

Choosing a Grab and Go Altazimuth Mount

Question:

What sort of alt az mount would you recommend as a grab and go? My HEQ6 is busy in use for imaging with my new scope which leaves my Skywatcher ED80 available for star hopping during imaging runs. Its something sturdy, portable and basic that I am after without breaking the bank. I've looked online and the prices for the Sabre and the Pro Optic Ericole mounts are a bit expensive especially when you consider you also need a tripod to go with them. I've also been looking at the Skywatcher AZ 4 mounts. I wondered if you had any experience in this area.

Reply:

Yes, perhaps I can help with the alt-az question. I own a made in Germany Giro DX that I bought from Markus Ludes some years ago. According to Baader, this is the precursor of the Ericole. I use it with my TEC 140 which weighs around 10.5 kilos with finder-scope etc. I like it a lot. It is sturdy, portable, well-designed and convenient to use. I use it on a tall Vixen pier rather than a tripod. This gives a convenient sitting down eyepiece height with the TEC (using a diagonal) and there is no issue of tripod legs potentially fouling the scope when it's swung towards the zenith. I've also used it with my William Optic 98mm; with this smaller scope that issue doesn't arise.

The load bearing capacity of the Giro (>Ericole) is remarkably high. I usually balance the TEC with a counterweight on an extension bar. With the 98mm, there's no real need to. It would be possible, though I've not tried it, to mount both of the scopes opposite each other.

The action is smooth. If you balance the scope in altitude (and ideally in az as well) you can leave the axes just a little bit screwed down or even unlocked and just move the scope in the same sort of way you'd nudge a nicely constructed and balanced Dob. So, I can recommend these mounts and, while they are a little bit pricey, it's not a purchase I regret.

I've not used the Sabre mount. It looks to me like a clone of the Giro, but I'll check and come back to you. I think the Az 4 is a single arm mount isn't it? I've not used one but I've looked at similar designs; I tried one out while testing an eyepiece a few months ago. They are very handy and, if you want something for a light scope that's very quick to set up and simple to point around the sky, then, in my opinion, they're worth a look. The Vixen Porta II is another mount in this category that you might like to consider.

The Berlebach alt-az head and tripod also come highly recommended by a friend who is an expert observer and whose opinion I trust; you can find them here:

<https://www.berlebach.de/?bereich=details&id=413&sprache=english>

<https://www.berlebach.de/?bereich=details&id=139&sprache=english>

You can purchase these these direct from Berlebach. The mount appears to be cheaper than the Ericole but closely similar in concept. I can confirm from experience that the Berlebach tripods are excellent; I used one with a GPDx for all my films shots from La Palma. Quite light, probably more vibration free than comparable metal, well designed and very stable.

I hope this helps.

John Evans FRAS

GAS Ask an Astronomer