



The new amateur astronomer

by Martin Mobberley

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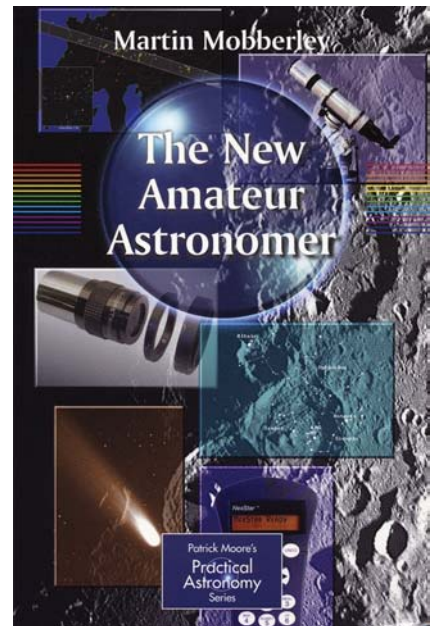
The author is well known in the UK amateur community as someone who for many years has pioneered the use of new astronomical equipment and observing methods. His writing communicates this wealth of experience with the same dry sense of humour for which he is renowned in the BAA. His latest book provides a timely review of the astonishing results being achieved by dedicated amateurs using the latest techniques and technologies now available to them. The word 'New' in the title should therefore be interpreted more in the sense of *up to date* than *beginning*, although the beginner will find the review of equipment options early in the book helpful.

Amateurs at all levels looking for motivation and inspiration to make the most of the latest equipment should find it here. But be warned, the results presented in the book will generally not come without a substantial investment of time and, in some cases, money.

The book is in two parts. The first seven chapters provide an introduction to the use of current (in 2003) goto telescopes, video, digital and CCD cameras, and the software needed to analyse the data they produce. The remaining seven chapters describe the

work of several amateurs who lead their chosen fields of endeavour, and reveal some of their secrets for achieving such impressive results. The author's approach is always practical, identifying what makes the difference between average results and excellence. His explanations assume a moderate level of fluency with the basic concepts of telescope operation and imaging, so the book will probably be of most use to the already engaged amateur, although the ambitious beginner will also pick up much useful advice. The Appendix contains a helpful list of URLs which a dipstick test revealed were almost all still operational.

Prices are given throughout in dollars, reflecting the commercial dominance of the US amateur market. I found very few typographical errors, none of which were serious. The coverage of equipment and techniques, and the author's recommendations for their use, are comprehensive and on only a few occasions did I find myself mildly disagreeing with his comments or noticing an omission. On the whole, though, his advice is balanced and sensible, and, in the case of remembering to use an earth leakage circuit breaker, even potentially life-saving! I did, however, find the frequent references to the excellence of the colour planetary and deep sky images shown rather frustrating in a book with only monochrome illustrations. It really does need colour to show the reader what amateur imagers are now achieving.



I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and found many instances where the author's advice aligned well with my own experience. As with all texts focusing on latest developments, it runs the risk of dating relatively quickly, but much of the sound advice given here should stand the test of time.

David Boyd

Dr David Boyd is a member of the BAA Council, and makes photometric measurements of cataclysmic variable stars using a CCD for the Variable Star Section and the American Association of Variable Star Observers.

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