

AstroPlanner

VITAL STATS

- **Price** \$45 download, \$60 CD
- **System requirements** PC: Windows 98, ME, NT, 2000, XP, Vista, 7; Mac: OS 9.0+ (includes Mac OS X)
- **Databases** 156, including Messier, NGC, IC and Caldwell
- **Telescope control** Yes
- **Star charts** Whole-sky view and field of view
- **Developer** iLanga
- **www.ilangainc.com**

ASTROPLANNER HAS A huge number of features and functions, and it seems that the deeper you delve, the more you find. Fortunately, the excellent online manual is very helpful in getting to grips with it all.

Although it can control a good range of mounts, the current version of the software (v1.6.1) doesn't include Ascom compatibility, which is close to an industry standard form of computer control for telescopes. However, the Celestron NexStar 5/8 option does cover equatorial Go-To mounts produced by Synta, which includes the ever-popular Sky-Watcher mounts.

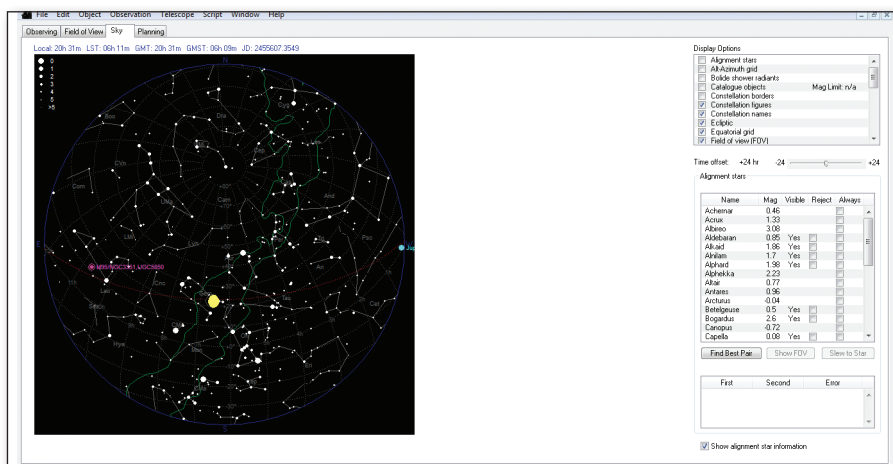
Even if you don't have a Go-To mount, this software will be of immense use in planning your viewing sessions, logging and collating your observations and obtaining additional data on the objects you're searching for.

The program doesn't include a software planetarium, but a customisable all-sky chart clearly shows where each object is located in the night sky on a circular chart reminiscent of a planisphere. In addition to this, the excellent field of view simulation shows what you should see through your own telescope and eyepiece combination.

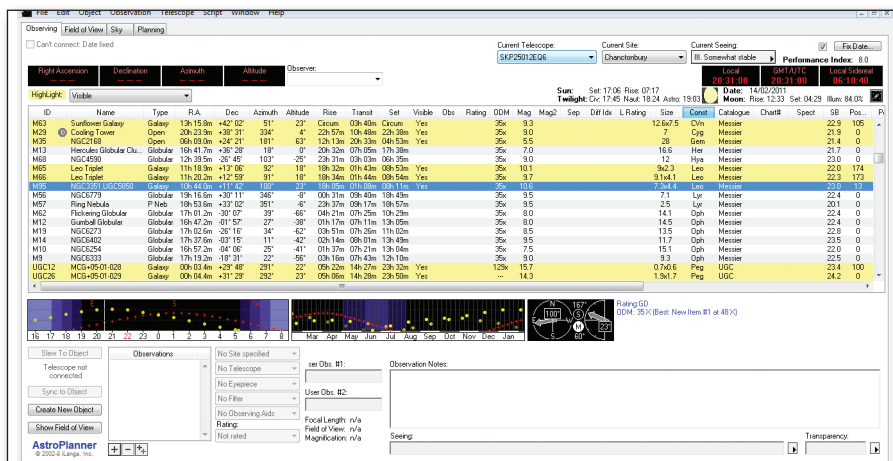
Catalogues galore

We were impressed with the program's extensive set of catalogues. As well as the popular Messier, NGC, IC and Caldwell catalogues, more obscure ones such as the Carbon Star, Collinder, Markarian Galaxy, Struve Double Star and Sharpless HII Region also put in an appearance. Additionally, some equipment-specific catalogues are included, like Orion IntelliScope ST, Meade Star and Celestron NexStar.

The 119 catalogues can be selected from an alphabetic list, and ordered into groups and subgroups. For example, if you like to observe galaxies, you can filter



An all-sky planisphere view is helpful to see the location of each object on your observing list



Creating viewing lists with a multitude of sub-categories is made easy

just these objects from the catalogues. You can even produce subgroups of galaxies, such as 'Interacting', 'Large Magellanic Cloud', 'Small Magellanic Cloud', 'Spiral', 'Elliptical', 'Irregular', 'Active', 'Seyfert' and 'Galaxy cluster', to narrow the selection.

Once you've selected the catalogues you want to plan from, objects that are visible will be highlighted, and by clicking on the table column headed 'Visible', the list will be sorted into two blocks: objects you can see and those below the horizon. Highlighted objects can be further filtered with a range of options from a drop-down list.

Clicking on any of the other column headers will re-sort the data under that heading. So you could arrange the display by magnitude or constellation order if this suited your purposes. Additional information about each object is also displayed. Producing observing logs for each object is simple and multiple logs can be stored for each target.

Originally written for Mac, the Windows version tested here is due for a complete re-write, with v2.0 currently in beta testing. To run the current version in Windows 7, we had to use XP compatibility mode and occasionally had problems accessing the Preferences page, but the planning aspects still performed perfectly. If the quality of the current version is carried on into v2.0 and is stable using the latest operating systems, this will be an excellent program.

VERDICT

FOR Extensive catalogues
AGAINST Struggles with Windows 7

EASE OF USE	89%
EQUIPMENT CONTROL	86%
LEVEL OF INFORMATION	85%
FEATURES	89%
SIZE OF DATABASE	92%
OVERALL	88%