

Cheap Observer's Report Calling All Cheap Observers

By Alex McConahay

One of the joys we get out of this hobby is that feeling when we open the box on a great new piece of equipment. It is fun to have the latest and greatest.

But does spending the bucks produce better observing or imaging?

Yes.

Discuss it and argue among yourselves, and qualify what is said if you like, but:

- Ethos are better than Naglers
- Astro Physics are better than William Optics or Stellarvue.
- Paramounts are better than Losmandys.

You have to pay for quality.

Okay, now that we have that out of the way, I would like to note that the correlation between expenditure and performance is not one to one.

Spending double does not double the quality of the experience. Furthermore, it is quite possible to enjoy this hobby and

keep within a budget.

I plan to have an article now and then in the Prime Focus showing some of the better ways to save dollars while getting the most out of the hobby.

I am going to start this month by asking you to head over to Andy's Shot Glass at <http://www.andyshotglass.com/>. (It's FREE!!!) Andy Raiford, an animation designer from Texas, believes that we can all enjoy great astronomy and not break the bank. Or, as he puts it more formally: *"My mission is to help amateur astronomers-on-a-budget to get the most for their money and the most out of their equipment."*

The screenshot shows the website for Andy's Shot Glass, which is dedicated to affordable telescopes and accessories. The main banner features a large telescope and a laptop, with the headline "Operate Your Telescope from Inside Your Home!". The website layout includes a navigation menu (HOME, GALLERY, ARTICLES, ABOUT ANDY'S SG, FORUM, PHOTO OF WEEK, WEBSTORE, KUDOS, SITEMAP) and a sidebar with "StarTarg Version 2.01" and "RED PLEXIGLASS". The main content area displays a diagram of a telescope setup with labels for "Focuser with Stepper Motor", "StarShoot Autoguider", "USB connection from main camera to hub", "Automated Filter Wheel", "RS232 directly to Atlas EQ-G", and "Serial Connection". A "Powered USB HUB" is also shown. A testimonial from a user is visible in the top right corner: "Thank you for creating the collimation movie. After stumbling across your movies I haven't (been confused).". At the bottom, there are four product categories: "Atlas 8 EQ-G with Goto Controller", "Solar Filters for observing sunspot activity", "Skyview Pro Polar Alignment Scope", and "XT-12i Dobsonian Telescope with Object Locator".

Raiford's site is a collection of articles, links, and movies covering many different products and ideas important to somebody starting out or on a budget in astronomy. Spend some time there and you will get some great ideas.

For instance, most newbies come into the hobby buying a decent telescope, and then trying to make it work. They start looking for what they should buy next. Andy's advice on highest priority accessories for somebody getting into astronomy, though, will tell them the number one accessory is to "join a club."

This is common sense to anybody in the RAS (and reading this article), but many people don't think of it before they give up and stuff that telescope into the closet.

On the website you will find more than thirty articles about various aspects of affordable astronomy. Some of them are just product reviews of reasonably priced products. Other articles talk about the things we all need to know (how to clean optics, how to collimate a scope, etc.). Others focus on how to improve what you

have (home-made rotating rings, giving your old telescope a facelift).

Still others grow from the limitations of budget astronomy. These articles deal with how to overcome the inadequacies of the things you bought on a budget. Let's face it: stuff you buy for less has shortcomings that you don't suffer when you spend more. But, there are ways to overcome some of the deficiencies. If the budget polar scope is not quite aligned in your budget mount, you may need to adjust it. Andy tells you how. If your basic mount is not enough any more, and you want to upgrade to goto on a budget, Andy tells you how. A little sweat equity gets you closer to perfection.

The website includes a place for those imaging on a budget to post their photos (see at lower left). There's also a Forum where you can ask questions of your peers. (I have to admit, aside from a cursory look, I have not gone into it. Astromart and Cloudy Nights keep me busy enough. How many different general Forums does a person need?) And there are plenty of advertisements spread throughout Andy's website. They tend to be heavily Orion oriented (which makes sense considering Orion's market targets). Andy even has a corner where he sells some of his own stuff!

Andy offers *bon mots* and sage advice to those who choose the path of fiscal responsibility. (One of my favorites: "You will probably not take photos to rival the masters like Russell Croman with a \$600 telescope.") But that just says he knows that astronomy on a budget has its limitations.

All in all, Andy's Shot Glass is an economical but enjoyable way to spend an evening of astronomy.

At Left: One distinguishing aspect of the photo gallery at Andy's Shot Glass is that it lists the cost of the equipment used to take the photo.

Andy's Shot Glass
Astronomy and Astrophotography for Non-Gazillionaires

HOME GALLERY ARTICLES ABOUT ANDY'S SG FORUM PHOTO OF WEEK WEBSTORE KUDOS SITEMAP

dedicated to affordable telescopes and accessories

Astrophotograph of the Week

	Name	David Rosenthal	Cost
	Location	Midland Park, NJ	
	Object	The North American Nebula	
	Scope	Orion 80ED	\$400
	Mount	Orion SkyView Pro goto	\$800
	Camera	EOS 300D	n/a
	Capture SW	none	
	Expos	31 x 6-min	
	Luminance		
	Red		
	Green		
	Blue		
	Processing Software	Maxim DL and PhotoShop	
	Total Equipment Cost		\$1200

The North American Nebula (NGC7000)

The Canon 300D was the first digital camera to take roots in the astronomy community. After all this time, it's still a workhorse! David took 31 exposures at 6 minutes apiece and the results are stunning!

After looking at this photo it makes me wonder why we call it "space". There doesn't seem to be a lot of it in this photo. But, we all do know that each of those stars is many light-years from its closest neighbor.

-- Andy

Submission Requirements