

Bushnell Forge 10X42 Binoculars

Reviewed by Ben Brown

WHEN AN OUTDOOR ENTHUSIAST DECIDES TO TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE OF HUNTING our expansive backcountry and remote mountain ranges, the first questions that arise are, “What gear do I need?” and, “Which brands are good to have?”

I've been asked numerous times what gear I use on my solo hunting expeditions because experience is hugely valuable in validating whether a piece of gear is fit for operation and will perform as expected on the hill. Initially, a hunter just starting out needs to get two bits of gear bang on, those being their rifle - and subsequent calibre - and their binoculars. Getting these first two items correct will put you on the right foot as you begin your hunting career. Selecting poorly performing gear can lead to many missed opportunities and can stall your maturation as a hunter. Thus, good gear choice is paramount if you're wanting to achieve big things in our beautiful mountain ranges - remember, gear that performs outstandingly will pay for itself ten times over via better hunting experiences and opportunities.

Before I begin the review on the Bushnell Forge Binoculars, I want to say there's no straight and narrow rule for buying hunting gear. The classic saying 'you get what you pay for' should never be the go-to mentality when purchasing hunting gear. Do your research and simply find out how it's performed in the field, as performance is not subject to a particular price bracket - good hunting gear, irrespective of price, is determined by performance, durability, design and quality of warranty. ►



ABOVE: **THE BUSHNELL FORGE 10X42** binoculars at home in the Southern Alps.

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10X42 EXPLAINED

Choosing suitable binoculars for your style of hunting is imperative if you're going to have continued hunting success over many years. Binoculars really are a priority for one to be able to hunt effectively, and without them you'll miss 90% of the animals in your hunting block.

The most commonly used binoculars are 10X42, which means 10X optical zoom and 42mm diameter lens. Due to the fact binoculars are often handheld, 10X optical zoom is the ideal magnification for operation without a tripod – a walking stick or secure seated position is adequate for stable and effective glassing. Furthermore, they're highly adaptable at distances from 30-600 yards, which are often the ranges over which productive glassing is required. Beyond 600 yards, increased optical zoom is required – then stabilisation becomes an integral component in successfully spotting game animals on the hill.

BUSHNELL FORGE

Over the past couple of months, I've been testing the new Bushnell Forge 10X42 binoculars in the mighty Southern Alps. The main attractions of these binoculars are exceptional performance in low-light conditions and a clarity of imagery that rivals other brands of binoculars that cost significantly more.

Right off the bat, I'll say the Bushnell Forge binoculars are the absolute real deal, and I've been blown away by their performance in the field. Ultimately, my aim in this review is to give an objective analysis so other hunters can decide whether or not these binoculars will suit their style of hunting and be fit for purpose.

PERFORMANCE

With significant advances in optical glass, light transmission and clarity have seen a dramatic improvement. What determines the level of light transmission is the type of glass used in the binoculars – there are two main types: BAK-4 and BK-7. BAK-4 is a much superior type of glass as it's of higher density and has been rounded. This leads to fantastic clarity of image and light transmission. If you're really

serious about investing in binoculars, then definitely go towards BAK-4 glass over the cheaper and less effective BK-7 glass.

The Bushnell Forge binoculars use BAK-4 glass in conjunction with their extra-low dispersion glass (ED Prime Glass) and PC-3 phase coating applied to the prisms. This combination allows for 92% light transmission for bright images, enhanced resolution, optical clarity and superior performance in low-light conditions.

There's an astounding difference in performance between BK-7 and BAK-4 binoculars; with the BAK-4, hunters will be able to identify game animals on the hill with a high level of accuracy – they have excellent optical clarity and light transmission in scenarios such as glassing for red deer in the open tussock country of Central Otago or when searching for bull tahr in scrub country on the west coast ... proving them to be highly advantageous.

However, where these binoculars truly excel is in low-light conditions. Right till the last few minutes of shooting light, these binoculars still held their light-transmission ability, retaining consistent clarity. Having the ability to stay out on the hill, glassing right till last light, will certainly allow you to spot those mature, cunning big game animals who use the cover of low light and darkness to feed in relative safety.

PERFORMANCE RATING = 9/10

DURABILITY

Most hunters would agree ... if we pay for something, we want it to last the test of time and not fold like a house of cards when conditions test its durability. Modern hunting gear can be a bit hit-and-miss depending on its design and subsequent points of weakness. Defects and design flaws can quickly see a piece of gear fall by the wayside and become unserviceable in a very short period of time when subjected to rigorous use in the mountains.

Bushnell's Forge binoculars utilise their exclusive EXO barrier protection to significantly improve lens durability and performance in all environmental conditions. This protective coating allows the glass to competently repel water, oil, dust and debris, and prevents



scratches. Although the Forge binoculars have EXO barrier protection, a good habit to follow when cleaning your lenses on the hill is to use a clean piece of microfibre material. Never use worn garments, as they can have dust and debris embedded into them and can either wear down the protective barrier or worse, create small scratches on the lenses.

One of the most important characteristics to look for when assessing whether or not a piece of gear will be highly durable is its IPX rating. This is a waterproof rating system used to indicate how much ingress protection (IP) is present in the gear. IPX ratings range from IPX0 (cannot withstand any moisture ingress) to IPX8 (full submersion in three feet of water). If you know your gear's going to get wet, then you should definitely choose gear that has a rating of IPX7 or higher. In good fashion, the Bushnell's Forge binoculars have an IPX7 rating and solid waterproofing construction that prevents moisture ingress and eliminates any chance of internal fogging.

The durability of these binoculars is excellent and as a result, they haven't skipped a beat during numerous backcountry expeditions into the rugged Southern Alps.

DURABILITY RATING = 9/10

DESIGN

Straight out of the box, the Bushnell Forge binoculars feel and look like a robust bit of kit. One dimensional aspect I noticed straight away is they're slightly longer than most 10X42 binoculars, measuring 170mm, and are also slightly on the heavier side, weighing 862 grams.

In terms of handling, the textured outer surface, interpupillary distance adjustment

(IPD adjuster) and underbelly thumb grooves gave the Forge binoculars a real sense of control when glassing at different angles and positions. However, the striated lateral grips etched into the binoculars are a complete waste of time and turn the effective textured grip into a smooth, non-compliant area in terms of grip. Bushnell would have been much better off applying the textured circular pattern around the whole binoculars to avoid this area of weakness. This could be an issue when wearing leather-based gloves during winter hunts.

A top-notch feature is the ability to lock the dioptre ring in place. For those not familiar with what a dioptre adjuster does, it's designed to let you compensate for differences between the focus of your own two eyes. Personally, I have to slide the adjustment ring a couple of degrees to the right for clarity to be optimal. In addition, the 18mm eye cup adjuster allows for ease of use while wearing or not wearing eyeglasses, and the tripod socket enables mounting to tripods via Bushnell's tripod adaptor.

Other accessory items included with the binoculars are a deep textured neck strap, dust caps, harness system and carry case. The neck strap, dust caps and harness system serve well in operation, however the carry case is worth a comment; I have a small gripe here – I found it a bit cumbersome. It's far too big and bulky for either storing away in your pack or hanging around your neck while navigating open or closed country. Immediately, I swapped the carry case for a slim-fitting case I already owned to save space, weight and increase its practicality.

Overall, the Forge binoculars have been ►

Having the ability to stay out on the hill, glassing right till last light, will certainly allow you to spot those mature, cunning big game animals who use the cover of low light and darkness to feed in relative safety.

ABOVE LEFT: **UNDERBELLY THUMB GROOVES** serve well in terms of practicality.

ABOVE RIGHT: **DEEP IN THE SOUTHERN ALPS** putting the Forge binoculars to the test.

BELOW: **USEFUL**

ATTACHED DUST CAPS add another layer of protection.





designed with durability and performance in mind, although a couple of points are lost in the practicality department.

DESIGN RATING = 8/10

QUALITY OF WARRANTY

Bushnell stand strongly behind all their products and usually their top-end offerings come with a pretty credible warranty. The Forge binoculars fall into that bracket coming with an 'Ironclad Warranty' which translates into a full lifetime warranty that covers the lifetime of the product - that being 20 years for the Forge binoculars.

Although Bushnell's warranty covers the vast majority of potential malfunctions and defects in the manufacturing process that could occur during the Forge binoculars 20-year lifetime, it needs to be noted that any

incorrect usage and care of the binoculars could result in this warranty being null and void. For example, if a hunter accidentally dropped a pair of binoculars down a bluff system while glassing for tahr, this could subsequently result in the hunter having to buy another pair of binoculars.

Nonetheless, accountability falls firmly on the individual operating the binoculars, and if one looks after their binoculars, then a 20-year warranty serves as a satisfactory safety net. As the old saying goes 'look after your gear and it'll look after you'.

As hunters, we demand a lot when spending \$999.00 on a pair of binoculars, however I wouldn't let a minor issue in the warranty take away from the phenomenal performance these Forge binoculars deliver.

WARRANTY RATING = 7/10 ■

LEFT: CUMBERSOME CARRY CASE that's far from ideal.

RIGHT: DEEP TEXTURED NECK STRAP and tripod socket.

PERFORMANCE	9/10
DURABILITY	9/10
DESIGN	8/10
WARRANTY	7/10
TOTAL RATING	33/40

PROS

- Phenomenal clarity and optical resolution
- Exceptional performance in low lighting conditions
- Highly durable construction of internal and external components.

RRP \$999.00

CONS

- Longer and heavier than most 10X42 binoculars
- Cumbersome carry case
- Warranty not as comprehensive as other top-end binocular brands.

MORE INFO www.ampro.co.nz

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HORIZONTAL**