

Adding a setting circle to my Sky-Watcher Skyliner-200P Dobsonian Telescope

Background

I've owned the Dobsonian for several years, having bought it 2nd hand. The previous owner had modified the scope by adding a 12" (300mm) "Lazy Susan" rotating bearing.



Most Dobsonians of this size rotate on smooth plastic "buttons", but the addition of the ball bearing equipped Lazy Susan drastically smooths the Azimuth rotation of the scope. Altitude rotation still depends on smooth plastic bearings.



The previous owner also fitted four plastic legs to the base to raise it off the ground and to provide some degree of levelling ability, although the Dobs scope is very tolerant of being slightly off level.

Although Dobsonians are renowned for their light gathering ability at low cost, their greatest failing is the lack of any form of goto ability or even setting circles that can aid in the location of dimmer objects. Star hopping is the usual way of navigating a Dob and with a Telrad Finder fitted star hopping is perfectly feasible.

But what if I had some form of goto adaption to my scope.....?

Giving the Dobs a "push to capability"

Push to adaptations usually consist of some form of setting circle for the base/Azimuth setting and a level/protractor arrangement for the Alt setting.

For the Altitude setting I simply use a digital protractor which has a built in magnet that allows it to cling to the scope like a limpet. This was by far the easiest step, and even on its own it is a worthwhile investment of around £25.



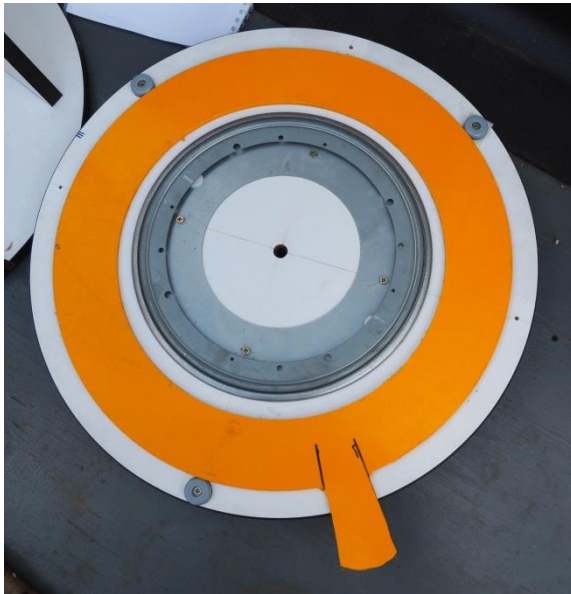
There are a number of ways that setting circles are fitted to Dobsonian bases. You can research them on the net as I did, but I feel my approach is the best as it allows for easy adjustment when setting the scope to North.

This is the process of setting up the scope.

1. Place the base so that it is reasonably level and *with the setting circle roughly adjusted for north.*
2. Place the OTA on the mount, find the pole star and lock the base up using a large clamp.

3. With some care so as not to move the scope in Azimuth, adjust the yellow setting circle so that the cross hair is on 0 degrees. Recheck you are still on the pole star.
4. Unclamp the base and you are ready to "dial up" the coordinates of any object above the horizon. I use SkEye app on my tablet for this.

The Azimuth Setting Circle



Rather than attach the printed paper circle to the base of my scope I decided to fit a plastic circle between the Lazy Susan bearing and the outside of the base. The setting circle "ring" is held in place by three plastic buttons. These are the same plastic buttons that the base would have originally rotated on, and which were left in place when the previous owner added the Lazy Susan bearing.

The handle allows the ring to be rotated through approximately 100 degrees, greatly simplifying the alignment.

To make the ring I cut the circle using a

router.

Step 1: decide the radius of the OUTER circle and fix a pivot (a 1.5mm drill in my case) that distance away from the edge of the router blade.



Step 2: drill a small hole in the centre of the plastic board. Switch on the router, place the board over the pivot and allow the router blade to cut into the board. Switch off and check your measurements.

Step3: Switch the router back on and slowly rotate the board so that the router cuts out a circle. Stop 50mm before completing the circle as

this last bit will form the adjustment handle.

Repeat the process with the pivot set up closer to the router blade to cut the inner circle. I moved the pivot another 70mm closer to the blade so that my ring was 70mm wide. Cut the handle out, clean up the rough edges and fit to the base board of the Dobsonian mount. You may need to move the buttons slightly to get a good firm fit.



Printing the setting circles. Cloudynights.com and other websites have free to download setting circles. Take care when printing them that the size is just right or you can waste a lot of printer paper. My original attempt was as a mosaic on A4 paper which I glued together. Later I had them printed on a single large (A2) sheet.

Trim to fit and glue to the ring. Measure the distance from the central pivot to the setting circle markings.



In my case I measured out to the blue mark. This distance is where you will drill the viewport.

The next step was the hardest step of all as it required me to drill a 50mm diameter hole in the top part of the Dobsonian base. Drilling wasn't hard, but making that first cut was a big step as everything else until now was reversible.

My first attempt (see right) was in the wrong place and so I had to make another cut. The best place for the viewport is on the left side of the base. This is the west side when the OTA is pointing North, and the same side that you will stand when operating the scope.



And that is as far as you need to go.

But being an iveterate "tweaker" I decided to fit a 12v battery powered LED light for the viewport.



Another light on a lead to view the Digital Protractor, This light has a magnet attached and I pop it on the OTA tube next to the digital readout. A small switch completes the setup.



Total cost was under £50, and as I already had most of the bits in place it actually cost less than £10. Lee Cooper, Beverley, UK

Added March 2022: The 8" has been sold and a 12" Dobs bought to replace it. Setting cicles are being added to this one.

NB: You can use any bright star to align your scope to, it doesn't have to be the Pole star.