

Plastimo 40562 £120.23

They weigh 960g and the price includes a soft case, a comfortable strap and non-captive objective and eyepiece lens caps. Prisms are BaK-4 glass, optics are multi-coated and the barrel focus turns a threaded bar that moves the eyepieces to a minimum focal length of 7m (23ft), and there is diopter adjustment on the right-hand eyepiece. Though notably crisper than any of the cheaper models, the outer third of the image softens significantly and there's distortion with straight lines bending towards the edges. The plastic strap lugs prevent the rubber non-slip doing its job and, as we saw with the very similar Dowling & Rowe, plastic construction affects durability. The eyecups are a good size and stiff enough to hold against the eyebrows.

CONTACT Bainbridge International
TEL 01489 776000
WEB www.bainbridgeint.co.uk



Central focus is easier to adjust than eyepiece focus



With diopter adjustment, these will suit anyone's eyes

Opticron Marine-3 £160

**YACHTING
MONTHLY**
Best budget buy

With a reassuring 1,122g heft of aluminium and polycarbonate, plus full rubber coating, these feel 'proper.' You get a soft case, captive lens caps, a comfy strap and a five-year parts-and-labour guarantee. No vignetting suggests BaK-4 lenses but there is visible clipping of an undersized prism. Centre field is crisp and light but straight edges curve towards the edges and colours separate. With eyepiece focus, there's no need for diopter adjustment. One observation was that they seemed more forgiving about pupil position relative to the eyepiece. Many of the binoculars on test crop the image if you're a millimetre out, but not these.

CONTACT See website for nearest dealer
TEL 01582 726522
WEB www.opticron.co.uk



A wide, cushioned strap is more comfortable



The captive protective lens caps won't go missing

Fujinon FMTR-SX £599

**YACHTING
MONTHLY**
Best on test

These 1,430g binoculars, with strap, captive caps and case, are built to US military standard, in rubber-covered aluminium, offering durability and decent non-slip. Rubber O-ring seals and nitrogen-purging ensure fog-free performance and submersibility. Prisms are BaK-4, with no clipping or vignetting, the image is virtually flat-field, crisp and bright because all optics are coated with 11-layer electron beam coating. The eyecups are a bit soft, making it hard to jam them against your eyebrows and maintain eye relief while at sea, and you have to focus each eye individually. Minimum focal length is 6m (20ft), so rig checks are possible. The lifetime warranty is reassuring.

CONTACT Fujinon
TEL 01234 572000
WEB www.fujifilm.eu



Eyepiece focus and stiff eyecups that fold down



Don't buy binoculars without captive lens caps

Steiner Commander XP £839

The most expensive but not the heaviest, due to Makrolon polycarbonate construction. They come with captive lens caps, floating strap, wooden case and a 30-year guarantee. The non-slip is good. Some vignetting suggests BaK-7 lenses but the field of vision is too clear to be anything but BaK-4. However it's not quite flat-field vision. There is light distortion at the edge of field, a touch more than the FMTR-SX, and softening of focus. Adjust the individual eyepieces to achieve the shortest focus of 6m (20ft), handy for rig checks. It's the only pair with eye cups that shut out light entirely and maintain eye relief exactly, but adjusting focus turns them too.

CONTACT See website for nearest dealer
TEL 01628 674411
WEB www.steiner-binoculars.co.uk



Great eyecups but they turn as you focus each eye



A good floating strap keeps your investment buoyant

The results

Every piece of kit *Yachting Monthly* tests is thoroughly examined against three key criteria

Performance

How close to 'flat field' vision do they get? Do the colours separate at the edge of field? Do the prisms clip the image?

Ease of use

Can you set them up to accommodate differences between eyes? Is the eye relief comfortable? Do you get a strap?

Value for money

Taking in the two factors above, do they justify their price tag? Are they worth the money and how long will they last?

Each of our three criteria are marked out of 10

Maximum possible score ▼

Plastimo 40561	2	5	9
Dowling & Rowe	1	4	7
Plastimo 40562	3	6	6
Opticron Marine-3*	6	8	8
Fujinon Mariner WPC-XL	5	8	6
Fujinon Mariner WPC-CF	7	6	6
Fujinon Fmtr-SX*	10	8	8
Steiner Commander XP	9	7	6

*Yachting Monthly recommended products - see conclusion below

Conclusion

With one accidental but conclusive exception, we were unable to test the durability that is key to a pair of yacht binoculars. They are going to knock against bulkheads, slide off benches and get wet. The Opticron is the cheapest pair that would see the season out. Without unusual and impractical levels of care, we're almost certain that none of the others would, regardless of their visual shortcomings, so the Opticron Marine-3 is our budget buy.

Having said that said, we'd urge you to see any new pair of binoculars as a precision instrument, an investment to be valued and handed down, like a fine timepiece, from generation to generation. Neither of the Fujinon Mariners was especially satisfying as they needed to be positioned so precisely on the face to avoid cropping that we couldn't see them being entirely practical at sea - and their performance didn't really impress. The Fujinon FMTR-SX, on the other hand was the best in the test, just edging past the Steiners on performance and ease of use, while costing more than £200 less.

Fujinon FMTR-SX

Its top-quality optics get very close to flat field vision and the machined aluminium construction ensures longevity

YACHTING MONTHLY
Best on test



Opticron Marine-3

Robust construction, captive lenses and user-friendly eyepieces. The optics aren't the best but the price is excellent

YACHTING MONTHLY
Best budget buy



CHOOSING THE RIGHT BINOCULARS FOR YOU



Do the eyecups collapse when you press the binoculars against the bone below your eyebrows?

1 Check the weight. A decent set may make your arms tired but it indicates robust construction and will help damp their movement at sea.

2 Are there lens caps for both ends? Are they captive? Is there a case to protect them? How about a lens cloth?

3 Unless you have 20/20 vision, you'll need to compensate with diopter adjustment or individual eyepiece focus.

4 Hold them 15cm (6in) in front of your eyes. If you can see grey 'vignettes' around

the edge, they have inferior BaK-7 lenses and the grey is incomplete internal reflection of light. If you see solid black 'clips' then the prisms are too small.

5 Hold them to your eyes with the eyepieces. Do the eyepieces collapse if pressed to keep them in place? If you wear glasses, can you fold the eyepieces down to maintain the right eye relief?

6 If there's a compass built in, is it accurate? Make sure you check it against your handbearing compass.



Pick a distant object, find out what the binoculars' compass reads, then check it against a handbearing compass

Our thanks

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Tel: 02380 846563
Web: hythesailingclub.co.uk

■ Thanks also to Philip Monk of Monk Optics, for his patience and expertise in this field, and for supplying the Fujinon and Dowling & Rowe products.
Tel: 01291 689858
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