The San Jose (California) Astronomical Association held its monthly bright-moon in-town public star party at Houge Park, near state 85 and US 880, on the evening of October 2, 1998. I took the occasion for first light of a new telescope: I had bought a Vixen 70 mm f/8 fluorite refractor optical tube assembly during the previous week. Now, before I go on, I want you all to know that I am *not* a refractorholic, I can quit any time I want.

I didn't need another telescope, and when the little Vixen showed up on AstroMart, that was the first thing I told myself. Then I asked the more important question -- "If I don't buy this, will I regret it?" -- and went ahead. The owner lived not far off, and we got together a few days later to exchange it for a check.

These little fluorites are sure pretty. The tube and dewcap were gloss white, with the fittings a pale matte green, about the color of wasabe, the horseradish condiment often served with sushi. Vixen uses hardware much less thick in cross section than that of most of its competitors. (It is actually more than enough to do the job.) Thus their telescopes appear particularly finely drawn and gracile. I had planned to refinish the newcomer, and have in mind another uncommon paint job (I just completed changing my Brandon 98 to pink and gold), but it is so attractive as is, that I am having second thoughts.

There was no finder, and I didn't have any tube rings for so small a tube. Fortunately, I had some unused rings for an 80 mm refractor, and some sponge rubber that I could cut into strips, and at only 560 mm focal length, a 32 mm eyepiece in a 1.25-inch barrel gives almost a three degree field, so I easily could put the telescope to use.

My first view was of the Moon, which was bright -- ouch -- and free of false color when viewed through an 8 mm Brandon. at 70x. There was a good deal of detail visible in the vicinity of Schroter's Valley, but Luna was still low enough that the seeing was poor, so I moved on to something else.

I lined up on Polaris with the 8 mm eyepiece, and promptly noticed without really trying to, that it was split wide open -- not too shabby for so little aperture in so bright a sky. I added a 2x Ultima Barlow and performed a cursory star test -- a better one will have to await better seeing. The figure seemed excellent, however, and again I saw no false color.

Eleven-day Moon or not, nothing would do but that I start a Messier survey at once. Fortunately, there were plenty of objects in the south and southwest at twilight, that were suitable for medium

magnification. I chased down a handful of Messier globular clusters: M22 and M55 were granular at 47x (12 mm Brandon), while M28, M30, M54, M69, M70, and M75 were not. The tiny asterism M73 was granular at the same magnification -- I couldn't quite hold its individual stars against the bright background from the nearby Moon -- and I had to Barlow up to 93x to find M72 at all. I dropped in my 32 mm Brandon, for 18x, and easily resolved M6 and M7, down near the horizon, and decided to call it quits for Messier work.

By that time, Jupiter and Saturn were high enough for reasonable viewing. The seeing had steadied somewhat, and 70 mm seemed to be about the right aperture for maximally aesthetic views -- several members of the public commented that these views through the little refractor, at 93x, were the best they had had all night. I told them to wander by my the setups of two of my friends, who had brought a Takahashi 5-inch and an Astro-Physics 180, and say it again, loudly. Jupiter showed many belts, with hints of irregularity in their edges here and there. Saturn showed the Cassini division -- quite remarkably, as the planet was still low in so-so seeing -- and one broad, slightly dark band on the planet itself. One moon -- likely Titan -- was obvious, to the west, with another hanging at the limit of averted vision, about a third as far out from the center of the disc, just a hair north of the line from Saturn to its bright moon. Several other objects in the field might have been stars or moons.