

Dude, You're Getting a Telescope!

You might remember the Dell computer commercials in which a youth reports this exciting news to his friends that they are about to get their new computer by telling them, "Dude, you're getting a Dell!" It was a cute series but it reflects the excitement young people get about anything new, particularly if it's a new machine.

So when its time to finally get your children that very first telescope, you want to make sure it's just the right thing. There are a number of reasons you should put some serious thought into just what this beginner telescope should look like. Perhaps this will be your children's first experience with a real telescope. They may have a healthy and thriving love of astronomy from your family trips to the country to watch a meteor shower or just to gaze at the stars. And you may have piqued their interest showing them how to enhance the experience with binoculars or even letting them play with your telescope.

But this is a big moment. You want them to "bond" with this first telescope the way you did and catch the excitement of using the power of a telescope to do things with their love of astronomy that they could never do before. The reasons for taking care with your choice are many including...

- * A telescope is a big step into the lifelong hobby of astronomy. If they get the wrong thing, frustration could make them lose interest both in the machine and in the field of study.

- * Kids have a short attention span. You want this beginner telescope to take them from where they are to the next level while giving them those gratifying moments discovering new things in the stars every time they use it.

- * It has to be a hardy piece of equipment. Kids don't always know how to treat delicate equipment. So the starter telescope should have some good "training wheels" on it.

- * It has to be their teacher even when they don't know they are in school. A good beginner telescope, accompanied by some stimulating documentation that is written just for kids will stimulate their excitement and use it to teach them to work hard to reach new heights in their quest for knowledge about the stars.

A lot about how you go about getting this first telescope will depend on your own expertise in astronomy. If it is your passion and you have developed a pretty sophisticated knowledge about telescopes over the years, you not only are well equipped to make this choice but you will be there to guide them as they begin to use it.

But if you are just encouraging them in a wonderful hobby that you yourself have not been involved with in depth, first of all, congratulations. You are giving them a wonderful gift of not only knowledge but the love of astronomy and the natural wonder of nature. But you also need some help. So here are some quick guidelines.

- * Find the astronomy geeks. They are easy to find in hobby shops,

astronomy clubs and societies at the local college. They will help you enthusiastically.

- * Look at the telescope you are considering through their eyes. It should not be too complex. Don't get something that will intimidate them.

- * Don't buy a toy. Your kids will know the difference.

- * Make sure it can grow and be expanded as their knowledge expands.

If you put some wise consideration into just the right starter telescope, your kids will be as excited they have ever been for a gift. Don't be surprised if you hear one of them squeal, "Dude, you got a telescope!"