The Portable and Practical Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi Mount Reviewed

By: Lee PullenPublished: Nov 27, 2021

The Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount. Credit: Sky-Watcher

The Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount offers portable "go-to" functionality. Boasting a payload capacity of 11lbs (5kg) it can handle most grab 'n' go telescopes, and comes with a range of genuinely useful features. Unfortunately, the app used to control the mount is unintuitive and takes some getting used to, so be prepared to thoroughly read the user manual and spend a few nights learning the ins and outs before you can unleash its full potential.

The Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount packs a lot into a small package. Credit: Sky-Watcher

Hardware

Power is provided by 8 AA batteries. Be sure to load them up in advance because the battery compartment is a bit fiddly, and you don't want to be using it with numb fingers during a cold observing session. A power port gives the option of using an external battery. I tested this with a Tracer Lithium Polymer Battery Pack and it worked flawlessly.

The tripod legs are reasonably sturdy, but wobble a little if extended. The extension pier comes with a 3/8" socket, so if you have a better-quality tripod then you can use that instead.

A Hand Control port allows for connection to a SynScan hand controller. You may like to try this if you already own one, but it's not essential given that everything can be controlled via an app.

There's even an Automatic Shutter Release Control to connect a DSLR or mirrorless camera using a shutter release cable (not included). If this kind of astrophotography interests you, it's possible to buy accessories and update firmware so that the Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount can function as an equatorial platform suitable for tracking targets during long-exposure photography, although testing this was beyond the scope of this review. Alternatively, consider a Star Adventurer 2i Pro Pack (MSRP $423). This has the same payload capacity as a Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount, but comes in an equatorial configuration as standard.

The Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount with the tripod legs fully extended. Credit: Sky-Watcher

App control

The Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount creates its own wi-fi network, allowing it to be controlled via your phone or tablet using the SynScan Pro app for iOS and Android. This has a decent range of features, but the layout can be unclear. For example, "Tonight's Best" lists prime targets to observe based on the current date; useful for beginners, but confusingly hidden away in the "Utilities" submenu.

A headline feature is Freedom Find. Once the mount has been aligned, you can actually loosen the clutches and move your telescope manually, with the mount keeping track of where it's pointing. This lets you switch back and forth between computerized "go-to" and good-old-fashioned manual star-hopping. Here we hit up against the app's interface again, though. Freedom Find isn't on by default, and to activate it you need to dig through the menus until you come across a toggle to "enable encoders". Why hide such a prime feature?

The SynScan Pro app works well once you get used to the interface. Credit: Lee Pullen.

Grab 'n' go

Once you overcome the app's learning curve, there's a lot to like about the Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount. I could set it up, attach a telescope, and complete a three-star alignment in just over 10 minutes. The "go-to" accuracy is quite good, with targets landing within the field of view of a wide-angle eyepiece with reasonable consistency.

Sky-Watcher offers the Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount on its own (MSRP $400) or as a package bundled with a 102mm Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope (MSRP $575) or 127mm Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope (MSRP $760).

Overall, the Sky-Watcher AZ-GTi mount is a good choice if you want a portable "go-to" mount for lightweight telescopes.

Plus:
Lightweight
Good "go-to" accuracy

Minus:
Unintuitive software

MSRP: $400

Website: http://skywatcher.com/

About Lee Pullen

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Lee Pullen is a science writer and communicator from the city of Bristol, UK. He has a degree in Astronomy and a master's in Science Communication. He began his career writing for organisations including the Hubble European Space Agency Information Centre and the European Southern Observatory, as well as becoming Staff Writer for the International Year of Astronomy 2009, the world's largest ever science outreach initiative. Lee runs the website UrbanAstrophotography.com

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