



Low vision



Figure 1 The Maggie with its USB charger and mains adapter



Figure 2 4X magnification

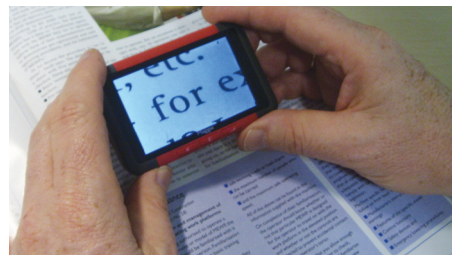


Figure 3 11X magnification

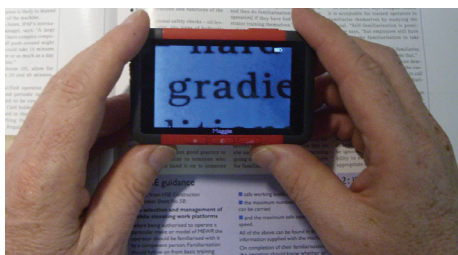


Figure 4 Low brightness setting



Figure 5 High brightness setting



Figure 6 Freeze frame capture

Waking up to Maggie

Bill Harvey road tests a surprisingly compact electronic aid

Portable electronic magnifiers are becoming increasingly popular and *Optician* has reviewed several of these already. The latest product

released by Bierley, the Maggie, is notable, however, as it is the most compact design I have yet seen. I decided to try one out and then sought the opinion of one of my visually impaired patients who had expressed an interest in electronic aids.

The Maggie is just 55mm by 88mm, making it the same size as a pile of 10 credit cards. It is easy to fit into the pocket or a small purse. This means it is very portable, but the screen is smaller than many portable electronic aids, such as the Explora (which is 77x85mm and thicker). The finish is brushed aluminium, making it very similar to a typical digital camera. The unit I had was red but I understand a range of other colours is available.

Before first use the unit needs charging, either from a USB or a power socket (Figure 1). Once charged, the unit is capable of 3.5 hours of use. The Maggie is easy to carry and hold, which means that maintaining a steady position over the object to be viewed with minimum tremor is easy. This is an important advantage, as is the apparent robustness of the unit. Compactness does have some trade off, however, and the buttons on the unit are small and difficult to distinguish, either by sight

or touch. As with many of these units, I would strongly recommend that the practitioner pre-sets them to as great an extent as possible prior to issuing to the patient. Keep the patient's requirement to press buttons to a minimum.

There are four magnification settings which, assuming the unit is held at its maximum working distance from the object beyond which the image degrades, offer 4, 6, 8 and 11X enlargement. This is achieved by repeated pushing of a small button on the unit's front (Figures 2 and 3). A second button gives the option of three preset brightness settings. The aim here is to allow the user to adapt the brightness of the image to best suit the ambient lighting. Under bright outdoor conditions this could be set low (Figure 4) while a dim internal viewing might require a brighter setting (Figure 5). My only concern here is, again, the fiddly buttons. My preference would be to leave this on maximum brightness until the patient reported they were using the unit in unsuitably lit environments and, assuming some manual dexterity, they might be able to adjust accordingly. A third button allows the user to change from a full colour to a black and white image. The unit also has a freeze frame option, allowing the user to store an image for later viewing, typically a phone number or email address.

Patient PH has previously been prescribed 6X spectacle magnifiers for prolonged reading (*Optician*

18.09.09), but finds these cumbersome for occasional glances at text or when out and about in shops. She now uses a MonoMouse with a degree of success to look at photos and crosswords, and can view the enlarged image on her large-screen TV from a comfortable working distance. She tried the Maggie for a shopping trip. She was both impressed by its small size but also a little apprehensive about losing it or being unable to handle it comfortably, preferring something a little more 'chunky'. I made sure the unit was fully charged, and set at maximum brightness, full colour and magnification. I reasoned this would be most appropriate for viewing goods and prices in a supermarket. She managed, with very little effort, to use the instrument and it enabled her to easily see prices and labels. She barely noticed its weight in her bag and was able to capture the image of a label of something she was interested in buying in the future. Her view was that for a portable viewer, for shopping or reading a menu, the Maggie fitted the purpose perfectly. She was also confident it would not break with repeated use.

I think the Maggie is a useful addition to the market, but be prepared to preset the unit, as many patients might panic at having to adjust the tiny buttons themselves. ●

● Thanks to Bierley for loan of the instrument. Further information is available from Bierley at www.bierley.com or telephone 0800 0430 282