

Yukon 6.5x50 Digital NV scope

I think all shooting products in general are very much a case of: 'wouldn't it be good if they just did that'? A factor most relevant to night vision (NV) equipment! When NV came, we started off with basic generation (Gen 1) units and slowly the market grew and Gen 1 gave way to Gen 1+, then Gen 2 etc. Truth is, the more money you threw at it the better it got! That's why I never bothered, as I don't do that much night shooting and could not justify the prices. Plus I still found some kit less than ideal in terms of optical performance.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Then digital NV started to appear, which offered workable ability and more acceptable prices. Pulsar's Digisight N550 and the improved versions are great examples; with one-shot zero function, multiple reticule choice liked a bit more magnification; see there it is already – 'wouldn't it be good if? Plus digital NV allows daytime usage, or at least easier zeroing.

The next barriers were size and couldn't they be more like a telescopic sight in terms of features and rifle mounting? Yukon had the answer, with their hybrid Photon design that mated the back end of a seemingly conventional telescopic sight with a digital objective housing. First models even retained the mechanical, external turrets but that soon gave way to everything going electric.

MORE MAG AND VIEW

The latest version is their Photon XT 6.5x50, which is around the same size as a comparable 3-12x50 day scope. The body tube is 30mm and offers an uninterrupted 6" mounting surface for the one-piece mount (supplied), with a focusing ring behind; up front is the digital housing. The layout is simple – objective lens with flip-up cap (with day time pin hole) and focusing ring, as all NV optics have to be focused front and rear as the range changes.

Though offering similar features to the Pulsar Digisights, the Photon keeps things simpler, with fewer options, which is no bad thing! On top is the battery housing that takes 2 x AA cells, top left is the IR projector with the ON/OFF button behind, this also controls the IR level. On the left is a wheel with a button in the centre, which is your selector/navigation system. Below and forward of this is the video out socket. There's no removable memory card or an external power socket, which keeps the price down, however Yukon also offers an MPR (mobile player recorder) .

TWILIGHT & BEYOND

The Photon is not a true day scope but can be used as such, helped by the pin hole lens cap that reduces light input, that would otherwise white out the view on bright days and is easily zeroed in day time too. Where it really shines is in the transitional period between twilight and full dark, giving an edge that few, if any, day scopes can fill. The x6.5 magnification is heading in the right direction too, giving just that bit more but still with a good field of view of 7.5° @ 100 yards.

Operation is simple – 2 x AA batteries go in the top, the IR is located top left and the push button at the rear doubles as the ON/ OFF switch (green indicator light) and IR selector with three levels of illumination intensity and IR off. One short push turns it ON and a longer one (3-seconds) turns it off; individual presses turn on and adjusts the IR. On the right is a short, plastic Picatinny rail for add-on torches etc, which is a bit flimsy. What you see in the square screen is the reticule and a battery life indicator (lower right), the view is in black and white only, which is fine.

NAVIGATION

Navigating and selecting menus is easy! The selector is located on the left of the NV housing and consists of a central button with a wheel around it. Press the button to go in and you get three icons to the left of the reticule; top - reticule choice, middle – reticule colour and bottom - zeroing. Press it in to enter and then use the roller to select an option, then click to engage it. The reticule choice offers – Mil- Dot-style, two fine crosses with range bars on the 6 o'clock arm, an open T-cross, a Dual-X and what looks like a No 4 ret. Of these, I found Mil-Dot the most useful, but that's just me. Once you have what you want, press again to select. Moving down to the middle, repeat the process and here you get the choice of red, white and green. I found red worked best for me, but in the half-light white proved useful too!

Finally zeroing, which is of the one-shot type, with you selecting the individual vertical/ horizontal planes to adjust. This requires that you see the bullet hole and the rifle is solidly rested. Maintain your aim point and select horizontal, then using the roller, move the cross hair to coincide with the bullet hole. Then switch to vertical and repeat until the cross is over the hole, then select the correction and come out. In this mode you get a small Mil-Dot in green, no matter what reticule you have selected. Brightness is also adjustable, which is useful, as on a bright day lighter objects will literally white out, even at close ranges.

SMILE WHEN YOU SEE THE FLASH!

The Photon is capable on all rifle types and sturdy enough to withstand fullbore recoil. What I really liked was the ease of mounting, as the 30mm body means standard rings. I fitted it to a 223 AR15 and a Smith & Wesson 15/22, both offering flat topped receivers, a CZ452 in 11mm dovetail and a Ruger 17HMR (M77/17) and 22 Rimfire (M77/22) in their dedicated rings. Though the objective area looks bulky, as can be seen even on the Ruger, with medium height mounts there's plenty of barrel clearance. I did find in all cases the scope does not come back enough in standard, vertical mounts; for example, on the Ruger and CZ I had to push my head forward a bit to get a good position.

Zeroing showed that at anything much over 25 yards you cannot see the bullet strikes, which is not a big issue. With the 22 subs I set zero at 25, which shoots near point of aim at 50 and drops 7" at 100. The Mil-Dot reticule is cock-on, as I converted my ballistics to Milradian and was hitting targets from 50 to 150 yards using Mil hold over. The 17HMR and 223 were even easier, due to their flatter trajectories!

The MPR worked well and I managed to get some good footage of a muntjac moving through game cover and also a rabbit daft enough to poke his nose out and sit side on at 75 yards, which was shot as it was being shot. For testing, I placed a series of reactive targets out to 150 yards in 50 yard increments, it was a clear but overcast night, so good NV conditions. By far the best view is in the twilight, as the image does degrade a bit in the dark, even with IR, but is still recognisable to accurately hit. The on-board IR is not bad and good out to 100 yards but loses power after that. Saying that, I was able to pick up eyes at 200 yards, but target ID was not good at that longer distance. The Nightmaster NM800 torch had a rheostat and was in an adjustable mount and really lit things up; aided by the fact you can adjust beam angle/intensity to suit. From my testing, I'd say the Photon is of more use to airgunners and rimfire hunters, in the latter case out to 100 yards. I'd push it to 150 ish for foxes with the NM800 on a centrefire!