

Out with the Old and In with the New: The Celestron Nexstar 8SE

With our move from Bridgenorth back to our cottage on Fife's Bay, I soon realized that the trees and brush had grown over so much over that past decade that astronomy from my back deck would be darn near impossible. Although a nice clearing is less than a five minute walk I was definitely not looking forward to constantly ferrying my Orion XT8 Intelliscope Dobsonian just to set up in the clear. I knew I was getting a little to old to bear its weight over long distances. The decision was made to replace the Intelliscope with a Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope.

The decision was made quite easy for me as I wanted the same aperture as the Intelliscope plus I wanted "Go To" technology and I wanted all of that in an easy-to-transport package. I also decided on Celestron as the manufacturer of choice after the recommendations of several amateur astronomers – most notably being John Crossen who has the C11 and Nexstar 6SE. So, it was out with the old as the long-serving Intelliscope was sold to fellow member Larry Hum and a brand new Celestron Nexstar 8SE telescope was purchased from Astromechanics in Barrie.

The 8SE is the largest in a line of single arm fork mounted "Go To" telescopes manufactured by Celestron. The line also includes models of 4, 5, and 6 inches in aperture. The scope is an f/10 model with a focal length of 2032 mm in a compact tube of only 17 inches in length. The OTA disengages from the fork mount for storage as does the mount from the tripod. The tripod is made of very durable steel legs that will not topple over easily. All together mount, tripod, OTA, and all of its accessories neatly pack away into two duffle bags that, together, weigh a modest 33 pounds.

The 8SE can be powered by eight AA batteries or, better still, by 12 VDC from an AC Adaptor or a power pack – which is advisable as the eight AA batteries will need changing after a single night of observing.

Setting up the 8SE is as easy as "One! Two! Three!" After turning the unit on you need to tell the onboard computer in the hand controller where you are. That can be accomplished

by using the optional plug-in GPS unit or by entering your coordinates from a hand-held GPS unit. Then you need to tell the controller what time and date it is and whether you are on daylight savings time or not. Then you align the scope on three stars. You pick one bright star in the sky and slew to it and centre it in your eyepiece. Then you hit the "Align" button and the controller asks you to move on to the next star. Repeat the process for the second and third alignment stars. At the end of the third alignment the hand controller will confirm the alignment and you are off to the races tracking down planets, nebulae, and galaxies. The neat thing about aligning this scope is that you do not need to polar align and any three bright stars will do. The 8SE's controller seems to know what should be in the sky and by triangulation performs the alignment.

Does the scope work? You bet it does! The smaller models tend to be more of a "Close To" rather than proper "Go To" scopes but this one seems to centre everything I ask it to find. And, for the most part, it keeps tracking the object as long as the hand controller is powered up. It saw first light at Buckhorn Observatory and I noticed that fellow PAA members Pat and Jean Crebar had also bought the same scope.

At \$1299 (sometimes cheaper on sale) it is one nice scope that it is a nice balance between aperture and portability. For anyone on a budget wishing to move up to a Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope I can heartily recommend it.



**Mark and his Celestron Nexstar 8SE
Photo courtesy of John Crossen**