

Binoculars bringing the world in closer for your inspection

Associated Press

Whether you want to read the quarterback's lips or identify a bird of a different color, binoculars will put you closer to the action. Make sure to pick a pair with quality and features to suit your needs.

Binoculars are either prismatic or nonprismatic. In the more precisely engineered and expensive prismatic binoculars, entering light passes through prisms that make the image reaching your eye seem more realistic and sharp. The most common type uses a "Porro prism." The costlier and more compact roof-prism type, with prisms positioned differently, is sleeker and lighter.

German-style prismatics have two-piece barrels with prisms easily misaligned if the binoculars are treated roughly. The American-style one-piece body is sturdier.

Nonprismatic binoculars are less expensive and more rugged, but they lack the magnification and 3-D effect you can get with a prismatic product. Opera and field glasses are usually nonprismatic. Be wary of glasses with bulging sides that imitate the shape of the prismatic glass.

Binoculars usually bear two numbers on the body, appearing as 7 x 35 or 7 x 50 and so on. The first number gives the magnifying power. At 7 x, the subject being viewed appears seven times closer. Most binoculars magnify between six and 10 times. If you go higher and lack a tripod, the slightest hand movement will cause an image to jump around.

The second number is the diameter in millimeters of the objective lens, the larger one in front that receives light. The bigger the lens, the more light it gathers and, to a degree, the brighter the image reaching your eye.

As a guide for using binoculars at night, some makers' product brochures report relative brightness; others report the more useful twilight factor. Either way, the higher the number, the better the night vision.

Models numbered 7 x 35 and 8 x 30 are the most versatile. Because they collect more light, a 7 x 50 or an 8 x 40 are good if you expect to use binoculars frequently at twilight or in dim light, although a 6 x 30 is a worthy compromise if less bulk and more portability are important.

Another measure of binocular performance is the field of view, which is the width of the area you see from 1,000 yards or meters away and is defined as regular, semi-wide, wide field and extra-wide field. As the binocular's magnification increases, the field of view narrows.

Binoculars fall into four price categories. Generally, the more you pay, the better the view.

Top-of-the-line equipment includes models from Bausch & Lomb and Leitz and Zeiss. Because of the superior materials, exacting construction, durability and lifetime guarantees that frequently come with these quality products, even standard-size, all-purpose binoculars are pricey.

A Zeiss 8 x 30 B Dyalot, for example, goes for \$555. A Leitz Trinovid 7 x 35 B costs \$459 and a Bausch & Lomb Classic 7 x 35 sells for \$730, although discounts are common.

In the next-best category, which includes Bushnell, Swift, Tasco, Edmund Scientific, Fuji, Nikon, Canon, Minolta and Pentax, prices fall. By comparison, the Bushnell Explorer II 7 x 35 general-use model sells for \$206. Quality is often good enough to make models from this group attractive choices.

Serviceable but less costly models are available at another level, which often includes economy models by manufacturers in the second-best group. Bushnell's Sportsview 7 x 35, for example, sells for \$75.

In the \$25 to \$50 range, you may get your money's worth if you're going to use the glasses only occasionally for less demanding tasks.

All binoculars are now made abroad which means that differing standards of inspection apply.

Bausch & Lomb and Bushnell, for example, test their Japanese-made binoculars after they arrive in this country while other brands are inspected in Japan by the Japan Telescope Inspection Institute.

Changing Times magazine suggests that you read and compare provisions for protection and warranties. Other ways to test for a suitable pair:

— To compare brands, take a printed page and back up until you can barely read the print through the binoculars. Switch to another model. See how it compares in bringing the same size type into view from the same distance.

— Sharply focus the binoculars on a distant, somewhat detailed object, then swing them to each edge of the field of view to see whether the image sharpness changes much. Loss of clarity should be minimal.

— Go over the general appearance of the binoculars. Avoid those that are scratched, dented, or that have internal rattling.

— Point the eyepieces toward a bright light and look through the objective lenses. From 5-10 inches away, check the inside for chipped lenses and prisms, dirt or lens cement separations.

— Check to see that internal glass surfaces are fully coated with magnesium fluoride to ensure brighter and better defined images; coated lenses will reflect a magenta hue.

— Check the alignment by observing a distant object with both lenses. Cover one lens with your hand, then quickly remove it. If you see two images before your eyes adapt to the change, the barrels are out of alignment.

Father and daughter team keeping job of piano tuning a family tradition

Associated Press

LAKE JACKSON — Family businesses are a fading institution. But the tradition of passing skills from generation to generation is alive and well in the Harvey household.

Kenneth Harvey and his daughter, Karen, are piano tuners and refurbishers. Their shop, located behind their house, is filled with pianos or parts of pianos and on any given evening, you're likely to find the Harveys tinkering with keys, strings and hammers.

"This one here has real ivory and you can't get that any more," says Kenneth, 50, pointing to a set of ebony and ivory keys Karen pulled from a baby grand piano nearby. "So right now, she's in the process of trying to match them with ivories from other old pianos. That's going to take her a long time."

Kenneth has tuned and repaired pianos for years, and his interest apparently was infectious. Karen, 23, says she used to watch her father work and caught the bug.

"I started out working with my dad about a year and a half ago," she says. "I used to go out while he was working and talk with him. Of course, I didn't understand it at first, but I've picked up quite a bit."

Since then, Karen has advanced to the point where she can handle a project on her own. The baby grand, a Bramback, must be completely

overhauled, a task not to be taken lightly. But when she is done, Karen will have a musical instrument of unparalleled quality.

Kenneth learned to tune and fix pianos from an old acquaintance, M.B. Kelley, with whom he used to get together and play the guitar.

"The finest man I ever met," Kenneth says. "I told him fixing pianos was something that I'd probably enjoy. He said to me, 'Any time you're ready, you just holler.'"

Today, with the skills Kelley taught him, Kenneth and Karen buy pianos from people who would otherwise ship their instruments to the dump.

The hopeless cases are torn down for parts, some of which cannot be found in stores. But if a piano can be saved, the Harveys are faced with the challenge of bringing it back to life.

"To me, taking an old piano that won't even play and rebuilding it so that it can sing again, well, that's something you can sit back and know you accomplished something."

Putting a piano back together is one thing. But making it sound as its manufacturers intended is another.

Tuning requires an ear capable of differentiating subtle changes in pitch. What passes for "in tune" to the uninitiated, may sound painfully out-of-kilter to a trained ear.

"A piano should be tuned at least

once a year," Kenneth says. "Most aren't. And it really depends on how often it's played. I've heard some that are played a lot and tuned a little."

Tuning a piano takes Kenneth two or three hours. Unlike its stringed relatives the guitar and fiddle, pianos may have as many as 200 strings and each must be kept at an exact tension.

Kenneth says many of the keys have multiple strings which must be exactly in tune with each other and with other notes.

High notes have three strings for each key. Those in the middle have two. And the base notes strike a single string.

Once a set of strings is in tune with itself, the note must be matched with the rest of the piano. This is done by playing and listening carefully to an entire chord. If the strings are still out of tune, the listener will hear what musicians call "beats."

Striking a middle C, Kenneth pauses, listening for the telltale vibration that alerts him something is amiss.

"There, you hear that, the way the sound seems to rise and fall?" he asks. "That means it's not quite in tune."

Between their hobby and their jobs at Dow Chemical Co., Kenneth and Karen don't have the time they

need to get all the work done. Kenneth says they are at least six months behind in their refurbishing projects.

"When I retire, then I'll be able to do it full time," Kenneth says. "Until then, though, it's just a hobby."

Karen feels the same way. She enjoys working with her father but has to ration the amount of time she spends in the shop.

"I'd like to continue learning about pianos but I don't know if I'll ever reach the point where I'd quit my regular job," Karen says. "But it's definitely enjoyable."

Karen plays the piano and says she was the kind of child who had to ask if she could take lessons.

"I've always enjoyed playing," she says. "It's a separate world when you play you're all by yourself."

Kenneth says his piano skills are rusty, so he sticks to tuning. Every so often, he'll play one of his guitars—a classic Gretsch or the battered guitar he got as a child. Most of the time, he works with pianos, teaching his daughter and learning more about the craft himself.

It's important to Kenneth that his daughter learn what he knows, just as M.B. Kelley taught him. Kelley died several years ago.

"I guess I'm training my daughter for the same reason he trained me," Kenneth says. "He didn't want to die and take it with him. I guess I feel the same way."

Bus driver: Overtime wage decision was a major victory for U.S. workers

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Bus driver Joseph Garcia was busy working his route the morning the U.S. Supreme Court announced a sweeping ruling on a lawsuit concerning overtime pay.

The court reversed its earlier decision and held that public employees of state and local governments are entitled to overtime pay under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

"I was elated," said Garcia, whose lawsuit led to the Feb. 19 ruling. "We were confident we would win."

That Garcia was doing his job when the ruling was released—driving his bus like he has every week for the past 17 years—seemed fitting for him.

"I chose to have a very low profile on this," he told The Associated Press in one of the few interviews he has granted.

"I think the press tends to glorify the namesake. I don't think it was a Garcia alone. It took many people—a labor of many, many hours to pull this thing off."

Garcia, one of 600 bus drivers for San Antonio's VIA Metropolitan

Transit System, found out from his fellow drivers that the high court had ruled in his favor.

The decision, which has sweeping implications for public employees nationwide, marked the culmination of an eight-year fight by VIA workers to secure overtime pay.

Since the beginning, Garcia has kept a low profile in the case. He says he just allowed his union, the Amalgamated Transit Workers Union, to put his name on its lawsuit against VIA.

"It was a random choice," said Garcia, who was a union board member at the time. Now he is a vice president of ATWU.

Garcia, 38, said he works little overtime these days and stands to gain little from the ruling.

But many other drivers, who work backup shifts and handle charters, had been working 45 and 50 hours a week with no extra compensation, he said.

"You've got workers in the city that weren't getting overtime. It can't do anything but better their lives. They're going to be able to bring a little more bacon to the house," he said.

The American Public Transit Association estimates labor costs for mass transit nationwide will go up 5 percent because of the Supreme Court decision.

The bottom line is that it will cost a little more for citizens to ride public buses, said Scott Baker, assistant general manager for VIA.

Garcia says he has no qualms about local governments having to pay overtime for all public employees.

"We're very happy that other people benefitted from our lawsuit," he said.

The legal skirmishes began in 1976, when the Supreme Court ruled that "traditional government services" were exempt from provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The 1938 law calls for time-and-a-half compensation after 40 hours of work each week.

After years of wrangling between the union, VIA officials and the Department of Labor, the secretary of labor ruled that mass transit is not a "traditional government service."

Immediately, VIA officials sued the labor secretary and the union filed a countersuit against the bus

company. On Nov. 17, 1981, U.S. District Judge Joe Shannon of San Antonio ruled in favor of VIA.

After the union filed an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered Shannon to rehear the case and reconsider. The judge upheld his earlier decision Feb. 14, 1983.

The case was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court March 13, 1984, and the high court reversed its 1976 ruling and decided in favor of VIA workers on Feb. 19. VIA officials appealed the decision, but the Supreme Court refused to hear the case again.

Garcia said he had no idea the case would take so long to be resolved.

The ruling means another set of guidelines for VIA officials to follow, said Baker, the bus company official.

The union and VIA officials had worked out a pay agreement in which workers would get time-and-a-half pay for certain working assignments, Baker said. Despite the provisions, drivers could work more than 40 hours a week and not get time-and-a-half compensation, he said.

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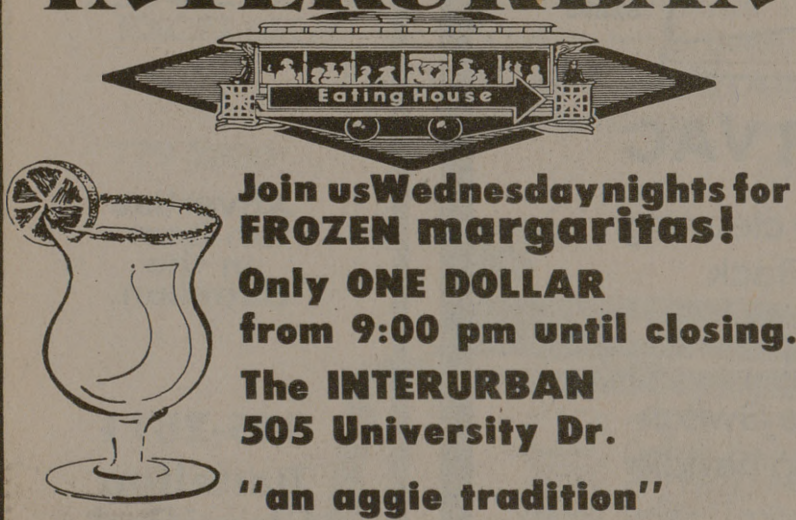
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