**By Alan Brandon**
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SBIG, also known as the Santa Barbara Instrument Group, has announced its latest horizon-to-horizon view cameras, the AllSky-340 and AllSky-340C. The AllSky cameras are designed for extended, unattended sky watching such as monitoring the weather, detecting meteors, or keeping an eye out for ETs. The cameras feature a self-contained all-weather housing, heated dome enclosure, an optional Bluetooth interface, and optional solar power.

The AllSky-340 is a monochrome camera and the AllSky-340C is a color camera. Both of the AllSky cameras are based on SBIG's Smart Guider autonomous guiding astrophotography camera, which features a high-gain CCD sensor for improved sensitivity.



The camera body is coupled to a Fujinon lens inside a weatherproof aluminum housing with an acrylic dome providing a full view of the sky. The overall package measures 5.5 x 5.5 x 11in. (14 x 14 x 28cm). Inside the housing, the fisheye lens is mounted to an adjustable plate that can be tweaked to take advantage of the full resolution of the lens and CCD. The mounting plate is also heated to keep the lens and the inside of the dome free from condensation. The dome itself is designed to be field replaceable in case it become scratched or damaged from use.

For control of the camera and image downloading, the AllSky cameras feature an RS-232 port. RS-232 is somewhat slow, but it does support longer cable runs. In addition, the camera can transmit image data while it is taking an image and SBIG says that long exposure images should not experience a delay. As an alternative to the RS-232 port, you can communicate with the AllSky wirelessly using an optional Bluetooth link.

The AllSky-340 and AllSky-340C both operate on 12Vdc power. An optional solar array is available to power

the camera independently. By combining the solar array for power with the Bluetooth link for communications, you can locate the AllSky nearly anywhere without wires. SBIG says the unit could ideally be mounted on the roof, above nearby trees and neighboring buildings.

The AllSky's long-exposure capability is designed for detecting meteors and other bright objects such as Iridium flares, the International Space Station, and many brighter satellites. Its wide field of view enables detecting meteors near the horizon. In addition, the AllSky cameras can take exposures as short as 50 microseconds, which makes them suitable for daylight operation as well and allows continuous weather watching and the recording of cloud conditions 24 hours a day.

SBIG's meteor camera software enables bright meteor detection and recording while even when the system is unattended. The software captures and plays AVI files. SBIG says that one frame per minute, 24 hours of coverage uses about 72 MB of storage. The manufacturer also claims that the processor load of the software is low, so it can run continuously in the background without interfering with other PC tasks.

The AllSky-340 monochrome model is available now for US$2195 with a fisheye lens, or US$1695 without the lens. The AllSky-340C should be available by the end of the year.

For more details and specification, visit the Santa Barbara Instrument Group.

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