

BIG ALARMS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

LUNÁTICO ASTRONOMIA'S POCKET CLOUD WATCHER

By Mark Zaslove

Worst thing in the world if you're a mobile imager: you set your rig up, polar align, cool your camera, get your focus, find your target, get guiding (or unguided), watch your perfect subs start to download, then close your eyes to take a snooze (maybe in your car, mobile home, tent, or just out under the stars), and WHAMO! Clouds move in. Or worse! And what are you doing? Snoring.

If only there were some tiny little battery-powered box robust enough to check for clouds, relative humidity, dew point, temperature, even the advent of sunrise and then set off an alarm on your laptop or phone to wake you about any calamities. Ha! I thought you'd never ask: meet the Lunático Astronomia's Pocket Cloud Watcher/the PCW.

This mighty mite, coupled with the industry friendly AAG CloudWatcher software – which can automate with its own ASCOM safety monitor and weather conditions drivers – is a mobile astronomer's dream buddy.



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Image 1

Small: 71x71x21mm (or, for us backwards Americans: 2.8x2.8x0.82 inches – **see Image 1**) and lighter than a shot glass of vodka at <85grams (hey, you sleep how you sleep, I'll sleep how I sleep), there is one version that is strictly for Bluetooth usage (Android or iOS), and then there's a version that can USB to your computer as well (how I tested it) – no muss, no fuss.

With a rechargeable battery inside, it can run for up to a day, or you can plug it into an external 12V power supply via a 5.5-2.1mm jack for those week-long overnight trips (**see Image 2**). Of course, if you're like me and have it plugged into your laptop, you don't have to worry about any of that stuff, as it's getting juice from the computer.

Speaking of computer, the AAG software is VERY powerful, though the phone app is MUCH prettier (I did try it, and it's simple and cool – **Image 2A**). But, I'm testing the computer version because, hey, I've got my laptop out anyway, so why not?

First off, you have a general Sensor tab to see what's what that gives you the current readings on things like Clouds, Brightness, Temp, Relative Humidity (the PCW doesn't do wind, and the PC ver-

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Image 2



Image 2A

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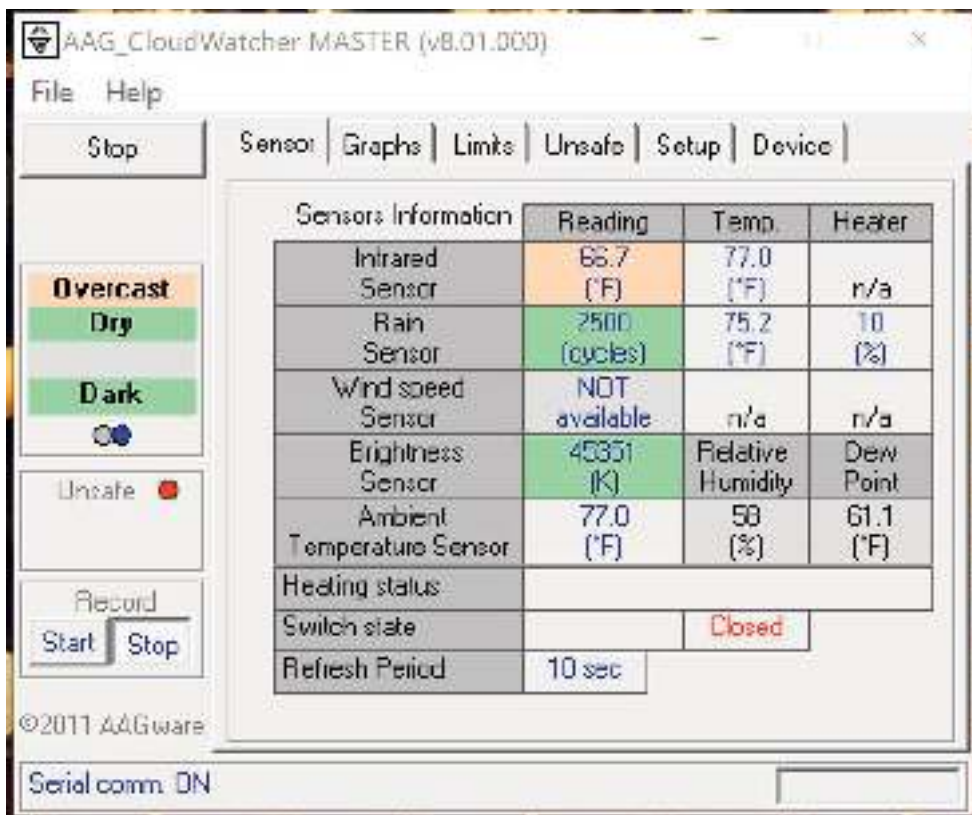


Image 3



Image 4

sion of AAG is not just for the PCW, so Rain and Heating Status are meaningless – **Image 3**).

It gives you a nice Unsafe if something is not optimum ... which leads to the Setup tab (**Image 4**). This has a loooooong scrollable list of settings to check and set (almost as bad as a fighter pilot cockpit, but not quite). Couple this with the Limits settings (**Image 5**), and you've pretty much covered what constitutes Unsafe conditions and how the PCW manages various levels of input. I played with it indoors (covering up the light meter and also shining a light into it; moving it to various rooms), and it seemed to work as advertised.

So, onto the test. During setup in the early evening I let everything get acclimated: the night was clear and not too cold. The PCW agreed with my low-tech assessment, so I was good to go and got into my tent-cot to grab some snooze time. I figured that as pre-dawn came and my rig would park itself for the night, I should get an alarm. And whatta ya know, I did! Got up, checked that everything was where it should be, and that was that. EXACTLY what it was supposed to do!

So, if you want to get some shut-eye at your dark site – Lunático has more advanced boxes for observatory usage – but worry that you'll be sleeping when disaster hits, Lunático Astronomia's Pocket Cloud Watcher is just the thing. At \$290 for the Standard version and \$315 for the PC dual version, it is reasonably priced for the peace-of-mind that it gives you when out in the middle of nowhere and wanting to catch some Z's. Thanks to Jaime Alemany, founder of Lunático for letting me take a look at the PCW. And check out Lunático: www.lunatico.es 