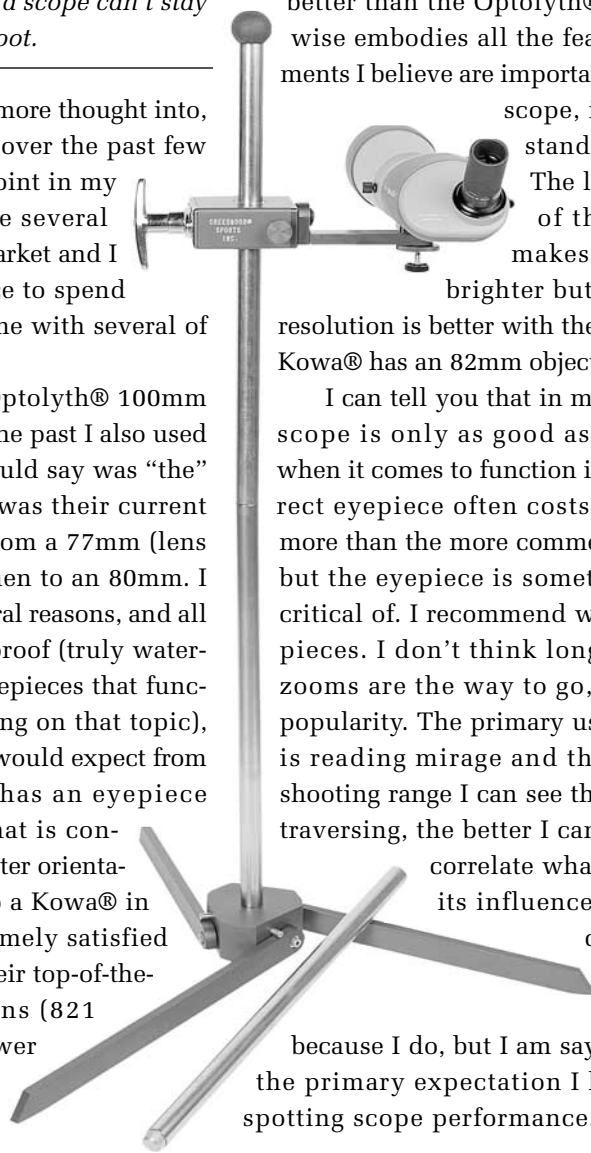
I had been using an Optolyth® 100mm for my personal scope. In the past I also used an Optolyth®, which I should say was “the” Optolyth® — whichever was their current best. I moved up to this from a 77mm (lens objective diameter) and then to an 80mm. I favored that brand for several reasons, and all still hold true: it is waterproof (truly waterproof), has tremendous eyepieces that function as I want (more coming on that topic), has the optical clarity one would expect from an expensive unit, and has an eyepiece mounting arrangement that is conducive to the scope to shooter orientation I desire. I switched to a Kowa® in 2003 and have been extremely satisfied with it. The one I use is their top-of-the-line with the fluorite lens (821 “Prolimar”) with a 32 power wide angle eyepiece. We test scopes here for clarity

by focusing on a windmill tower about a mile and a half away. Doing that we saw little difference in the Optolyth® and Kowa® (the test is how well we can see the guy wires on the tower). The optics in this scope are a little

better than the Optolyth® and it otherwise embodies all the features and elements I believe are important in a spotting scope, including outstanding eyepieces. The larger objective of the Optolyth® makes it just a little brighter but the clarity or resolution is better with the Prolimar. The Kowa® has an 82mm objective size.

I can tell you that in most instances a scope is only as good as its eyepiece, when it comes to function in use. The correct eyepiece often costs considerably more than the more commonly used part, but the eyepiece is something I'm very critical of. I recommend wide-angle eyepieces. I don't think long eye relief or zooms are the way to go, despite their popularity. The primary use of my scope is reading mirage and the more of the shooting range I can see the more mirage traversing, the better I can estimate and correlate what I'm seeing to its influence. I won't say I

care nothing about seeing shot holes, because I do, but I am saying that is not the primary expectation I have from my spotting scope performance. Seeing those



The first thing I do with a new eyepiece is remove the rubber piece that surrounds the lens and then turn the metal top down so my eye can get closer to the glass when wearing my glasses. Now the glass is more vulnerable, but I put the scope cap on to protect it when it's not being used. Closer is better. I still can't see a full field of view with my glasses on, but I can still see more area than with an extended eye relief eyepiece.

shot holes comes with or as a function of purchasing a superior unit, like an Optolyth® or Kowa®.

The first thing I do with a new eyepiece is pry off and throw away the rubber cup that covers the eyepiece then put the eyepiece in the lathe and contour the back outside edge to turn it down so my eye can get as close to the glass as possible. This effectively eliminates any need for an extended eye relief eyepiece. The idea is to get closer to it with my glasses on. When I can get closer to it with my glasses on, even if my glasses are lightly touching, I can see more field of view through my 30-32 power wide angle eyepiece than I can a straight 25 or 30 power extended eye relief eyepiece. Again, the wider field of view gives me more information. I know some like to take a variable power eyepiece and run it

to 60 power and see mirage that we sometimes can't see at 30, but if there's that little mirage and if it's that hard to see I'm probably watching the flags instead. I never liked variable power eyepieces because they don't give a good field of view.

Previously I was using an 80mm objective Optolyth® with a 20 power eyepiece. When I went to a 100mm objective, it effectively increased the power of that eyepiece so my 20 became a 30. The larger objective size functions to gather more light, and the larger the lens the more it can see. I can see more field of view through the 30 wide angle, probably another 6 or 8 targets at 300 yards, over anything else with an extended eye relief eyepiece.

I like 30-32 power. I didn't know that I would, but I do. In the past I shied away from anything over 20 power, but coupled with the larger objective the clarity and focal range is the same.

I have tried all the variables, all the long eye reliefs, all the standards, and all of the wide angles, and the 30-32 wide angle is my choice. The extra magnification also makes it easier to spot shot holes if that's what someone is looking for; it's more defining.

By my experience, the main factor in how well one can spot shot holes on a black target face at 300 yards, or more, depends on lens quality, and that's part of what you're paying for when you decide to get a top quality scope. The set up I use will do that under all but the most adverse viewing conditions, such as fog or extreme mirage coupled with undesirable light conditions. Scopes get abuse, too. No matter how careful we are it is inevitable that a scope will get knocked over and bumped and banged off things, and it is certain to get wet. It cannot fail or fog.