

**Product Review: Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42**



**The amazing Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42.**

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**Product: Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42**

**Country of Manufacture: China**

**Chassis: Rubber Armoured Polycarbonate**

**Exit Pupil: 5.25mm**

**Field of View: 143m@1000m(8.14 angular degrees)**

**Eye relief: 18mm**

**Close Focus: 2m advertised, 1.8m measured**

**Coatings: Fully Multicoated optics, silver coated and phase corrected Schmidt-Pechan roof prisms**

**ED Glass: No**

**Waterproof: Yes- 3 minutes at 1.5m depth**

**Nitrogen Purged: Yes**

**Dioptre Compensation: +/- 4**

**Tripod Mountable: Yes**

**Weight: 819g advertised, 796g measured**

**Accessories: Clamshell case, logoed neck strap, microfibre lens cloth, rubber rain guard and objective lens covers, instruction sheet, warranty card**

**Warranty: 10 Years**

**Price (UK): £129.00**

Before I moved from reviewing telescope optics to the world of binoculars, I sought advice from an experienced birder living nearby my home, who could recommend a decent entry-level instrument to get me started. He suggested I try a model from Barr and Stroud. My first roof prism binocular purchase was the Barr and Stroud Sahara 8 x 42, which really impressed me and whetted my appetite for more sophisticated models marketed by the same company. That led me first to the Sierra 8 x 42 with its phase coated optics, which I could immediately discern when I compared it to the non-phase coated Sahara, showing superior brightness and contrast. From there, I took a chance on the slightly more expensive Savannah 8 x 42, which literally blew me away with its enormous field of view and razor-sharp optics. This was my first encounter with high-quality optics and led me inevitably to begin testing a large range of binoculars in different price categories and sizes in order to build a decent portfolio for the writing of my up-and-coming book. After four years of testing, I remembered that Savannah binocular that had stoked my interest on binocular optics and decided to order another unit up to see how that binocular would hold up in light of my experiences with other models. Would I still be as enamoured about the Barr and Stroud Savannah 8 x 42 after all these years?

### **Reuniting with an Old Friend**

When the package arrived, I was filled with a sense of child-like excitement, as I opened the colourful box containing the hard clamshell case housing the instrument. All the goodies I remember finding in my first Savannah binocular were inside; an instruction sheet, warranty card, neck and carry case strap. The instrument was stored inside a small plastic bag with the rubber rain guard and ocular covers already attached. The instrument was just as I

remembered it; a rather Spartan polycarbonate chassis covered in a thick rubber armouring. This is one sturdy binocular built for the great outdoors!



**The Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42 comes in a nifty clamshell case.**

The eyecups were just as I remembered too: they twist up and rigidly lock into place with a reassuring click. Eye relief is a very comfortable 18mm. That means you can easily access the entire field of view using eyeglasses as I was able to do. The central focus wheel is really great; large, smooth, accurate turning, with no free play encountered while racking it back and forth through its travel. Two full anticlockwise rotations brings you from nearest focus to infinity and a wee bit beyond. I've always been impressed with the focus wheels on all the Barr and Stroud models I've test driven over the years, and this one is no exception. They are well engineered and easy to negotiate with just a single finger.



**The Savannah has a very smooth focus wheel and comfortable twist-up eyecups that hold their positions rigidly.**

The dioptre setting is unusual: located just ahead of the focus wheel, the ring is marked with + and – to get you started and has a generous compensation range of +/- 4. I note that the Swarovski's new flagship NL Pure models have a similar mechanism. If I'm being critical, it can be easy to accidentally rotate it out of position owing to its proximity to the focus wheel, but a little practice will remedy that. Memorising your ideal setting is a good idea.

The objectives are very decently recessed to protect the lenses from rain, aeolian- borne dust and peripheral light. The ocular lenses are nice and large, making centring of your eyes child's play. The single bridge is big and bulky making holding the instrument a little bit more challenging than open bridge designs but again your hands will quickly find their happy place.





**The fully multicoated objectives lenses are very deeply set.**



**The large ocular lenses on the Savannah 8 x 42 are very easy to engage with.**

### **A Reacquaintance with the Optics**

As I went back and read through my journal notes about this instrument, I was struck by how many times I wrote words such as “brilliant,” “excellent,” “immersive” and “compelling.” But these were written as a complete tyro; what did I know about binocular optics in those early days? Well, I had a chance to compare and contrast it with an excellent 8 x 42 from GPO – specifically the Passion ED – an instrument costing more than three times the retail price of the Savannah (£129). What I uncovered was, quite frankly, shocking – but in a good way. Let me explain.



**The GPO Passion ED 8x 42(left) versus the Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42(right).**

I began, as ever, by directing a bright beam of light through the binocular to see how well it handled. Just as I reported in my first encounter with the instrument four years ago, the results were excellent. It was just as good as the GPO binocular (£404); there was very little in the way of internal reflections, no diffused light around the beam and only the tiniest hint of a diffraction spike. Testing both instruments out on a bright sodium streetlamp showed no significant reflections and no contrast-robbing diffused light around the lamp.

Next, I looked at the exit pupils of the Savannah and the results were also very good: round and with very little encroaching of peripheral light. I've included the result from the GPO Passion ED 8 x 42 for comparison.





**Left exit pupil of the Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42.**



**Left exit pupil of the GPO Passion ED 8 x 42.**

The big surprise for me was the view through the Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42. It has a great big sweet spot that I'd estimate to be about 70 per cent of its very large (8.1 degree field) field, after which mild field curvature begins to show. But even the edges are acceptably sharp. Contrast is excellent and glare suppression exemplary. Indeed, when I compared the views through this economy binocular with the GPO Passion ED 8 x 42, I came to the conclusion that I was looking through substantially the same optics. It too has the same sized sweet spot, and displays mild field curvature in the outer field of view. The Savannah was also just as good, if not a tad better at suppressing all kinds of glare, both in bright sunny conditions and on dull overcast days. It is, for example, in a completely different league to the considerably more expensive Vortex Diamondback HDs in this regard too. If anything, the GPO

Passion ED 8 x 42 displayed a shade more contrast, slightly warmer colours and slightly better colour correction on high contrast targets. But if I'm being honest, there was very little in it.

In a test conducted at sunset, I was really impressed how well the Barr & Stroud Savannah held up against the GPO Passion ED. Though the latter has a reported light transmission of 90 per cent, both instruments were very comparable and I wasn't able to detect a runaway winner. The GPO might have the edge with its dielectric mirror coatings, but the silvered roof prisms of the Savannah did a really impressive job during these low light conditions.

I conducted more tests under the stars, where I was able to verify that the collimation of the Barr & Stroud Savannah was spot on. But when I compared the GPO binocular to it, I got pretty much the same results; stars remain respectfully tight within the central 70 per cent and begin to morph slowly owing to field curvature and mild astigmatism as the field stops are approached. Only the last 10 per cent showed noticeable morphing but I deemed these results very positively indeed.

In another test carried out during daylight hours, I canvassed the opinion of two of my students, who compared and contrasted the GPO binocular to the Barr & Stroud. Their results were unanimous too; they both concluded that these instruments produced really fine images, with excellent contrast and sharpness but ultimately came out in favour of the GPO binocular. They also preferred the ergonomics of the GPO Passion ED, which is not surprising, as it's beautifully made.

I decided to take a couple of shots through the right barrel of each binocular to show you what my iPhone camera picked up. Both images were captured within minutes of each other under the same lighting conditions. The results are shown below.







**Image captured by the Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42**



### **Image captured through the GPO Passion ED 8 x 42.**

The Barr & Stroud has excellent close focus: I measured it at just 1.8m, so great for exploring the nearby world like a long-range microscope. Indeed, this kind of activity is much better suited to roof prism models compared with their Porro prism counterparts.

### **Uses**

The Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42 makes for an excellent birding binocular, with its smooth, responsive focuser. Indeed, I've enjoyed watching a group of Jays gathering acorns just a few hundred yards from my home. I've also enjoyed glassing the somewhat elusive Kingfisher up at my local pond, with the excellent sharpness making light work of picking up its beautiful blue and orange plumage. It's also great for scanning the hills around my home. It's decent aperture and large exit pupil make it a very capable astronomy binocular too. I spent an hour outside with it, enjoying the glories of a last quarter Moon in the early hours of October 18. Showpieces of the sky presented excellently in this instrument, such as the Pleiades and Hyades and, owing to its very well corrected field of view, I was able to admire the preternatural beauty of the Sword handle and Belt stars of Orion in a single field.





**An exceptional bargain.**

In conclusion, I can't recommend this instrument highly enough! Of course, there will always be sceptics who won't lift a finger to buy a unit up and do some tests, but that's their loss. Personally, I'd be more than happy using the Savannah as a go-to 8 x 42. With an age of austerity now upon us, the Barr & Stroud Savannah 8 x 42 will help a great many individuals enjoy the natural world at a price they can afford. Buy from a reputable dealer and ask them to inspect the binocular to ensure the eye cups, focuser and dioptre compensation ring are all working properly before they ship it out.

I guarantee it'll put a smile on your face!



Neil English's up-and-coming book, *Choosing & Using Binoculars: A Guide for Stargazers, Birders and Nature Enthusiasts*, will cater for all budgets.