



Starry Night Pro Plus: computer software for Windows & Macintosh

Since I reviewed *Starry Night Pro* a couple of years ago (*JBAA*, 112(5), 2002), it has had two upgrades to reach the current version of 4.5. The *Plus* option has the addition of a DVD giving over 2½ hours of high quality video and CDs containing additional high-resolution planet images, horizons and movies. This does, however, add £30 to the price, bringing it to £129.99. (Of course, you can save 30% off the RRP by purchasing from Amazon.co.uk, remembering to use the link from the BAA website!)

Though most of the copious information on the DVD may be well-known to most serious amateur astronomers, it does contain some information that may not be readily available elsewhere. As an example, the

video on Coronal Mass Ejections explains the colours in the aurora, and covers the Maunder Minimum.

So what has changed? For a start the interface has been completely reworked, and is now much cleaner and less cluttered. There is a Red Screen feature which helps to preserve night vision (and it does work) plus you can plan a night's observing session and log your recordings for later review and export to a tab delimited text file.

The databases contain in excess of 16 million stars, with online access to data on further 500 million, down to magnitude 21. There are 13,000 deep sky objects, and nearly 100,000 galaxies. The Equipment list allows you to create custom field-of-view indicators to match your telescope eyepieces, binoculars or CCD.

Particularly handy is the ability to choose an object, then click the Info tab and choose Extended Info. This connects you to Livesky.com which has a first-class search system enabling you to find the latest information painlessly. As a quick and dirty test of accuracy, I tried some data from p134 of the June 2004 *Journal* concerning simultaneous transits. That for 6757 July 5 was almost spot on, but that for 15790 April 20 was some 70 days out – or less than 0.00002%, giving plenty of time to refine the program before it becomes crucial!

I have no hesitation in recommending *Starry Night Pro*. Whether you need the *Plus* version will be a matter for personal preference, but it would certainly be a valuable aid in fostering interest for the newcomer to astronomy.

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