

# Cat's Perch Observing Chair

Product Review by Charlie Warren

I usually do my research, so rarely do I make an astronomical purchase that I regret. By the same token, because of my research, I usually have pretty accurate expectations, so while I enjoy most all of my astronomy related purchases thoroughly, they usually come close to my expectations. Occasionally, I purchase something that exceeds my expectations and the product gives me delight beyond what I hoped or anticipated. This is the case with my new Catsperch observing chair.

I had been considering one of these for some time, and kept putting it off until the recent Peach State Star Gaze where

partners Jim Fly (Catseye collimation) and Ron Burrows (Wood Wonders) attended as vendors. This gave me ample opportunity to climb, sit and mess with all the adjustments on the chairs live and in person. Both Jim and Ron were very patient with my tinkering until I finally decided to put my money down and go for the largest and most expensive of their line; "The Summit". The Summit is the latest addition to their lineup, which includes three other shorter models with maximum seat heights ranging from the 36" Miniperch to the 58" Summit. The middle two models are the (original) 48.6" Catsperch and the 52.3" Catsperch Pro. Prices range from \$148 to \$238 for

the "kit" models that you assemble yourself. The fully optioned and assembled line runs from \$248 to \$363. I took the lazy man's route since they had one assembled and ready for that nights observing. I probably would have opted for the kit if I was having it shipped home, as it would be quite an easy and probably even enjoyable task to assemble. Even the most mechanically challenged could handle it.

The chairs are very nicely made of solid red oak and utilize stainless steel and brass hardware, which can withstand the rigors of dew in the southeast. The natural finish looks great, but I may apply another coat or two of polyurethane this winter. Not that it is lacking, but with the wear and tear that accompanies a well used piece of astronomy equipment during remote setup, I want to make sure it remains looking as nice as new. Mine features a laser etched engraving of Saturn at the top just under the handle aperture, which makes for an attractive finishing touch.

The weight range for these nicely designed chairs is 12 lbs to 21 lbs. I knew that the size and weight for the Summit would make it a little more cumbersome, but in my mind the trade off for being able to observe at Zenith on my 20" f/4.3 Starmaster while SEATED, was well worth the extra effort carrying and positioning it. After use, the chairs are simple to fold flat by raising the cross support at the bottom. If necessary, you can also completely disassemble the chair without tools in a few minutes and place it back in the shipping box by removing two bolts for the stabilizing foot cross brace. This allows minimized storage and the cardboard box can protect it in transit if your storage space is limited. I found it easier to just fold it up, wrap some padding around it and place it in the back of the truck beside the scope, but I know not everyone travels with as much storage space as the RV and tow vehicle provide.

I found the steps to work well and were easy to adjust. It did take a little bit of getting used to the procedure of climbing



up on the chair when it was more elevated. Initially, we would kick one of the steps on the way up, which would cause it to ratchet down. I tried to think of a design improvement that could alleviate this, but any modification that I could think of would reduce the convenience of quick and easy repositioning. In the end, it simply required some additional care when climbing up. We quickly got good at the maneuver of climbing up facing the chair and making the required rotation and transition to sit. Once up, we found we were very natural at the sitting part. We did use it in a way that is probably a little different than intended. The easy way to mount the chair is with it facing the same direction as the scope (see Margie in the picture), and when you are seated, you simply swivel into the eyepiece. This requires a slight trunk twist, which is not uncomfortable, but not as comfortable as having the eyepiece directly in front of you. When we were going to observe an object for an extended period of time, we would position the chair facing the eyepiece, which means getting up the rings was a bit more challenging, since you have to climb under the top cage of the scope. You can accomplish this, but it takes a bit more care. We found the easy way was to position the chair with the eyepiece at optimum height and use a small step ladder to facilitate climbing into the saddle. While this could be accomplished with the chair alone, it made it easy with the assist of the ladder. The end result was a remarkably comfortable position with the eyepiece at perfect level and our backs comfortably supported on the back of the chair. We found we could observe like this for a very, very long time. The only drawback was that both of us tended to really hog the eyepiece. The benefits are listed below, so we adopted a new strategy of alternating observing time, while the other did research on the current and next object on the observing list. This allowed us to enjoy very long relaxed and informed views of each object.

Well, now for the reasons that I so enjoyed my new Catsperch Summit. To understand my pure joy following my first session with this observing chair, I suppose you would have to know what it was replacing, which was either a quickly manufactured adjustable chair that I fashioned from scrap oak in my workshop one day and a step ladder from the local hardware store. My old seat made

an acceptable rough mach up, but should have been redesigned with upgrades years ago. It was cumbersome and limited my seated observing on the 20" to low angle objects. Most of my observing was done using the step ladder. I think I was on my fourth model. My garage is littered with an assortment of step ladders. I was always in the hunt for the perfect size and weight. The one I currently used was a bit on the heavy side, but it is very stable and has nice wide steps. The biggest challenge of course is the problem with all commercial step ladders, and that is the distance between steps, which requires a back scrunching "hunch" to view a good number of objects that are inconveniently located between comfortable flat footed stances on the steps.

What makes the Catsperch so different



and enjoyable is: the extended seat height range (8"-58"), which allows me to view seated from horizon scrubbing to zenith surfing, and the short two inch intervals between the two step rungs and seat, which allows comfortable posture while observing objects in any sky position. The improvement in comfort really made a difference in our enjoyment during a long observing session. Not only did Margie and I engage in longer observing sessions, but we found ourselves looking much longer and more patiently and critically at every object on our list. Having a relaxed posture allowed us to focus on calm steady breathing and more intense visual focus on detail. I did not realize how distracting even a little bit of discomfort can be

truly observing deeply. This is where my expectations were exceeded. I knew it would be more comfortable, but I underestimated the impact it would have on the quality of our observing. We saw much more detail in objects we had observed many times before and our enjoyment meter swung off the charts as we both agreed we had more fun observing than we could remember having in the last several years. We were still so fresh and stoked after about four hours of observing one night that when clouds moved in, we headed inside for some soup to wait it out instead of going to bed. Two hours later we emerged anxious for more, and our persistence was rewarded with crystal clear skies. For the next three hours, we had the field to ourselves and enjoyed some of the best observing of the star party until dawn.

This was a huge upgrade for Margie, since she sometimes suffers from lower back pain, which can be greatly aggravated by long sessions standing and observing at uncomfortable positions on a ladder. Because of this, she will frequently pack it in around midnight. Using the new chair, she observed on numerous nights during the star party until 2:00-3:00 with me, and with absolutely no back pain.

I can't even describe the fun we had casually surfing around the Veil nebula and some galaxy cluster groupings located near Zenith. It was a blast to be sitting so high above the field and observe non-stop with the controller in hand. Margie and I both noted a new sense of freedom in our observing. It made a quantum improvement in my ability to record notes, and I was even inspired to drag out my sketch pad again.

I can truly say this item is on my highly recommended list if you own a telescope that mandates you climb on a ladder and you currently experience any discomfort during your extended observing sessions, or if you like to sketch or take notes. For Margie and I, the pain to gain, or enjoyment to cost ratio was very high based on our observing sessions with the Catsperch Summit. The cost of my Summit - \$363, the rewards of sitting comfortably while observing at zenith with my 20" under pristine dark skies - priceless!

*Charlie*