



Simply the best?

Kahles decided the key to thermal success was to keep it very simple. Was that the right call?

GET the basics right and, in theory, you can't go wrong. The most advanced rifle in the world is no good if it isn't accurate, yet the most simple rifle can't be beaten if it puts bullet after bullet into one hole. Is it the same with thermal imagers?

Kahles has bet on it. The high-quality Austrian optics maker has aimed for little more than state-of-the-art image quality in its Helia TI range, although speed of operation is another big plus.

The goal was to make it "as simple as possible," said Kahles' head of product management, Christian Hahn,

who listed the main design criteria as easy handling, secure identification, a lack of "interfering" lights, and "absolute reliability even under extreme conditions".

The Helia TI has only two buttons that do everything. There's also less to be done: the Helia TI does not take photos or videos; it has only three colour palettes to scroll through; the menu is short and relevant.

"We have not forgotten to integrate a photo and video function," says Hahn, "we have eliminated it on purpose."

If you're scared by online anonymity, walk away now,

because the Helia will not help you. If you're serious about quality thermal imaging to maximise your hunting success, the Helia might be your new best friend.

The Helia TI has great image quality and is better than just being simple to use, it's got some cleverly practical design features.

First, let's talk image quality. I have not yet seen a thermal picture quite as good as the Helia's in anything that costs less. In dearer scopes, yes, sure, but not for this price. Kahles has done well on that score. Kahles chose components like sensors, and



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wrote an algorithm, with image quality top of mind.

Target identification is the big problem when you're using a thermal device. The lowest grade units will show you little more than a heat signal — a blob of light. The thermals worth buying make it easier to know what you're looking at and the Helia made it pretty easy for me.

The good silhouettes it produced allowed me to confidently pick wombats from

pigs at 150m, something that can be almost impossible with other units. Its clarity permitted me to identify a cat at 180m by its movement, when it might well have been a possum.

One thing that's no different with the Kahles is the use of a digital zoom. The lens gives you 2.3x optical magnification as the base, and the digital zoom increases that by 2x and 4x. It'll enlarge the image but it won't increase the resolution.



Still, sometimes that digital magnification is helpful.

The depth of field is very generous in the Helia, so I hardly ever had to muck around with objective-lens focus unless the range changed significantly.

I did not miss having more colour palettes. I generally work with black hot, using red or white hot as a fallback if I can't get the view I need from black hot; that's all Kahles gives you



ON THIS SPREAD

1 Thermals find things a regular light won't reveal. This pig was found with the Helia and shot under the torch.

2 Kahles made the Helia to fit ergonomically in your hand with easy-to-reach controls.



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anyway. Not having to flick past other palettes in the menu made working with the Helia quicker. The transition from one colour to the next is instant with the Kahles, too, just by pressing the first button.

That’s one area where the Kahles is fast. Another is switching on. Press the first button for two seconds and it starts up; five seconds later it has a thermal view activated for you. That is excellent.

Waking it from sleep mode is super-fast, too. Just bring the spotter up to your eye and in about 2-3 seconds it’s awake and showing you targets. The Helia includes a tilt sensor and a motion sensor, and it automatically goes into standby mode when you point it down at more than 75 degrees, or if it is stationary for 15 seconds. Movement reactivates it. Clever.

The Helia is so quick because Kahles designed it to load menu functions in the background. Most thermals activate all their software before showing a view and this can take an interminably long time; I’ve had creatures disappear into the bush while waiting for some thermals to either turn on or just wake up from sleep.

Kahles designed the Helia so that when you pick it up, you can’t help but hold it correctly. Even the way the strap supports it plays a role in this. In the dark, it’s easy to feel whether you’ve got it the right way up and whether it’s facing forwards. The square profile prevents it rolling away when you put it down, at least to some degree.

The diopter adjustment is set into a recess that makes it a little hard to adjust but also ensures it isn’t accidentally changed while

LEFT: Simplicity: the Helia has only two buttons along with a very basic menu so it’s easy to use.

BELOW: (Left to right) Black hot, white hot and red, showing wallaroos on a hill at just over 200m. Note that these images are photos of the Helia’s display and they do not match the quality of view your eye will see.


floating around in a pocket or dangling from its lanyard.

Kahles rates battery life at up to eight hours, partly thanks to the automatic standby mode. I never went out for that long at one stretch but comfortably got four hours without a worry. The battery is built in, so you may want to carry a power pack if you are going out all night.

The device is claimed to be strongly built and waterproof to 1m, two things I didn’t put to the test.

Some people won’t like the lack of mounting thread and wi-fi. Without them, you can’t use the Helia remotely.

I think Kahles has made the right call in making the Helia TI so simple and so fast. The editor in me hates it because there’s no camera; as we say, if there’s no pictures there no story! Well, we content makers will just have to shop elsewhere. But when shooting is the priority, clarity and speed are paramount.

It’s easy to appreciate the clarity of the view. However, it wasn’t until I’d experienced the speed and simplicity of the Helia TI that I understood the tangible advantages they bring. Kahles has cut out the nonsense and made a better thermal spotter for it. 



TI 25 vs TI 35

There are two models in the Helia TI range, the TI 35 tested here and smaller TI 25.

The specs are identical except for the lens size, which translates to magnification and field of view. The TI 25 has lower optical magnification at 1.7x compared with the 35’s 2.3x. This gives the TI 35 the advantage in seeing detail: Kahles labels it as being for “reliable identification”.

On the other hand, the 25 has a wider field of view: 26m width at 100m distance compared with 19m at 100. This gives the 25 the advantage in scanning for and finding targets, because its view covers a greater area: it’s for “fast detection,” says Kahles.

In general terms, the wider field of view is better in a spotter unless you’re working in huge, flat paddocks where distant targets are common. In most situations, you’ll find more targets, and do it more quickly, with the wider view.



Helia TI 35 (TI 25)

Lens: 35mm F1.0 (25mm F1.0)

Sensor: 384x288p

Display: 1024x768p

Pixel size: 17um

Sensitivity: <35mK

Optical magnification: 2.3x (1.7x)

Field of view: 19m @ 100m (26m @ 100m)

Digital magnification: 1x, 2x, 4x

Battery: Built-in Li-Ion, 8 hours life

Dimension: 198 x 68 x 63mm

Weight: 430g

RRP: \$3990 (\$3490)

More info: www.kahles.at