



Astrophotography the Smart Way: ZWO ASI AIR Plus Review

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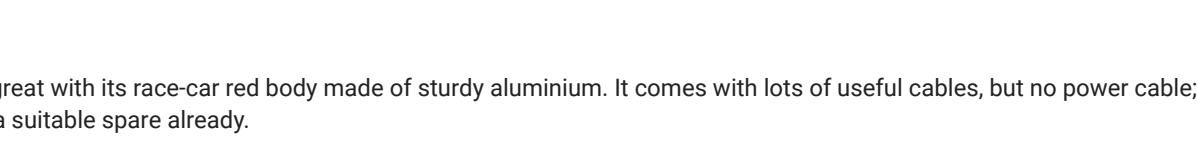
By **Lee Pullen** Published: Dec 15, 2021



The ZWO ASI AIR Plus. Credit: Lee Pullen.

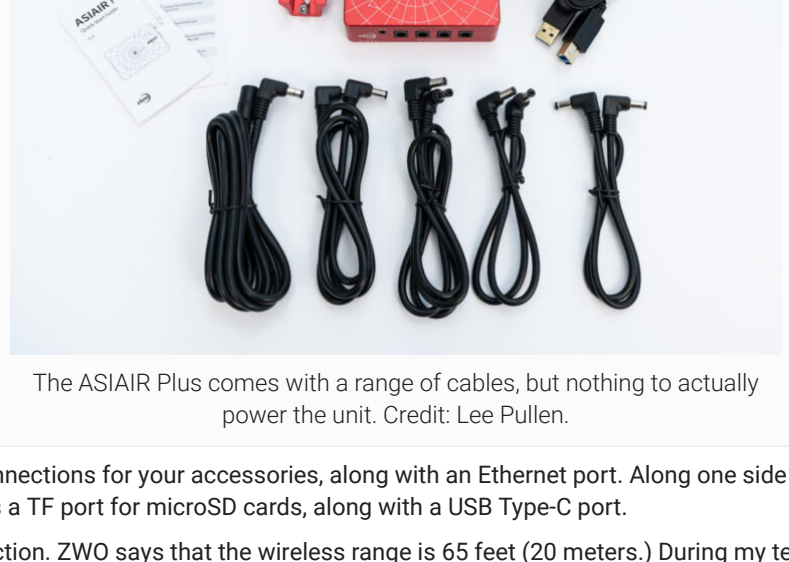
The ASI AIR Plus is astronomy imaging company ZWO's latest addition to their range of smart wi-fi controllers. The controller allows you to manipulate cameras, mounts, and accessories via an app on your phone or tablet. Also a power hub, it helps with cable management. The ASI AIR Plus aims to simplify astrophotography, boasting several upgrades over the previous ASI AIR models, including an antenna to overcome the wi-fi issues that plagued its immediate predecessor, the ASI AIR PRO (see *Alan Dyer's AGT review of the PRO here*).

The ASI AIR Plus is a solid choice to control your kit and smooth out the steep difficulty curve inherent in astrophotography. The catch is that it forces you to use ZWO cameras and accessories, although it's also compatible with lots of DSLR / mirrorless cameras, and a good range of mounts are supported. If this is a deal-breaker, consider *PrimaluceLab's* EAGLE range of controllers. They're more expensive, but Windows-based, granting access to a wide range of software solutions.



Getting hands-on

The ASI AIR Plus looks great with its race-car red body made of sturdy aluminium. It comes with lots of useful cables, but no power cable; it's assumed that astromagers will have a suitable spare already.



The ASI AIR Plus comes with a range of cables, but nothing to actually power the unit. Credit: Lee Pullen.

There are two USB 3.0 and two USB 2.0 connections for your accessories, along with an Ethernet port. Along one side are ports to power your various gadgets, such as dew bands. On the opposite side is a TF port for microSD cards, along with a USB Type-C port.

Then there's the antenna, the big new attraction. ZWO says that its wireless range is 65 feet (20 meters.) During my tests, the ASI AIR Plus was 50 feet (15 meters) from my wi-fi router, through with two brick walls and one set of glass windows intervening. The signal got weak, but the connection held, letting me control everything from the comfort of my living room sofa.



A range of ports offers flexibility. Credit: Lee Pullen

Under the stars with an ASI AIR Plus

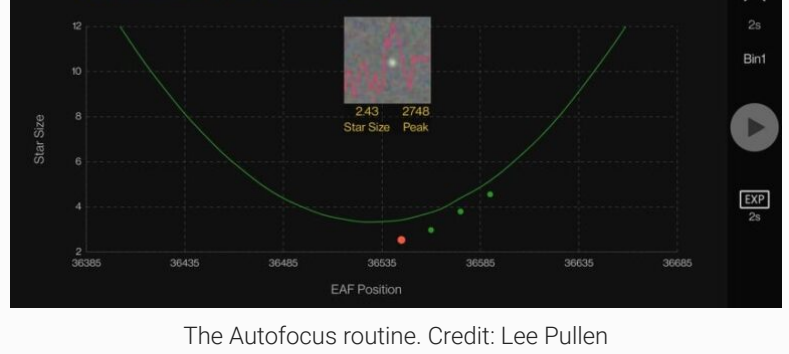
There's a learning curve to using the ASI AIR Plus, but ZWO made it as beginner-friendly as possible. For example, the ASI AIR Plus plays very nicely with ZWO's Electronic Automatic Focuser, giving pin-sharp focus with the touch of a button. Plate-solving is also accurate and remarkably fast. Guiding is automated and reliable, using a multi-star approach. During tests I routinely obtained an RMS error of under 0.5", which is good for my skies.



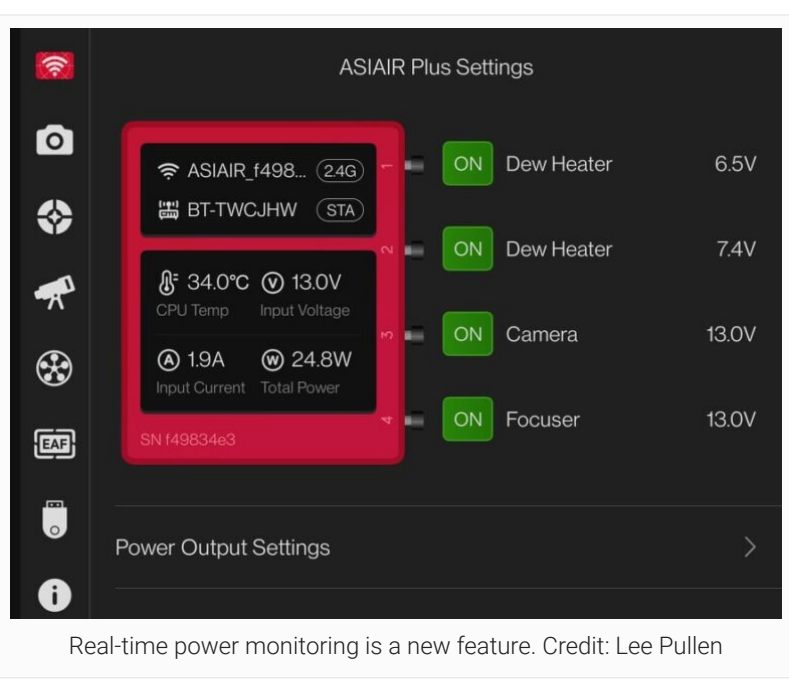
There are lots of ways to attach an ASI AIR Plus. Here, it's attached to the author's telescope's dovetail, under the drawtube. Credit: Lee Pullen.

Real-time power monitoring is a new software feature. It's neat to see the exact power draw from each of the attached gadgets, and knowing your power consumption will assist when using batteries. Also new to the ASI AIR Plus is eMMC memory, faster and more stable than the ASI AIR PRO's approach of having the Operating System loaded onto a microSD card.

For deep sky imaging, you have two main options. With Live Stacking, sees the ASI AIR Plus automatically integrate images as they're taken. This option offers more control and allows a user to plot out an entire imaging session in advance. After setting up a Plan mode to image the Andromeda Galaxy I went to bed, leaving the ASI AIR Plus to control everything all night: tracking, guiding, autofocussing every hour, imaging, meridian flip. If you're new to the world of remote automation, let me use italics to emphasize just how good this is. Think of all the photons that can be collected while you're happily asleep. Sweet dreams indeed!



The Autofocus routine. Credit: Lee Pullen



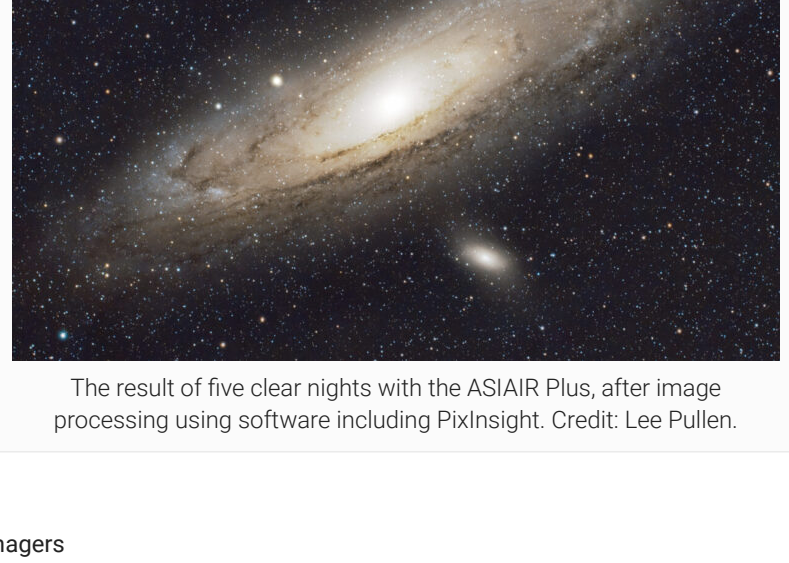
Real-time power monitoring is a new feature. Credit: Lee Pullen



A single sub-frame of the Andromeda Galaxy taken from the author's city-center location. Credit: Lee Pullen

Evolution, not revolution

This wi-fi controller is fun to use if you're new to their functionalities, but admittedly, if you already own an ASI AIR PRO it's hard to justify the upgrade. Odds are that ASI AIR PRO users have already developed a workaround to the ASI AIR PRO's wi-fi issues, in which case the ASI AIR Plus' new antenna is nice-to-have rather than a game-changer.



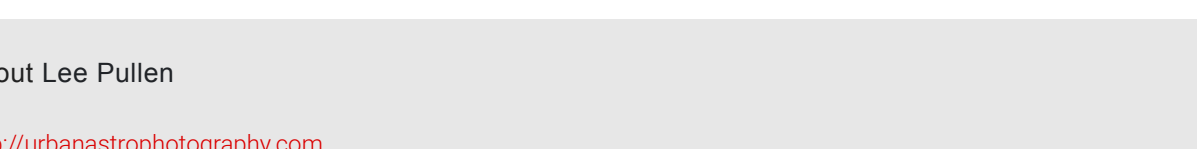
The result of five clear nights with the ASI AIR Plus, after image processing using software including Pixinsight. Credit: Lee Pullen.

- Plus:**
 - Simplifies astrophotography
 - Suitable for both beginner and advanced imagers
 - Reasonably priced solution for remotely controlling your equipment
- Minus:**
 - ZWO cameras and accessories needed for maximum compatibility
 - An incremental upgrade to the previous ASI AIR PRO model

Website: <https://astronomy-imaging-camera.com>

MSRP: \$299

For more read *Urban Astrophotography's* comprehensive *ASI AIR Plus* review.



About Lee Pullen
<http://urbanastrophotography.com>

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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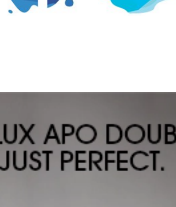
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