

First Eye on the Sky



First Eye on the Sky

Introduction

Buying your first telescope

Types of Telescope

How do they differ?

Telescope Mounts

Alt-Az? Equatorial?

Pros and Cons

Why is one better than another?

Prices

A rough guide

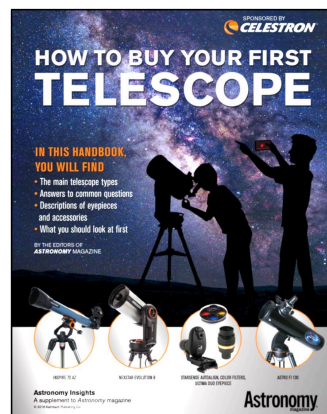
Hints and Tips

A few things to consider before handing over your cash



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Beginners' Guides



There's lots of help out there.

There are some well-written beginners' guides available on the web...

... but remember that if they are sponsored by a telescope manufacturer, then they are the only make of telescopes that you will find inside.



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Beginners' Guides



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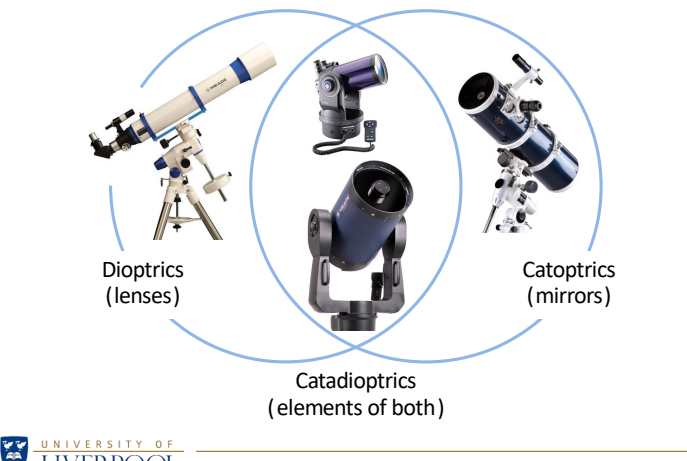
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Confused? That's Not Surprising



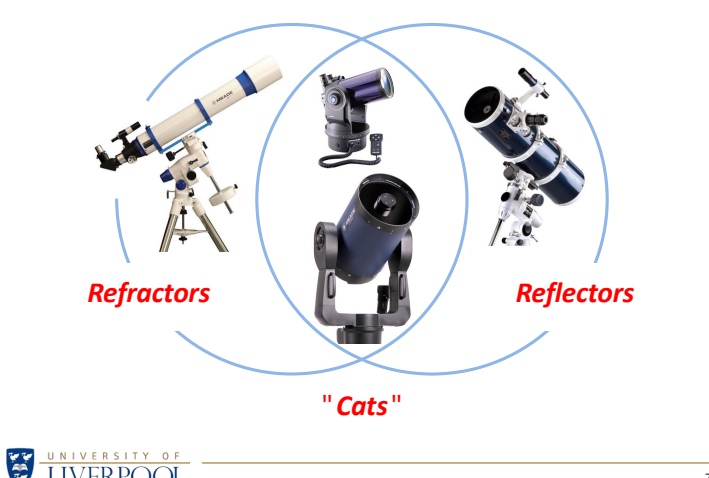
The collage consists of six pages from a 'telescope buying guide'. Each page features images of different telescope models (Newtonian reflectors, Dobsonian reflectors, and catadioptrics) along with text boxes providing technical details and advice for potential buyers. The pages are arranged in a 2x3 grid.

Telescope Types



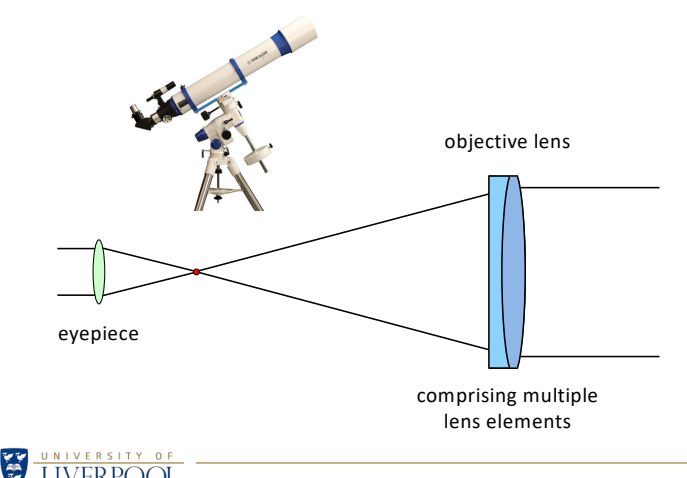
The diagram illustrates the relationship between three types of telescopes. It features three overlapping circles. The left circle is labeled 'Dioptrics (lenses)' and contains an image of a refractor telescope. The right circle is labeled 'Catoptrics (mirrors)' and contains an image of a reflector telescope. The bottom circle, which overlaps both the top circles, is labeled 'Catadioptrics (elements of both)' and contains an image of a catadioptric telescope. The University of Liverpool logo is at the bottom left, and the number '6' is at the bottom right.

Telescope Types



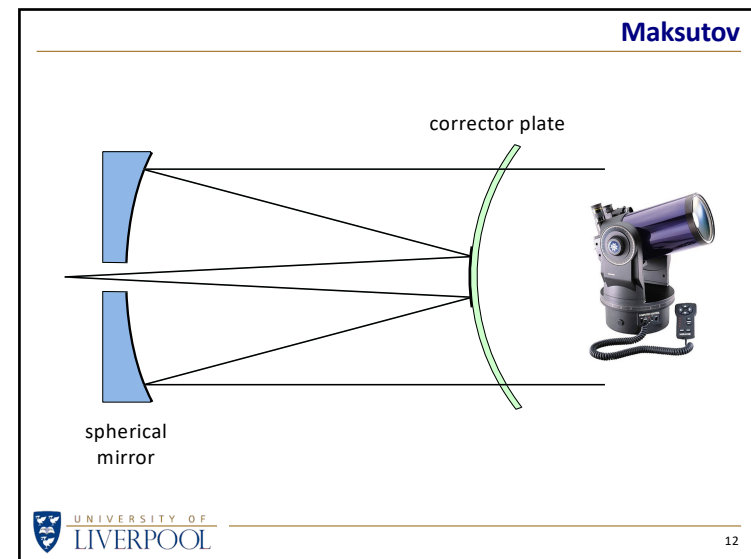
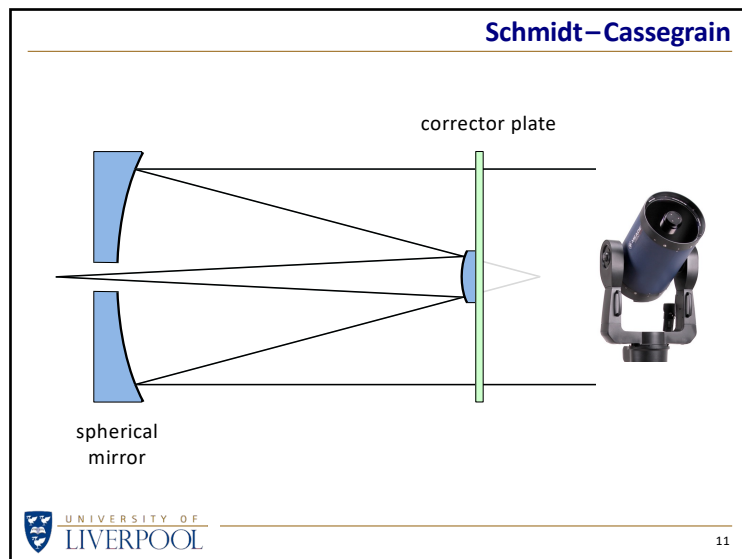
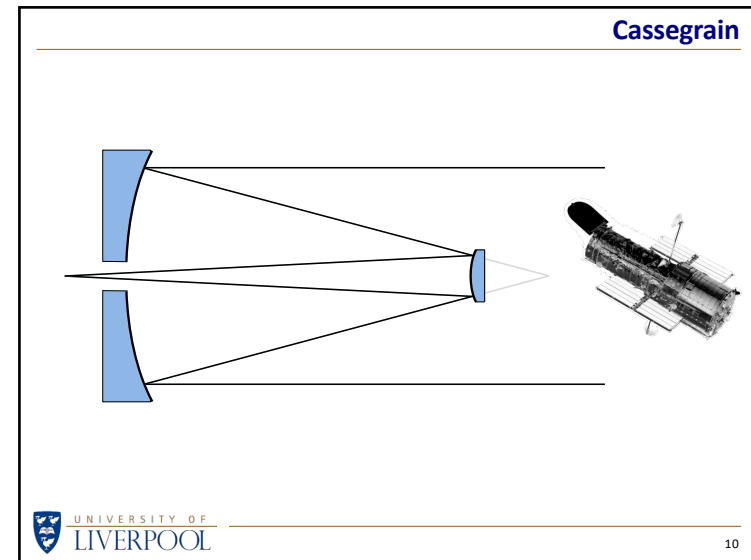
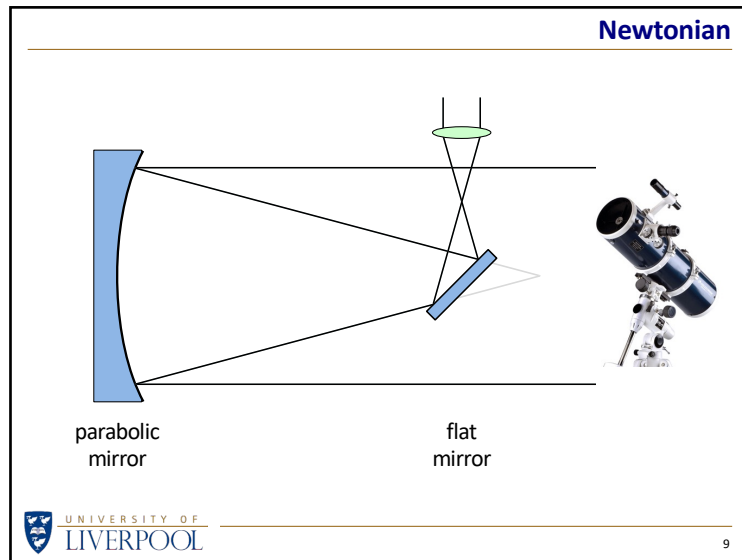
The diagram illustrates the relationship between three types of telescopes. It features three overlapping circles. The left circle is labeled 'Refractors' and contains an image of a refractor telescope. The right circle is labeled 'Reflectors' and contains an image of a reflector telescope. The bottom circle, which overlaps both the top circles, is labeled '"Cats"' and contains an image of a catadioptric telescope. The University of Liverpool logo is at the bottom left, and the number '7' is at the bottom right.

Refractor



The diagram shows a refractor telescope with a light ray diagram. Light rays from a distant object enter the 'objective lens' at the front of the telescope. The rays converge at a focal point and then pass through the 'eyepiece' at the back. The objective lens is labeled 'comprising multiple lens elements'. The University of Liverpool logo is at the bottom left, and the number '8' is at the bottom right.

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Telescope Mounts – Alt-Az



The simplest mounts allow movement in **alt**itude (up-down) and **az**imuth (left-right).



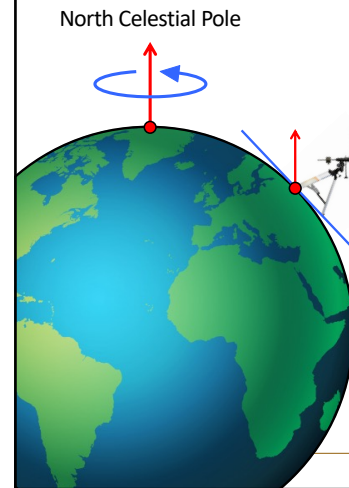
Some alt-az mounts are motorised and can be controlled by your smart phone.



The more it can do, the more you pay.



Telescope Mounts – Equatorial



Why use a mount with axes at such jaunty angles?

Aligning the mount parallel with the Earth's axis means that driving only **one** axis is enough to follow the stars.

Astrophotography

Small "eyepiece cameras" can be used on any telescope.

Telescopes with long focal lengths can provide good images of the **Moon** and the brighter **planets**.



For fainter **deep sky objects**, like nebulae and galaxies, long exposures require that the telescope is on a motor-driven **equatorial** mount.



Serious astrophotographers either buy dedicated astro cameras (left) or use their digital SLR cameras (right).



(The pros and cons of different cameras will be deferred to a future workshop)

Astrophotography

Aside: Remember that astrophotography doesn't **need** a telescope, as you can use a camera on a star tracker:



Astrophotography using a telescope can be very rewarding, but to get the most out of it will take quite a bit of time, effort and cash.

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Pros and Cons

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

Lenses suffer from chromatic aberration (colour fringing)

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Pros and Cons

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

Mirrors get around that problem

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Pros and Cons

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

Dob = Newtonian on simple alt-az mount

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Pros and Cons

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

Long focal lengths in compact tubes

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Pros and Cons

Large apertures good for deep sky objects

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

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Pros and Cons

Largest aperture for a given price

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

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Pros and Cons

Sealed optics mean low maintenance

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

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Pros and Cons

Portable or easily transportable

Maksutov

Newtonian

Refractor

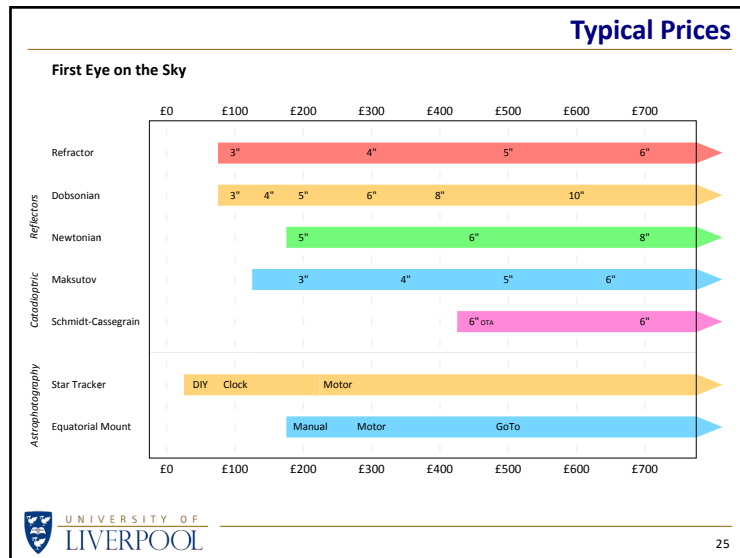
Schmidt-Cassegrain

Dobsonian

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Hints and Tips

You can't go far wrong with any of the "big five" manufacturers









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Hints and Tips

Aperture vs Focal Length

Of the two, aperture is more important. Aperture determines how much light is 'caught' by the telescope and the detail in the image. Focal length determines the magnification of a given eyepiece.



Magnification

Your telescope will come with one or two eyepieces that provide you with appropriate magnification. Later, you can think about whether you want more/different eyepieces.



High magnification is less important than you think.

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Hints and Tips

Ergonomics

Think about where you will be using the telescope. Will you be carrying it in/out of the house? Does it sit on a tripod or on a table? Will you be taking it to a dark sky site? Does it have to be portable or transportable?



Astrophotography

Visual astronomy and astrophotography have different requirements. The precision with which the telescope tracks the motion of the stars is not critical for you to enjoy the view of Saturn, but it is if you want to take long-exposure images.



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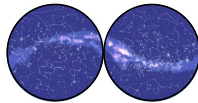
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Hints and Tips

GoTo Telescopes

Do you want to get to know your way around the night sky? Manually operated telescopes encourage you to learn the sky. GoTo telescopes can make you a "back-seat driver".



Try Before You Buy

The best way to get a feel for the different types of telescope is to try out a few on an observing evening. View the same object through a variety of telescopes and see what you think.



Buying Secondhand

It's a good idea to take advice from other society members on what you think might be an 'internet bargain'.



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Hints and Tips

Try to avoid the urge to keep adding accessories...



Dick Locke www.dl-digital.com



Jonathan Egoff @Photohorizons

...until you run out of cables.



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Hints and Tips

Images of telescopes can be misleading if displayed side by side...



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Hints and Tips

... unless they are shown to scale.

For you, what is a comfortable viewing height?



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Hints and Tips

Larger apertures are (generally) better
but remember that large means **heavy**.



Hints and Tips

Read the spec.

Make sure you know
what you are getting
before it is delivered
to avoid surprises ...

... and yes, the
Meade RCX 20"
really is **that** big.



Final Thoughts

- Your options are many and varied
- This is good ... and bad ... and confusing
- Don't suffer from "analysis paralysis"
 - Look at what you can afford
 - Take advice
 - Make a decision
 - Enjoy your stargazing
- Make full use of the resources of your astronomical society – the members
- The best telescope? The one you **use**.



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— A Rough Guide —
to buying your first astronomical telescope

www.liverpool.ac.uk/~sdb/Talks

Dr Steve Barrett
DLC 14 May 2025

