



Astronomy tests Celestron's SkyProdigy 6

This 6-inch telescope sets a new standard for ease of use.
by Tom Trusock

Celestron's SkyProdigy line of go-to telescopes is the ultimate in hands-free setup. Take one of these models out, set it up, turn it on, and observe.

Just a few years ago, the technology this telescope offers didn't exist, and when it did come into being, it wasn't as fully featured and cost significantly more. A beginner was on his own. If he didn't have a buddy interested in the hobby or a local astronomy club, he'd find it difficult to get started, and his interest might wane quickly.

Celestron offers a choice of five different scopes in its SkyProdigy line: two refractors, a Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope (SCT), one Newtonian reflector, and one Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope. The units are available in apertures from 2.76 to 6 inches.

Lightweight and complete

For this review, I received a SkyProdigy 6, which pairs a computerized single-arm fork mount with a 6-inch SCT, the largest aperture and focal length in the line. The package contained the mount; a star diagonal; two eyepieces (a 25mm Plössl, which yields a magnification of 60x, and a 9mm Kellner, which gives 167x); the StarPointer red-dot, unit-power finder scope; a battery pack; software; and the optical tube assembly. Power comes from eight D-cell batteries, and Celestron states that they should power the mount for about 30 hours. Setup took only a few minutes and required no tools.

One of the major benefits of the SkyProdigy is that you can remove the optical tube assembly quickly and easily from the mount for storage or travel. Another plus is that you can swap optical tube assemblies in and out on this very portable mount. Yet

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another is the setup's light weight. On a recent foray into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, I simply picked up the scope, mount, and tripod and walked a quarter-mile out into the observing field.

Setup and tracking

Using the SkyProdigy, in theory, is easy. Take the scope out of the box, set it up, turn the computer on, choose "StarSense Automatic Alignment," step back, and let it do its thing. The built-in CCD camera begins taking pictures of the night sky and comparing them to its internal database to find the position the telescope is pointing to. Allow some time for processing, slew a bit to the right, and repeat. Within three minutes, you should be observing.

Product information

Celestron SkyProdigy 6

Optical design: Schmidt-Cassegrain

Aperture: 5.98 inches

Focal length: 1,500 millimeters

Focal ratio: f/9.87

Mount: Computerized alt-azimuth

Weight: 23 pounds (10.4 kilograms)

Includes: StarSense Camera, hand controller with a 4,000-object database, 1¼" star diagonal, 25mm Plössl eyepiece (60x), 9mm Kellner eyepiece (167x), StarPointer finder scope, battery pack, steel tripod, and an accessory tray

Price: \$999

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Celestron's SkyProdigy 6 Computerized Telescope comes complete with a computerized drive and a steel tripod.



A few things can throw a wrench into the automatic setup. The foremost are sky brightness and horizons blocked by landscape or buildings. If either of these conditions exists, you'll get an "alignment failed" message. I learned from multiple setups, so here are a couple of tips.

When you set the SkyProdigy up, be sure the area of sky the scope is initially pointing at and the area to the right are as clear to the horizon as you can get them. And if you suspect your skies are too bright (or too dark), Celestron built in an option to select your sky brightness.

Attention to these details will greatly decrease your frustration. The telescope will inform you once your alignment succeeds. Then you're ready to observe. At this point, you can choose either a tour of some of the highlights in the sky or an individual target from the included database of more than 4,000 objects. This number is appropriate for the scope's aperture.

All of the above went well for me, yet when I selected the Ring Nebula (M57), the scope slewed but failed to put the target in the field of view of the supplied low-power eyepiece. Not centering an object was a consistent issue but more of an irritant than a catastrophic failure, because a little manual slewing yielded the target straightaway.

I suspected that the issue was due to mechanical misalignment between the telescope and the camera. Fortunately, Celestron provides an option to align the two in the user manual. Pointing accuracy seemed a bit better after a "Solar System Align" or a "Manual Align."

▼ **Schmidt-Cassegrain optics** (right) with a focal ratio of f/9.87 form the basis for the SkyProdigy 6. The StarSense Camera (left) provides completely automatic alignment to the overhead sky with no user intervention required. Just flip one switch.



Plug the hand controller into the telescope's drive, turn on the switch, and you'll have access to the SkyProdigy 6's database of more than 4,000 celestial objects. All photos: Astronomy: William Zuback

The mount was plenty sturdy for visual use. I employed the "tap test" — tapping the tube and waiting for the view to settle down. The SkyProdigy required five seconds for the vibrations to disappear, a normal performance. Once the drive centered an object, it did a good job tracking it.

Under the sky

Visually, the optical tube assembly provided some fine views of summertime objects. The Dumbbell Nebula (M27) appeared big

and bright, M57 was a well-defined little lifebuoy, and the globular clusters M56 in Lyra and the Hercules Cluster (M13) showed fine resolution. And the Moon looked great at all powers.

At nearly f/10, the optics are not wide field, but that number is a nice compromise between the ability to have a moderately wide view and still be able to toss some magnification on a target. Ultimately, I found this scope a good choice for both deep-sky and planetary work.

In fact, the optics gave high-quality views for a mass-produced SCT. The sky backgrounds behind my selected targets appeared black — a trait indicative of little light scatter — and the stars focused to sharp pinpoints. Collimation (alignment of the optical system) was quite good right out of the box. Optically, I was happy with this little guy and would be perfectly satisfied with it as my travel telescope.

Keep this one in mind

With a combination of high optical quality and hands-free setup, the SkyProdigy 6 is a great choice for a beginning observer. Such telescopes are making the hobby of astronomy more attainable for everyone. I'm looking forward to seeing what comes next. ☼