

The Search for a Used Scope

by Mark Coady

Many of you who do not own a telescope, yet, might often wonder how you can get a good used starter scope at a reasonable price without falling into the trap of buying a trash scope. Believe me, it's far easier to buy a piece of crap than it is to land a half-decent scope. I should know having dealt with stuff from EBay, garage sales, and the like. A lot of patience and due diligence is required.

Just like with buying new equipment, start with the professionals by checking out astronomical retailers like Efstonscience, Astromechanics, and Perceptor. They often have used telescopes that they have checked out and offer to the public at a discount much like buying a used vehicle from a reputable new car dealer. Often they list used equipment on their websites complete with photos so you can get an idea of the condition its in.

A good internet resource is www.astrobuysell.com. This is a Canadian website used by amateur astronomers country-wide to sell their surplus gear. It is financially supported by astronomical retailers who have links to their stores at the top of each page. Most amateurs will post pictures of the stuff they are selling. As with buying a used car, privately, caveat emptor – the buyer beware – is the rule, however, sales are generally on the up and up with this website as a deal gone wrong could ruin someone's reputation in the hobby. And, as an added bonus, some of the astronomical dealers will also post ads for web-only specials.

Then there are local sources like newspaper ads and Kijiji on the net. With these you have to be careful as many of these are trash scopes and the asking price is way more than what it is actually worth. If the deal looks good don't hesitate to ask the opinion of your fellow members, especially people like John Crossen who have seen more trash scopes than he'd like to have.

If the source of the scope is a garage sale the following rule of thumb applies: If it's a 60mm refractor – no more than \$20 as there will be eyepieces and other accessories to buy to make it worthwhile; if it's a cheap reflector (names like Orbitor come to mind) – no more than \$30 for the same reasons as above. If you are unsure, either don't buy it or call a fellow knowledgeable member first.

Sometimes patience rewards you and you just fall into a good deal. One day, Susan mentioned an ad she saw on Peterborough Kijiji that had a telescope that I might like. When I viewed it I figured it was possibly one of Stargazer Steve's models. Whether it was or wasn't, it was a Dob and it was going for \$60. SOLD! It did, indeed, turn out to be a Stargazer Steve creation – a 4-1/4" f/10 planetary reflector on a light weight Dobsonian mount which went for over \$300 in the late 90s. As these scopes, which are no longer made,

only came with inexpensive rifle cross-hairs for finders, I added a 6X30 right angle finderscope that I found on EBay for \$20. Since then I have added a healthy coating of fluorescent pink paint and cut down a Seymour Solar (a clone of Thousand Oaks film) solar filter to fit the tube. For under \$90 I now have a quality grab and go scope.



Mark's "New to Him" Scope

Take your time, look around, and ask questions of your fellow members. Soon you may find the good used starter scope you have been searching for.