

Vortex Optics Binoculars Upgrades Review



**REDSTART
BIRDING**



What's New from Vortex?

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Ask Vortex owners why they love their optics, and they're likely to tell you that not only do they love the birding experience afforded to them by their optics and the security that comes with Vortex's no-fault lifetime warranty, but they'll also probably say something about the accessibility and approachability of the brand: There's literally a binocular and price range for everyone—beginner or expert, young or old, inexpensive or top-tier. Multiple manufacturers produce great optics, but few provide options for everyone and then back them up with a no-fault warranty. Vortex is one of the few in this regard.

During the summer of 2019, Vortex rolled out an exciting new binocular, the **Razor UHD**. Additionally, the beloved Diamondback and Crossfire models got an overhaul and are now being called the **Diamondback HD** and the **Crossfire HD**, respectively.

Perhaps the most notable of these summer announcements is the addition of the Razor UHD binocular (UHD) to the Vortex family. This product, however, won't replace the well-known Razor HD, so, if you're a Razor HD fan, Vortex still has you covered. The

UHD is the company's first foray into the land of high-end optics and is said to deliver image quality comparable to that of high-end European and Japanese brands but at a better value. With a going price starting at \$1,449.99 for the 8x42 model, it's worth your consideration.

Not having had a chance to look through them myself, I can't speak from direct experience with the product, but given Vortex's history of providing quality optics, I can say with confidence that this is one model you'll want to check out at the next birding festival.

So, what gives the UHD the extra punch that propels them to their top-tier status? The secret is in a more efficient Abbe-Koenig prism. What does that mean, exactly? Basically, when light passes through the new prism system, it takes a simpler optical path than before and eliminates the need for both reflective and phase-corrective coatings, resulting in a much higher light-transmission rate. This will help you discern detail more easily, especially in the low-light situations we encounter during early morning and evening birding excursions.



[**Shop the Razor UHD**](#)

Chromatic aberration is also significantly reduced in the UHD, and thus resolution, contrast, and color fidelity are greatly improved. Color fidelity can be thought of as how closely the colors you see through your optics match those found in nature—an important consideration when determining which optics to buy. Given the importance of color in determining which bird's identification, it makes sense to strive for the most accurate color possible. You want the colors you see through your binoculars to be representative of true plumage colors. High-end optics generally achieve this well. In addition to the prism changes, the UHDs sport top-of-the-line lens

coatings and a durable magnesium chassis, making them both rugged and lightweight.

The Razor UHD wasn't the only binocular to get a new prism; in fact, the new Diamondback HD binocular has a completely overhauled optical design. This is true for the entire line, from the 8x28 to the 12x50 models. It now incorporates HD glass, a new prism, and added phase-corrective and dielectric coatings that make the new Diamondback HD binoculars perform more like binoculars in the \$400-plus price class for a little more than \$200. From an optical standpoint, they are nearly as good as the Viper HD, boasting quite similar specs at a more affordable price. Sure, they may not be as rugged, but they're covered by the Vortex VIP no-fault warranty.



[Shop the Diamondback HD](#)

After a morning of birding with them, I was thoroughly impressed, especially considering the price. Weighing in at 1.3 pounds, the 8x42 model is quite easy to use for long periods, and the rubber armoring makes them easy to hold and pleasing to the touch. Optically speaking, they're bright and clear, providing an image that's surely worth more than their price tag suggests. Their field of view is comparable to other binoculars in the same class and made finding birds, even in dense riparian vegetation, a non-issue. A five-foot close focus makes switching between birds and bugs a breeze—and believe me, we've got some stunning insects out here in New Mexico! I'll bet you do in your neck of the woods, too.

Looking more closely at the image, it begins to degrade a bit near the outer edge of the field, but it is certainly not noticeable unless you're looking for it, and remember: You can't have it all at such an

affordable price. I can't see this detail posing any problems for birding. How often do we place our subject at the edge of the image? In the best-case scenario, the answer is never.

Here's the takeaway: All of the optical improvements are well executed, and you'll get more out of the Diamondbacks than ever before, for the same great price. It's hard to beat that kind of value. If you already have a high-end binocular, you might consider this as an inexpensive backup or something to leave under the front seat of your car for that chance bird encounter.



Shop the Crossfire HD

The new Crossfire HDs have nearly the same optical design as the Diamondback HD, minus the prism coatings, which makes it a good step up from the previous generation, though not quite as crisp and sharp as the Diamondback HD. They're slightly heavier, at least on paper, though I didn't notice it much in the field. Additionally, their chassis is made from polycarbonate plastic, making them less resistant to regular drops and unavoidable bino abuse. When using the Crossfire HD and the Diamondback HD side-by-side, there's really no contest: The Diamondback HD is clearly superior, optically.

So, if the question is whether to buy the Crossfire HD or the Diamondback HD, treat yourself and go with the Diamondback. For only \$80 to \$100 more, the Diamondback HDs are well worth the price. With that said, the Crossfire HD is a great first binocular for a teen birder and would be handy to just have around the house or to share with your friends on a bird walk.

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