

TPoint Add On

User Guide

A Telescope Pointing Analysis System

Revision 1.66, April 2018



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Welcome!

Thank you for purchasing the *TPoint Add On* to *TheSkyX Serious Astronomer Edition Software* and *TheSkyX Professional Edition*.

Professional telescopes worldwide benefit from *TPoint's* pointing analysis and correction. With the *TPoint Add On* to *TheSkyX*, you can discover the errors inherent in your telescope, and improve its pointing performance. With less time spent searching for objects, you'll enjoy the increased productivity of your observing sessions.

The combination of *TheSkyX* and the *TPoint* software provides the tools necessary to:

- Analyze and refine the polar alignment your “go to” or robotic telescope.
- Analyze and improve the mount's pointing performance.
- Provide insight into the repeatable errors in your imaging system.
- Automatically correct the mount's pointing errors when used with *TheSkyX*.

As with other components of your imaging system, there is a learning curve with *TPoint*. However, when used in conjunction with *TheSkyX*, you should be able to complete a *pointing calibration run* on the first night to establish a *pointing model* that dramatically improves telescope pointing.

What is TPoint?



TPoint is interactive telescope pointing analysis software that can assist with polar alignment and greatly improve your mount's pointing accuracy to make your observing sessions more productive.

A telescope must be calibrated by pointing to a known position (usually a star) and record *the actual* coordinates of the telescope and the star's coordinates. This is called a *pointing sample*. The difference between the star's position and the telescope's position is the *pointing error* (Figure 1).

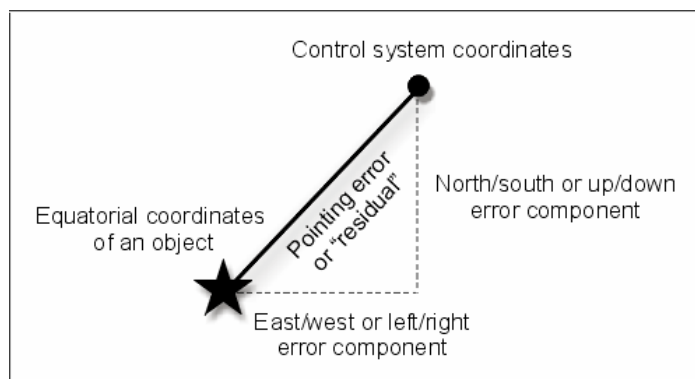


Figure 1: The difference between where the telescope ends up and the actual position of the target is called the pointing or “residual” error.

A minimum of six pointing samples is required for *TPoint* to generate a *pointing model* that provides information about the geometry of the optical tube assembly and the repeatable errors in the telescope imaging system (which includes the camera, focuser, filter wheel, pier, optical tube assembly, the mount’s gears and more). More importantly, *TPoint* uses the pointing model to improve the telescope’s pointing accuracy.

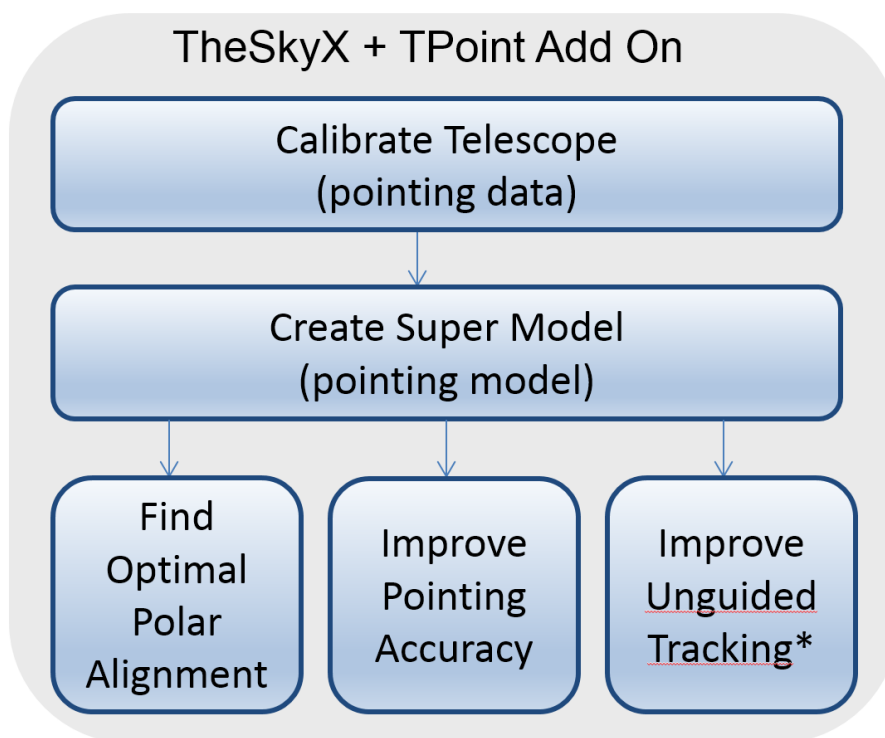


Figure 2: TPoint Add On flow chart.

*TPoint assisted tracking, called *ProTrack* (page 88), is available exclusively on Software Bisque Paramount robotic telescope mounts, and mounts that are controlled by the Bisque telescope control system (Bisque TCS) and *TheSkyX Professional Edition*.

Telescope calibration involves pointing the telescope at a series of positions that are distributed across the sky. At each position, the star must be centered in the eyepiece (or on the CCD image), and both the star's coordinates and the telescope's position are recorded. The two coordinates differ by the *pointing error* or *residual error*.

A collection of pointing samples that are recorded on a single night is called a *calibration run*. At the end of the calibration run (consisting of a minimum of six or up to 500 pointing samples or more, depending on your accuracy requirements), *TPoint* can employ a set of values, called *terms*, that are used to correct the telescope's pointing errors. The collection terms used to correct the telescope's position is called a *pointing model*.

Software Bisque calls to the process of collecting and recording pointing observations as *telescope pointing calibration*.

A set of terms working together to improve telescope performance is called a *model*. Whenever *TheSkyX* commands the telescope to slew (provided there is a minimum of least six pointing samples), the pointing errors are automatically removed.

Considering all the residual errors, the sky *root mean square* (RMS) pointing is the statistical measurement whereby the square root of the mean of the squares of the errors is computed. In simpler terms, the computed sky RMS value provides a gauge from which one can estimate, with a high degree of confidence, how well a telescope system will point. *TPoint* also reports the *population standard deviation* (PSD) based on the following equation:

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\rho^2 o / (o - n)}$$

Where ρ is the sky RMS, o is the number of active observations and n is the number of floating coefficients in the model. PDS gives an indication of how much variance from the average is present in the data.

Once a model is established for a telescope, it is saved and can be used from night to night. The model remains valid if no physical changes are made to the telescope system (for example, changing the mount's polar alignment, or switching OTAs). In situations where a telescope must be arbitrarily recalibrated by pointing at a star each session, only a few of the terms must be re-established each night.

The "magic" of *TPoint* is in determining the values of the terms based pointing samples; a process called *fitting* the pointing data. If each term could be dealt with one at a time, the fit might not be difficult. However, when zero-points, polar

alignment errors, non-perpendicular axes, gear errors and other repeatable imaging system errors are all mixed together, untangling them becomes a daunting task. *TPoint* handles this task efficiently.

TPoint also works in concert with *TheSkyX Professional Edition* or *TheSkyX Serious Astronomer Edition* to make calibrating and improving the telescope's pointing relatively straightforward.

A Simple TPoint Example

The best way to demonstrate *TPoint's* ability to improve telescope pointing is to look at the before and after *TPoint*-assisted pointing results.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show scatter plots of calibration data collected using a Paramount ME Robotic Telescope Mount. The blue shaded region represents the sky and the orange squares are calibration points.

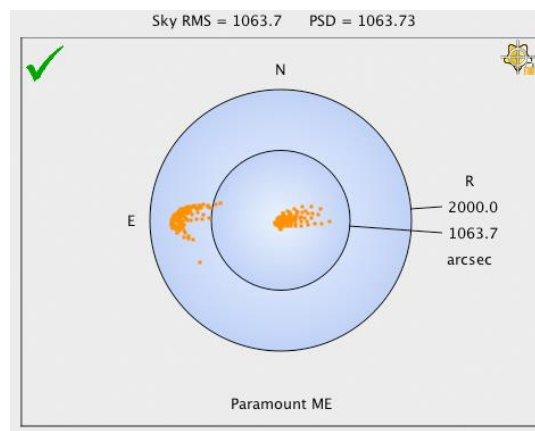


Figure 3: Graph of pointing calibration samples with no *TPoint* model.

Before TPoint

Figure 3 shows that, before *TPoint* corrections are applied, the RMS pointing is about 17 arcminutes. The two “groups” of pointing samples are typical for a German equatorial mount and highlight the significant pointing errors that occur when the optical tube assembly is placed on one side of the pier versus the other.

With this typical system, slewing the telescope to place an object in the center of a 10 x 15 arcminute field of view would be a hit-or-miss (mostly a miss) proposition.

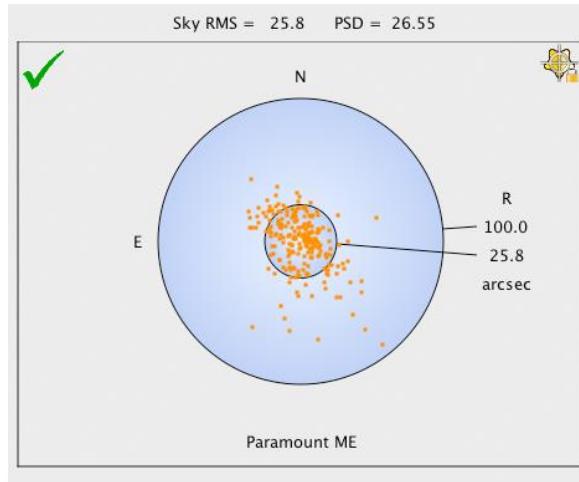


Figure 4: Graph showing RMS pointing after a TPoint model is applied.

Note the significant difference between the scale of the scatter diagrams in Figure 3 compared to Figure 4.

After TPoint

Figure 4 shows the scatter plot *after* the application of *TPoint*. The RMS pointing is under 30 arcseconds. The telescope will now routinely place objects in the same 10 x 15 arcminute field of view.

Minimum System Requirements

The *TPoint Add On* has the following software and hardware requirements.

Software Requirements

The *TPoint Add On* can be run on any Mac or Windows computer running *TheSkyX Serious Astronomer Edition* or *TheSkyX Professional Edition*.

Hardware Requirements

The *TPoint Add On* requires an *equatorially* mounted go to or robotic telescope with sufficient encoder resolution. The following equatorially mounted; go to telescopes benefit from *TPoint* modeling.

- All control systems that use the LX200/Autostar protocol and have sufficient encoder resolution. This includes virtually all go to telescopes from Meade Instruments Corporation.
- Astro-Physics GTO model mounts.
- Bisque TCS-controlled telescope mounts.
- Losmandy mounts using the Gemini control system.

- Mountain Instruments telescope mounts (using the Gemini Astronomical Pointing System).
- NexStar GPS Series, CG, CGE, CPC, SLT Series and Advanced GT Series telescopes, or any NexStar-compatible model telescope using firmware version 4.1 or later.
- Parallax GTO telescopes (using the Astro-Physics control system).
- Takahashi Temma mounts.
- Vixen HTTP mounts.

Technical Support

If you need help analyzing your telescope modeling data, or have questions about how to use the *TPoint Add On*, consider posting to the *TPoint* Community Forum on the [Software Bisque Support Corner](#). Software Bisque engineers and many other knowledgeable *TPoint* users are there to help.

Activating the TPoint Add On

When you purchase *TheSkyX Pro TPoint Add On* from the Software Bisque Store, your *TheSkyX Pro TPoint Add On* serial number is automatically registered to your account.

The *TPoint Add On* serial number is used to activate telescope modeling directly from *TheSkyX Pro*. **No additional installers, software or software downloads are required.**

To access your serial number and activate the *TPoint Add On*,

1. Sign in to the [Software Bisque web site](#) by clicking the **Sign In** link in the upper right corner of the site. After you are signed in, your **Sign In Name** appears in the upper right corner of the site.
2. Navigate to your subscriptions page by clicking your **Sign In Name**, then click the [Subscriptions](#) link.
3. From *TheSkyX Pro*, click the **TPoint Add On** command on the **Telescope** menu.
4. From the **Setup** tab, click the **Enter Serial Number** command on the **TPoint Add On Settings** pop-up menu.
5. Enter your **Name** and **Serial Number**.
6. Click **OK**.

TheSkyX Pro TPoint Add On is now activated and ready to use. You'll need to repeat the above procedure on each computer that is running a licensed copy of *TheSkyX Pro*.

Using the TPoint Add On

Note: The *TPoint* Add On can be run for a 90-day trial period. Visit the Software Bisque Store if you wish to purchase it. *TPoint* is licensed as a non-commercial, single-user product. If you need a site license, contact Software Bisque.

Select the ***TPoint Add On*** command from the ***Telescope*** menu to show the ***TPoint Add On*** window. If you have purchased the *TPoint Add On*, enter your serial number and click **OK**. Otherwise, click the ***Run Trial Version*** button to proceed.

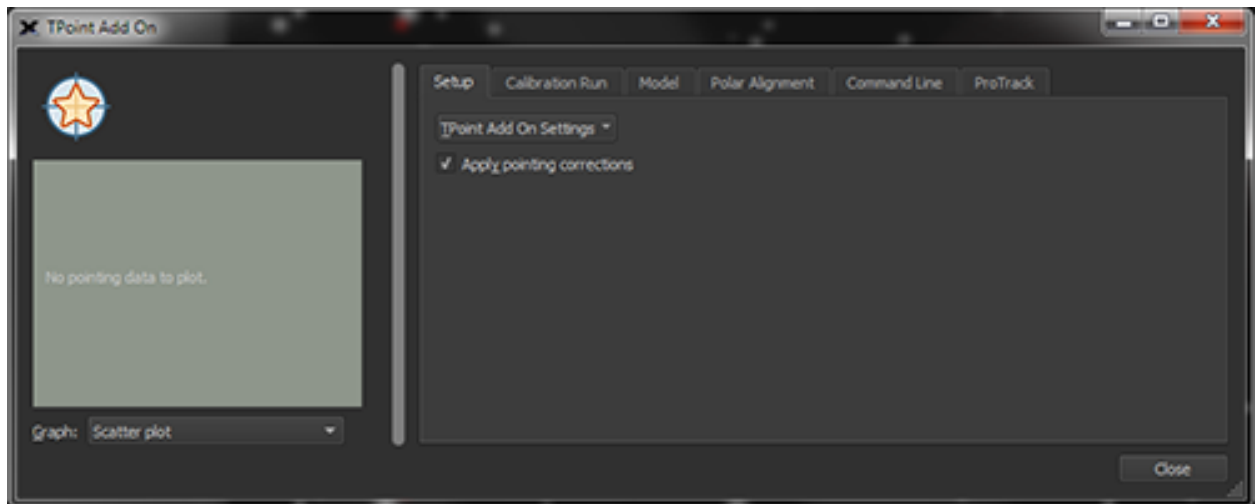


Figure 5: The Setup tab of the TPoint Add On window (Telescope menu).

You can enter your TPoint serial number at any time by selecting the ***Enter TPoint Add On Serial Number*** command from the ***TPoint Add On Settings*** pop-up menu on the ***Setup*** tab.

Quick Start

Follow the steps below if your telescope is setup and are ready to begin. This section assumes that you are familiar with setting up and slewing your telescope from *TheSkyX*.

1. Click the ***Connect*** command from the ***Telescope*** menu. Make sure your telescope is properly initialized and synchronized on a star. If your telescope is not available, or you just want to get a feel for the process, choose the ***Telescope Simulator*** from the ***Telescope Setup*** window.
2. Click the ***TPoint Add On*** command on the ***Telescope*** menu.
3. On the ***Setup*** tab, turn on the ***Apply Pointing Corrections*** checkbox.
4. On the ***Calibration Run*** tab, click the ***Start*** button to begin a calibration run.

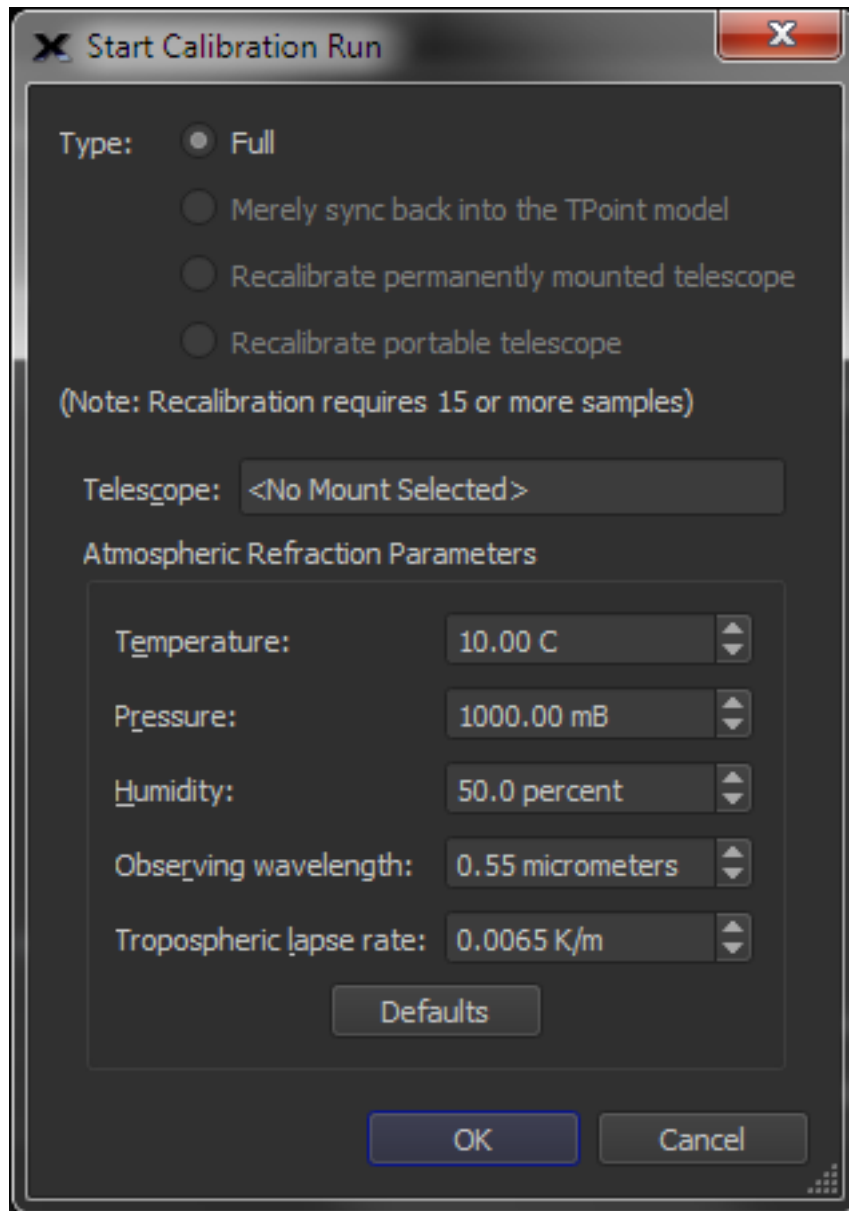


Figure 6: The Start Calibration Run window.

5. Click **OK**. If you know the ambient air temperature, enter it now. If not, use the default settings as they can be refined later if necessary.
6. Slew the telescope to a relatively bright star.
7. On the **Telescope** window (**Display** menu), click the **Add Pointing Sample** button.

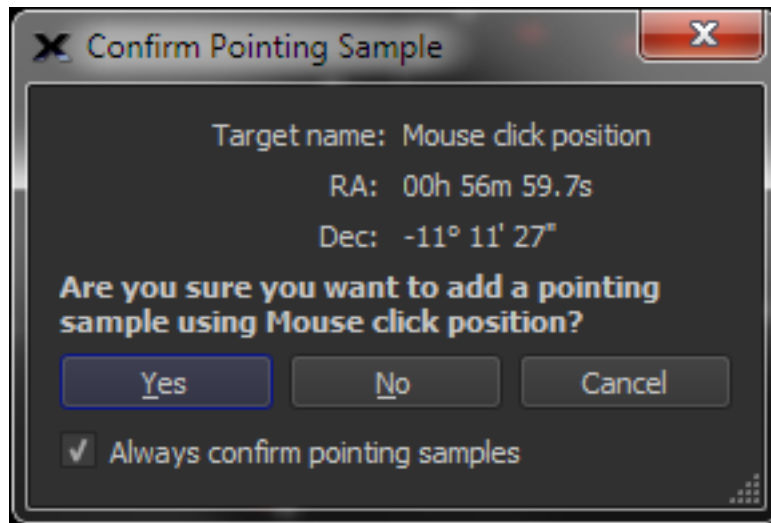


Figure 7: Confirm Pointing Sample window.

By default, you are asked to confirm whether to add this pointing sample to the calibration data. Turn off the **Always Confirm Pointing Samples** check box to bypass this step. This option can also be configured from the **Telescope Setup** window on the **Telescope** menu.

- Repeat steps 6 and 7 for at least six stars or *pointing samples*. After pointing samples have been collected, the scatter plot of the observations is displayed on the right side of the *TPoint Add On* window.
- When you are finished collecting pointing samples for this calibration run, click the **Finish** button. Once a model is marked as finished, additional pointing samples cannot be added to the model. Attempting to add a calibration point will result in a recalibration instead. See “Recalibration” on page 42 for details about the recalibration process.

Once six pointing samples have been added to the calibration run, you should notice a significant improvement in the telescope’s pointing accuracy.

The above process can be tedious, especially when tens, or hundreds of pointing calibration samples are used to create an optimal pointing model. Use Automated Pointing Calibration (page 47) to automatically acquire the calibration samples instead.

Introduction

How can *TPoint* be used to analyze the pointing performance of your telescope?

A reticle eyepiece, low-light video camera, or CCD camera is used to establish a precise and consistent reference point in the focal plane of the telescope. Using this point of reference, a sequence of stars of known coordinates is pointed to and

centered on this reference point (with the aid of *TheSkyX* astronomy software). Once a series of observations have been collected, *TPoint* can create a *pointing model* for the telescope based on the *pointing data*. The model is used each time a slew command is issued from *TheSkyX*. *TheSkyX* adjusts the equatorial coordinates to automatically correct for repeatable telescope errors and improve the telescope's pointing.

TPoint calculates the optimum value for each term in the model, such that the overall model is the best possible fit to the pointing data. Using *TPoint's* graphing commands, the remaining pointing errors can be inspected and any remaining obvious repeatable errors can be minimized by adding additional terms to the model.

The result shows how well the telescope can point, and what coefficients need to be employed to achieve this result. The coefficients that *TPoint* produces (that is, the value of each pointing term) are then saved in the *TPoint Settings* file. The *TPoint* model is then used by *TheSkyX* to adjust the right ascension and declination coordinates issued to the telescope control system, so that the pointing accuracy is improved.

How Accurate Does the Telescope Point?

The pointing accuracy of your go to or robotic telescope depends on the integrity of your telescope mount, the optical tube assembly, pier, mounting rings, camera mounting and other imaging system components. Even small mechanical errors manifest themselves as pointing errors. If the mechanical errors are repeatable, then *TPoint* will likely be able to determine their magnitude and correct them.

Random errors, such as mirror flop, focusing shift, backlash and others, fall into the category of hysteresis and must be dealt with separately. For example, locking the mirror on an SCT will virtually eliminate the random errors introduced by mirror flop.

Since these errors are random, or somewhat random in nature, a model cannot be created that can correctly predict the size of the errors at all pointing positions. Spending some time at the telescope with a simple video system can expose many of these non-repeatable errors. For example, if the focus is approached from both directions while the telescope is centered on an object, any focus shift (backlash in the focuser or mirror slop) should become apparent.

On most amateur systems, root mean square (RMS) pointing of two arcminutes or better can be achieved without great difficulty. Robust amateur systems can achieve 15-30 *arcsecond* RMS pointing.

TPoint cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The ultimate results cannot be any better than the resolution of the encoders and any hysteresis effects (for example mirror slop). What *TPoint* will do is get the most accurate pointing possible from your telescope.

The TPoint Approach

The general approach taken by *TPoint* is the telescope model should describe real effects (geometrical misalignments, well understood flexures, etc.), and empirical functions should be used only to “mop up” any remaining systematic errors. There is a school of thought that advocates using empirical functions (for example polynomials or spherical harmonics) for the whole job. However, the *TPoint* approach has many advantages.

Simple geometrical misalignments might require very complicated empirical functions but are simple to deal with analytically. Direct manipulation of certain geometrical terms while the telescope is in operation can be very useful. An important application of this technique on professional telescopes is where a star is switched from one instrument aperture to another simply by changing the collimation parameters. Another example is where the polar axis of a wide field telescope is routinely raised and lowered as a function of declination, to minimize the field rotation effects of differential refraction. The polar axis elevation parameter in the pointing model can simply be changed by the same amount and accurate pointing is maintained.

A realistic model of a telescope frequently exposes mechanical deficiencies, which can then be diagnosed and cured. A realistic model is likely to require fewer terms, and the number of stars observed in a pointing test can be correspondingly smaller. Physically based models are less likely to misbehave when extrapolating outside the area covered by the available test data.

Interaction with TheSkyX

Pointing calibration requires slewing the telescope to several known objects (or positions) in the sky. *TPoint* works with *TheSkyX* to provide a set of software tools that make pointing calibration straightforward.

TheSkyX performs the following functions during calibration.

- Oversees telescope control by sending coordinates to the telescope.
- Records the star coordinates and telescope coordinates used by *TPoint*.
- Maintains a visual history of pointing data.

- Once a model is established, it adjusts telescope coordinates so that pointing is improved.

Setting up TPoint for Telescope Use

TheSkyX must be able to control the telescope (issue slew commands) to collect *TPoint* pointing data.

How TheSkyX and TPoint Interact

TPoint uses the pointing data to analyze and improve your telescope's pointing. This involves slewing the telescope to several different points in the sky, then recording the actual destination and the desired destination of the telescope. *TheSkyX* is a very efficient tool for gathering this data.

After six pointing samples are collected, *TPoint* generates a model of the telescope's pointing. *TheSkyX* uses this model to silently correct and improve the telescope's destination coordinates each time a slew command is issued.

The green check mark in the upper left corner of the *TPoint* graph appears when the ***Apply Pointing Corrections*** checkbox on the ***Setup*** pane of the ***TPoint Add On*** window is turned on, and shows that pointing corrections are applied during telescope slews. A red X indicates this checkbox is turned off, and no pointing corrections are applied.

The add samples graphic in the upper right of the *TPoint* graph indicates that the calibration is not yet finished, and additional pointing samples can be added. The lock graphic mean a calibration is finished, and no additional pointing calibration samples can be added.

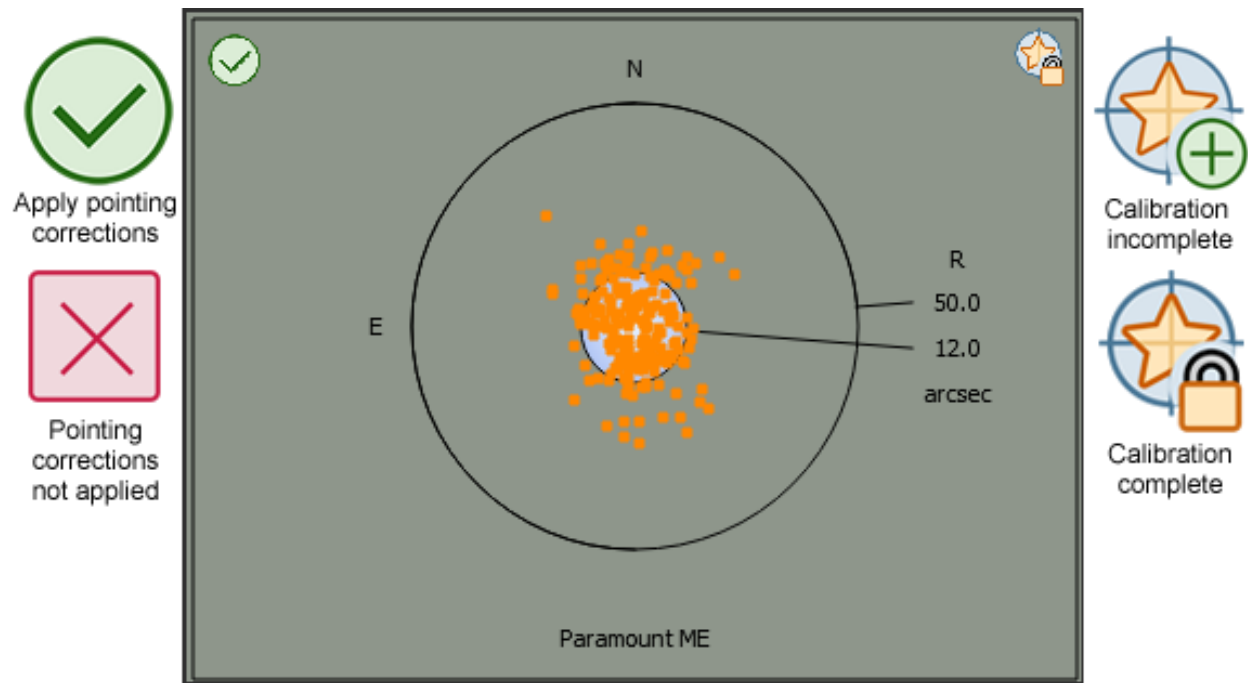


Figure 8: The checkmark on the TPoint graph indicates that pointing corrections will be applied. The TPoint icon with a plus sign indicates that additional pointing samples can be added to the pointing data.

Collecting Pointing Data

To begin collecting pointing samples, start *TheSkyX* and establish a link with the telescope by clicking the **Connect Telescope** command from the Telescope menu. Next, perform any initialization or synchronization that is required by the telescope's control system.

Once communication is established between *TheSkyX* and the telescope, you are ready to start collecting pointing samples. At *least* six calibration points are needed before *TPoint* can improve the pointing of the telescope. After six pointing samples are collected, you should notice considerable improvement in pointing accuracy.

If you are using a German equatorial mount, continue collecting pointing samples *on one side of the meridian* initially. Polar misalignment and errors due to non-orthogonalities in the mechanical and optical axes can make locating stars "on the other side of the meridian" difficult until a more thorough model is established. See "Using TPoint to Quantify Polar Alignment" on page 35 for more information.

TPoint and Third-Party Pointing Correction Software



TPoint cannot be used in conjunction with third-party telescope pointing correction software!

Before collecting pointing data with *TheSkyX*, you must disable all third-party pointing correction software, as well as disable all pointing corrections or pointing models that may be present in the mount's hand-paddle, firmware and any other third-party software.

Please consult your mount's documentation to determine if non-TPoint pointing corrections are available and how to disable them.

German Equatorial Mounts

To collect and record a pointing sample on a German equatorial mount (GEM), *TheSkyX* and *TPoint* must obtain the mount's equatorial coordinates, *and*, unambiguously determine whether the optical tube assembly (OTA) end of the declination axis is East or West of the pier.

By convention, when the OTA end of the declination axis is west of the pier, the telescope's right ascension (***Scope RA***) is recorded as 12 hours different from the star's right ascension (***Star RA***), and the telescope's declination (***Scope Dec***) is recorded as *180° minus the star declination* (***Star Dec***). *TPoint* uses this "beyond the pole" coordinate convention to generate an all-sky pointing model from a single set of pointing calibration data.

Astro-Physics, Gemini, iOptron and Paramount command protocols provide "side of pier" information so that pointing calibration data is conventionally correct, regardless of the orientation OTA.

The Celestron NexStar and Meade Instruments GEM command protocols do not provide a mechanism to unambiguously determine the side of pier. This means if, when collecting pointing samples, the OTA end of the declination axis is below the counterweight shaft, the recorded ***Scope Dec*** will not adhere to the coordinate convention. A TPoint model based on this data would be invalid.

Configuring TheSkyX and the TPoint Add On for GEMs

If your NexStar or Meade Instruments mount is a GEM (not an equatorially mounted fork), before collecting pointing calibration data, make sure to turn on the ***German Equatorial Mount*** option on the ***NexStar*** or ***Meade*** windows, respectively. These windows can be turned on from the ***Display*** menu.

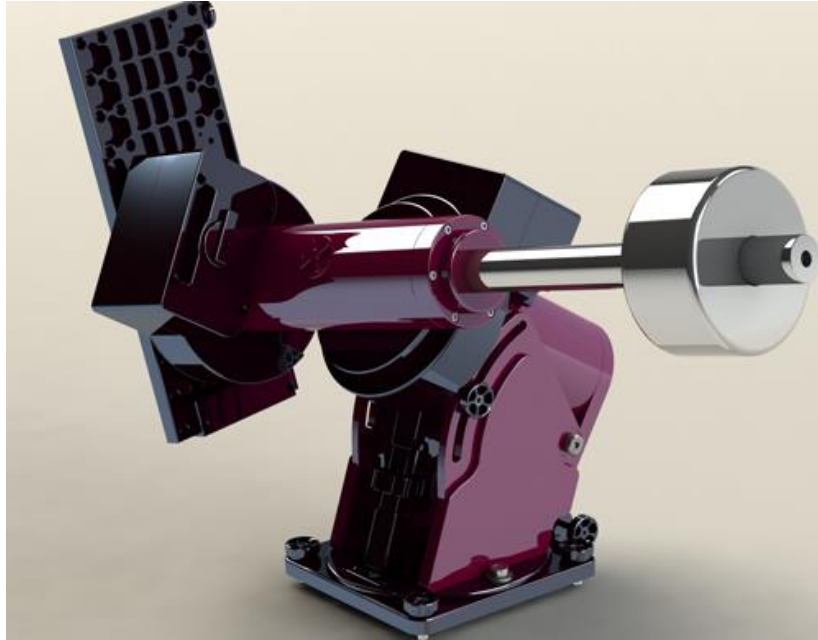


Figure 9: This photo is an example of a GEM in an orientation where the OTA end of the declination axis is below the counterweights. For GEMs that cannot provide “side of pier” information, collecting a pointing sample when the mount is in this orientation will result in “invalid” pointing data.

For GEMs that *do not* provide side of pier information, you must ensure the OTA end of the declination axis is always above the counterweights when collecting pointing samples. This will ensure that the correct **Scope Dec** will be recorded.

Centering Stars in the Eyepiece or Sensor

There are several different methods that can be used to center a star once the telescope control system has been directed at the star’s coordinates. Each method (described below) has advantages and disadvantages.

A commonly asked question is, “*What focal length should be used?*” Of course, the longer the focal length, the more accurately you will be able to center the target. However, using too much magnification can hinder the pointing sample collection process, especially when it is the first time a) the telescope has been calibrated or b) you have used *TPoint*. If the telescope is pointing poorly, locating and centering objects at high magnification becomes an arduous task.

CCD Camera	The goal is to have objects fall on a CCD detector the first slew, so there are obvious advantages to using the CCD camera to perform a calibration run. If the video camera is not centered in the exact same position as the CCD, there will be a consistent pointing error once the video is replaced with the CCD. Of
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	course, this offset can be corrected using <i>TPoint</i> but this requires an additional step.
Reticle Eyepiece	The simplest method is using a reticle eyepiece. Many eyepieces are available with the reticle lines illuminated, making it much easier to center an object. This method has the benefits of requiring a minimum amount of hardware. However, it does require the user physically views and centers each star – which can be difficult on some telescopes.
Video Camera	A low-light video camera is generally the most efficient method of centering a star at a given location in the focal plane since the gymnastics of placing an eye in the telescope eyepiece is removed. As well, there is no integration and download time associated with each observation as there is with a CCD camera. Be sure to check the focal plane relationship between the video and CCD detector to insure they match satisfactorily.

Overview of Centering Methods

The table below lists some advantages and disadvantages for each centering method.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Reticle Eyepiece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple; no additional electronics are required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires manual, visual observations at each pointing sample.
Video Camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient, no climbing around the telescope to look through an eyepiece. • No integration and download times when compared to a CCD. • A suitable video camera can be purchased for about the same price as an eyepiece. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the pointing model is established, the video camera is normally replaced by a CCD camera for imaging. This will require you recalibrate the model to adjust the model for the new instrument.
CCD Camera and Automated Pointing Calibration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a single instrument for collecting pointing samples and imaging; no additional collimation error adjustments are necessary. • Software collects the data for you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a CCD camera.

Manually Collecting Pointing Data

1. Initialize the telescope (see *TheSkyX*'s documentation for details how to do so.)
2. From *TheSkyX*, click on a star, or use the **Find** command from the **Edit** menu to show its information. Hint: Choose a star that is near the telescope's current position, so a long slew is not required. *TheSkyX* uses the equatorial coordinates of the star listed in *TheSkyX*'s **Object Information** report as the baseline position of the telescope.
3. Click the **Slew** button on the **Telescope** window.
4. Using the **Motion Controls** on the **Telescope** window (or the telescope's hand paddle or joystick), to center the star on the current detector (that is, in the eyepiece, on the video display, or on a CCD image).
5. Once the object is centered on the detector, click the **Add Pointing Sample** button on the Telescope window. *TheSkyX* will issue a warning message if the object's coordinates are more than 30 arcminutes from the telescope's coordinates. When the **Add Pointing Sample** button is clicked (and all else is okay), *TPoint* logs the star's coordinates and the telescope's current coordinates.

Repeat the above steps for each pointing sample. A minimum of six pointing samples are required to compute a "bare bones" *TPoint* model. The maximum number of pointing samples to use in the model depends on how accurate you need the telescope to point.

When you are finished collecting pointing samples, click the **Finish** button on the **Calibration Run** tab of the **TPoint Add On** window. This establishes the set of pointing samples, called the **Pointing Data**, which is used to create a pointing model.

After the **Finish** button is clicked, additional pointing samples *cannot be added* to the **Pointing Data**. If you attempt to do so, the **Start Calibration Run** window is shown, giving you the option to perform a **Full Calibration Run**, or to choose one of the recalibration options.

Calibration Run Options

Use the **Calibration Run** tab on the *TPoint Add On* window to perform manual or automated calibrations or recalibrations.

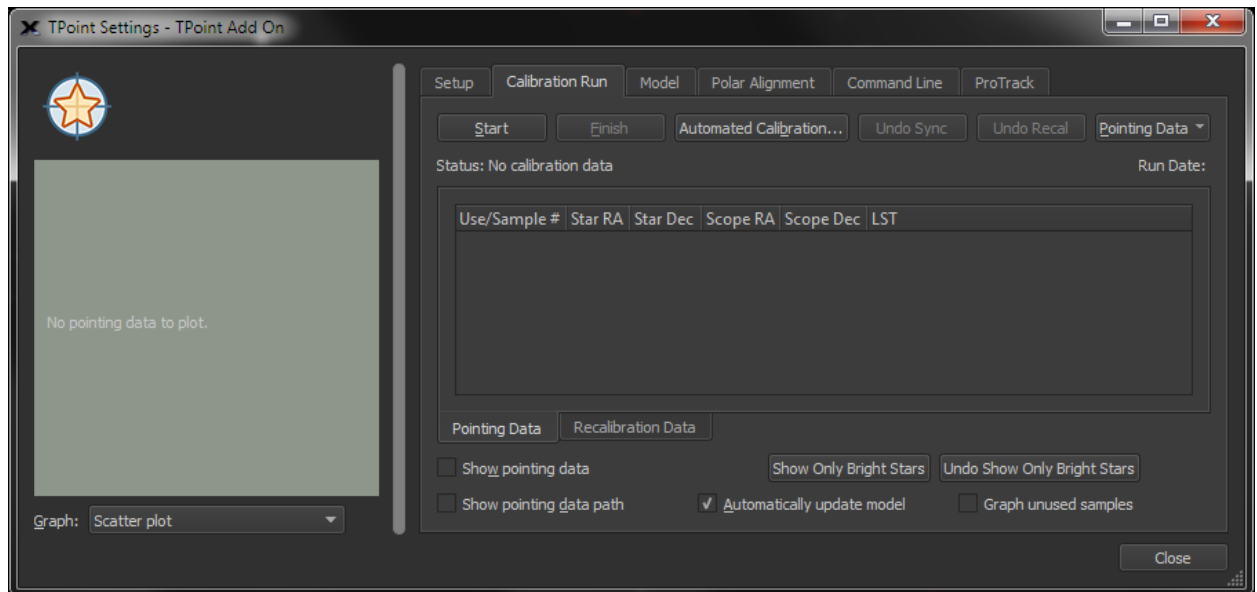


Figure 10: The Calibration Run tab on the TPoint Add On Settings window.

Start Button

Starts a pointing calibration run, or a recalibration (page 42) if an existing calibration already exists.

Finish Button

Ends the current calibration or recalibration run. Once finished, additional calibration samples cannot be added to this run.

Automated Calibration Button

Begin an automated pointing calibration or recalibration. See “Automated Pointing Calibration” (page 47) for more information.

Undo Sync

Click this button to remove the last synchronization.

Undo Recal Button

Restores the model that was based on a previous calibration, and removes all recalibration data.

Pointing Data Pop-Up Menu

Use these commands to clear the existing calibration data, import calibration data, or export the data to a text file.

Status Text

This text shows the status of the calibration or recalibration.

- *No Calibration Data*: No pointing calibration data has been collected.

- *Calibration Complete*: Displayed after calibration data has been acquired, and the Finish button is clicked.
- *Re-calibration Complete*: Displayed after recalibration data has been acquired, and the **Finish** button is clicked.
- *Full Calibration in progress*: Displayed while collecting calibration data.
- *Recalibration in progress, sync into model*: Displayed during recalibrations when the **Merely Sync Back into the TPoint Model** calibration option was selected (page 43).
- *Recalibration in progress for permanent mount*: Displayed during recalibrations when the **Permanently Mounted Telescope** calibration option was selected (page 43).
- *Recalibration in progress for portable mount*: Displayed during recalibrations when the **Portable Telescope** option was selected (page 43).

Run Date

Shows the date that the calibration data was collected.

Pointing Data/Recalibration Data Tabs

These tabs show a spreadsheet of the pointing calibration or the recalibration data that is currently in use.

Show Pointing Data

Turn this checkbox on to draw a symbol on the Sky Chart that shows the location of each pointing sample.

Show Pointing Data Path

Turn this checkbox on to show the path of the telescope while collecting the pointing data.

Automatically Update Model

Turn this checkbox on to automatically update the pointing model when new terms are added.

Show Only Bright Stars

Click this button to turn off fainter stars (magnitude 7 and higher) and the planets. Hiding these objects will minimize potential misidentification of calibration stars when manually collecting pointing data with a video camera or with an eyepiece.

Undo Show Only Bright Stars

Click this button to turn on the planets and fainter stars that were turned off using the **Show Only Bright Stars** button.

Graph Unused Samples

When the **Use** checkbox for a pointing sample is turned off on the pointing data spreadsheet, the sample is not used in the model. Turn on the **Graph Unused Samples** checkbox on to plot the unused samples on the graph, in red.

Pointing Data – How Many Points and Where?

The number and distribution of pointing samples is dependent on the pointing goal for the system and the system itself. Permanently mounted telescopes are better suited for extensive pointing runs (that is, up to hundreds of pointing samples) since the pointing model will probably remain unchanged for a long period.

A preliminary assessment of a telescope's improved pointing capabilities can be made using perhaps 20-30 pointing samples. More extensive calibration runs of 50-100 pointing samples (or more) provide *TPoint* with the necessary data to create a robust pointing model. See "Automated Pointing Calibration" on page 47 for more information.

On amateur systems, performing calibration runs of 30 to 100 points usually result in RMS pointing of one to two arcminutes; less than one arcminute and better RMS pointing is possible on higher-end mounts and collecting more pointing samples.

Hint: Avoid collecting pointing samples below 10 degrees altitude or so, where distortion due to atmospheric refraction causes large offsets between the actual position of the object and its observed position. Although *TheSkyX* and *TPoint* make refraction calculations, computing the exact positions of objects "down in the muck" is difficult.

The first six pointing samples should be in the same region of the sky, separated by a few degrees, and on the same side of the meridian. Using the method, the benefits of the model can be utilized as you migrate away from these stars, making the collecting the remaining pointing samples easier.

Keep an eye on the scatter plot while collecting pointing samples. If you misidentify a star, the RMS pointing will drastically increase, up to thousands of arcseconds. When this happens, you need to turn off the sample so that it is not used in the model. To do so, either click pointing sample rectangle on the *TPoint Add On* window's scatter plot, then click the **Ignore Pointing Sample Number N** command. Or turn off the checkmark next to the pointing sample on the **Pointing Data** spreadsheet in the *TPoint Add On* window's **Calibration Run** tab.

Pointing samples and the telescope's path during a calibration run are added to the sky chart as **My Chart Element Reference Points** and **Reference Line** objects. These *horizon-based* objects are a useful visual reference of the pointing sample history.

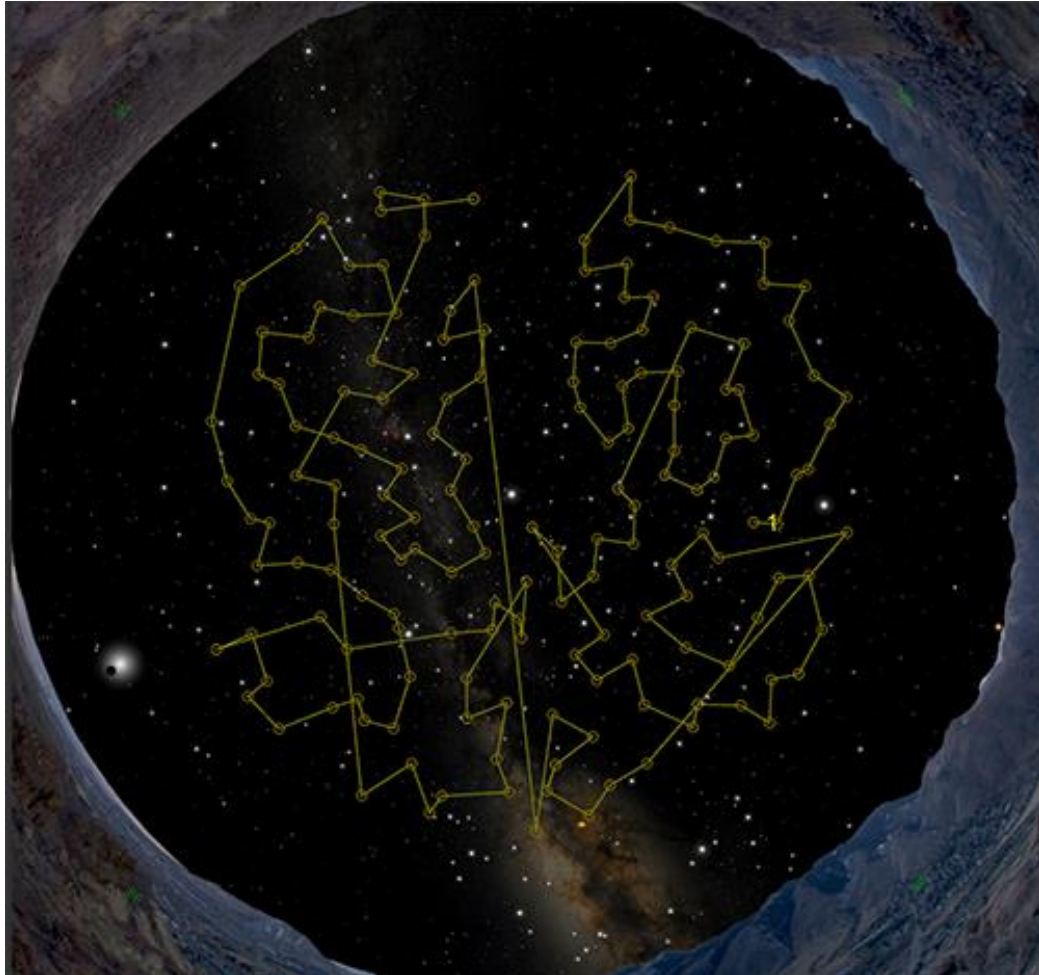


Figure 11: Pointing samples on the Sky Chart. The lines that connect these dots represent the telescope's path.

Turn off the **Show Pointing Data** and **Show Pointing Data Path** checkboxes on the **Calibration Run** tab of the **TPoint Add On** window to hide them. They can be removed by clicking the **Remove All** button on the **My Chart Elements** window from the **Input** menu.

Creating and Using a TPoint Model

In earlier versions of TPoint, a pointing model beyond the six standard geometrical terms had to be constructed “manually” based on the rules outlined in section “Adding Terms” on page 86.

While the models developed using this technique often achieved accurate pointing results, the process proved to be somewhat daunting and error prone for many, especially beginners.

One looming question always seemed to remain, *“How do I really know that I’m getting the best pointing for my imaging system?”*

Introducing the Super Model

TPoint’s *Super Model* feature answers the question above by determining the optimal pointing model for you. Clicking the ***Super Model*** button (Figure 16) performs an extensive statistical analysis of the pointing calibration data and converges on the optimal pointing model using all the processing power of your computer.

The *Super Model* algorithm goes far beyond the iterative approach discussed above and removes the drudgery of creating a pointing model.

Patrick Wallace, the TPoint and Super Model author, comments:

“The modeling has to explore a large multidimensional parameter space, applying strict statistical tests, and despite a myriad of optimizations this inevitably means a large amount of processing time. The application is extremely careful about efficient use of machine resources; the length of time the computations take is purely a reflection of the difficulty of the task.”

The length of time required to find the Super Model mainly depends on:

- The number of calibration points in the pointing calibration run. (For best results, use at least 40 calibration points, distributed on both sides of the meridian.)
- The speed of the computer’s CPU.
- For computers that have multiple CPU, the more CPUs, the less time required (provided the ***Use All CPUs*** checkbox is turned on, see page 30).
- The operating system and the operating system’s architecture (32- or 64-bit).

Computing a Super Model for 250 calibration points on a Windows 7 64-bit 4 CPU machine the takes about 55 seconds. Large calibration runs (up to 1000 points maximum) on a single CPU can take more than 10 minutes. An 830-calibration point run on an eight-CPU 2.93 GHz Windows 7 64-bit machine using all 8 CPUs takes just over 120 seconds.

Analyzing the Super Model Results

The resulting Super Model will shed light on the integrity of your imaging system. If the TPoint model shows an RMS of about 15 arcseconds or better for a permanently mounted system, you've most likely reached the "*best pointing possible for an amateur telescope*" limit. If the RMS pointing is greater than about 30 arcseconds or so for a permanently mounted system, or greater than one arcminute for a portable system, and you want to do better, it's time to analyze every single component of your imaging system to determine the source of the pointing errors.

- Is the telescope's mirror fixed? Mirror slop will introduce pointing errors. If possible, fix the mirror in place to minimize this error.
- How is the optical tube assembly attached to the mount? OTA mounting rings provide the most repeatable and reliable pointing. Dovetail mounting introduce flexure and can degrade pointing accuracy.
- How is the mount attached to the pier? Make sure all mounting bolts are tight so that the mount cannot move when the equipment is slewed to different parts of the celestial sphere.
- How is the pier attached to the ground? A solid and rigid mounting to a concrete foundation is critical.
- Are cameras, guiders, focusers, filter wheels and other devices mounted to the OTA bending, flexing or shifting as the mount slews to different areas of the sky?
- How much backlash is in the mount's gears?

The ultimate question you must answer is, "How accurate does my pointing need to be for my imaging system and my observing goals?" No matter what the answer, the *TPoint Add On* will help you achieve your goals.

A Super Model Example

The following example shows the pointing accuracy obtained with a high-quality imaging system. The pointing calibration data was collected using the Automated Calibration feature (see "Automated Pointing Calibration" on page 47) on a permanently mounted, accurately polar aligned Paramount ME carrying a ring mounted C-14 with the mirror locked in place. The SBIG ST-8 was rigidly attached to an Optec TCS focuser and all cables routed so that there was no drag or sag on the system.

Note that the 831 pointing samples are used for demonstration purposes only. A 300-calibration point run will produce similar pointing accuracy, as well as excellent ProTrack results (on Paramount ME, Paramount ME II and Paramount MX mounts).

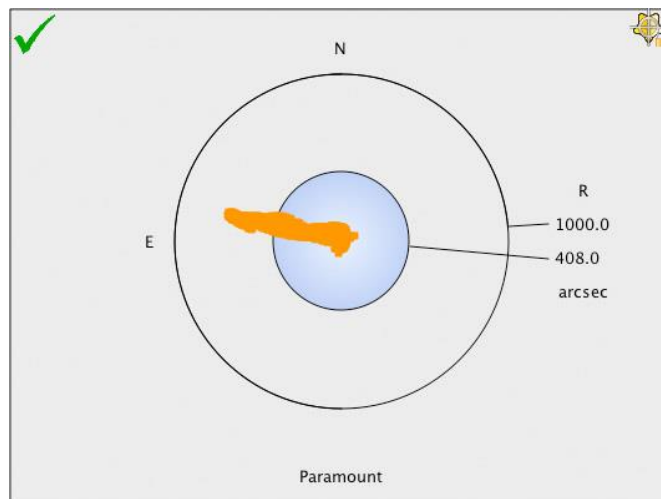


Figure 12: A scatter plot of 831 calibration points, with no terms in the model.

Figure 12 shows a scatter plot of the system's pointing accuracy with *no terms* in the pointing model. With no *TPoint* modeling, the all sky pointing accuracy is 408 arcseconds (*6.8 arcminutes*). Not great pointing, for sure.

Remember, this data was acquired using a high-quality imaging system with minimal hysteresis, but the pointing accuracy is degraded by inherent "errors" from the optical and mechanical axis misalignments, gear errors, and so on. In other words, even with a "high-end" imaging system, the blind pointing accuracy will not be sufficient to routinely place objects in a relative small field of view.

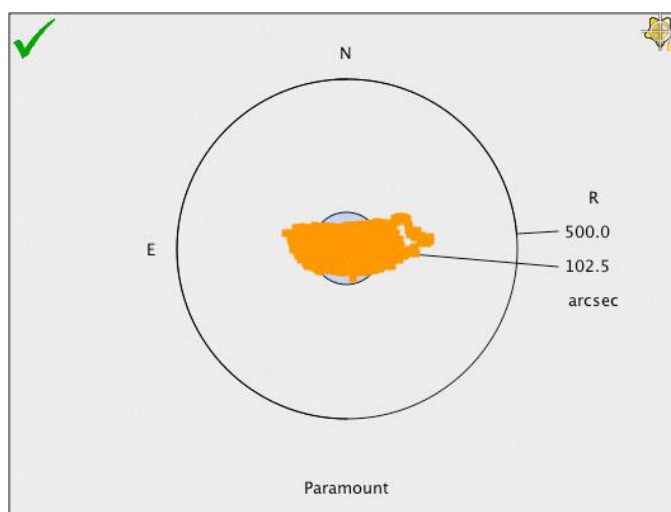


Figure 13: The pointing accuracy improves significantly using the six geometric terms.

Figure 13 shows that the pointing accuracy is improved significantly by adding the six standard geometric terms (IH, ID, NP, CH, ME and MA). The model's RMS pointing is now 102.5 arcseconds (1.7 arcminutes). Better, not quite *super*.

Bring in the Super Model

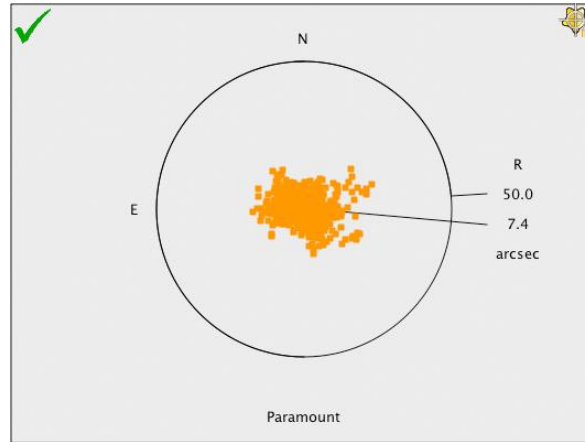


Figure 14: Scatter diagram showing pointing after applying a Super Model.

Figure 14 shows the scatter plot after applying the terms from the Super Model. The RMS pointing is now just over 7 *arcseconds*. This means that every object will be placed near the center of a 6 x 10 arcminute field of view.

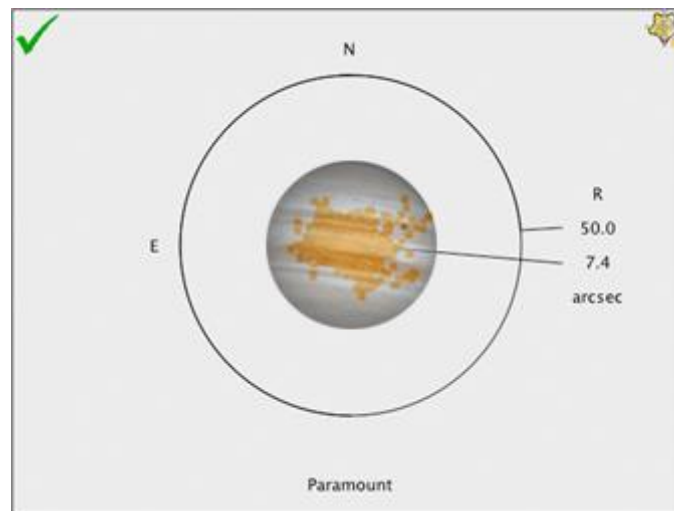


Figure 15: Scatter diagram with the planet Jupiter superimposed for scale. (Jupiter's apparent size varies from about 30 arcseconds to about 50 arcseconds.)

Figure 15 shows the approximate relative size of the planet Jupiter on the scatter plot. Now that is super pointing!

Super Model Button

After you have collected approximately 40 calibration points, click the **Super Model** button on the **Model** tab of the **TPoint Add On** window to create the optimal pointing model.

After the Super Model has been computed, click the **Apply** button on the **Super Model** window so that *TheSkyX* will use this model to improve the telescope's pointing.



Make sure that the **Apply Pointing Corrections** checkbox on the **Setup** pane of the **TPoint Add On** window is turned on, otherwise, pointing corrections will *not* be applied when the telescope is slewed from *TheSkyX*.

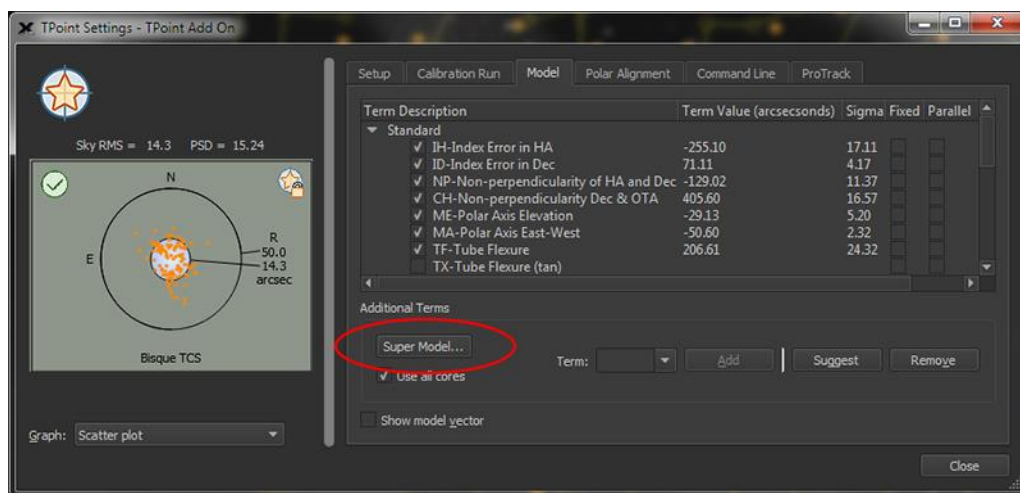


Figure 16: The Super Model button, highlighted in red, is located on the Model tab of the TPoint Add On window.

Use All Cores

Turn on this check box to use all the available central processing units (CPUs) on your computer when computing the Super Model. Please see "Super Model and Parallel Processing" on page 32 for an in-depth discussion on this subject.

The **Super Model Status** window shows the progress and the total run time in minutes and seconds. Depending on the speed of your computer, computing a super model can take several minutes or more.

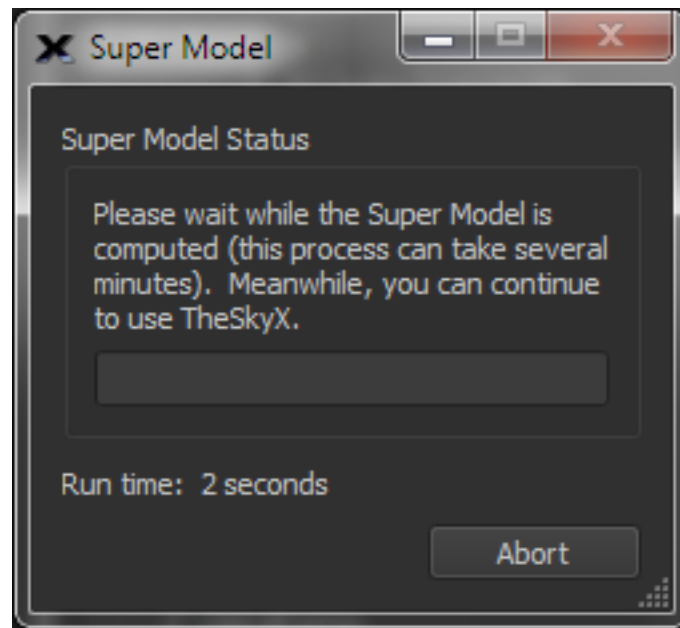


Figure 17: The Super Model Status window.

Abort

Click the Abort button on the Super Model Status window to end the computation process.

The Super Model Window shows the total run time, and the Super Model results.

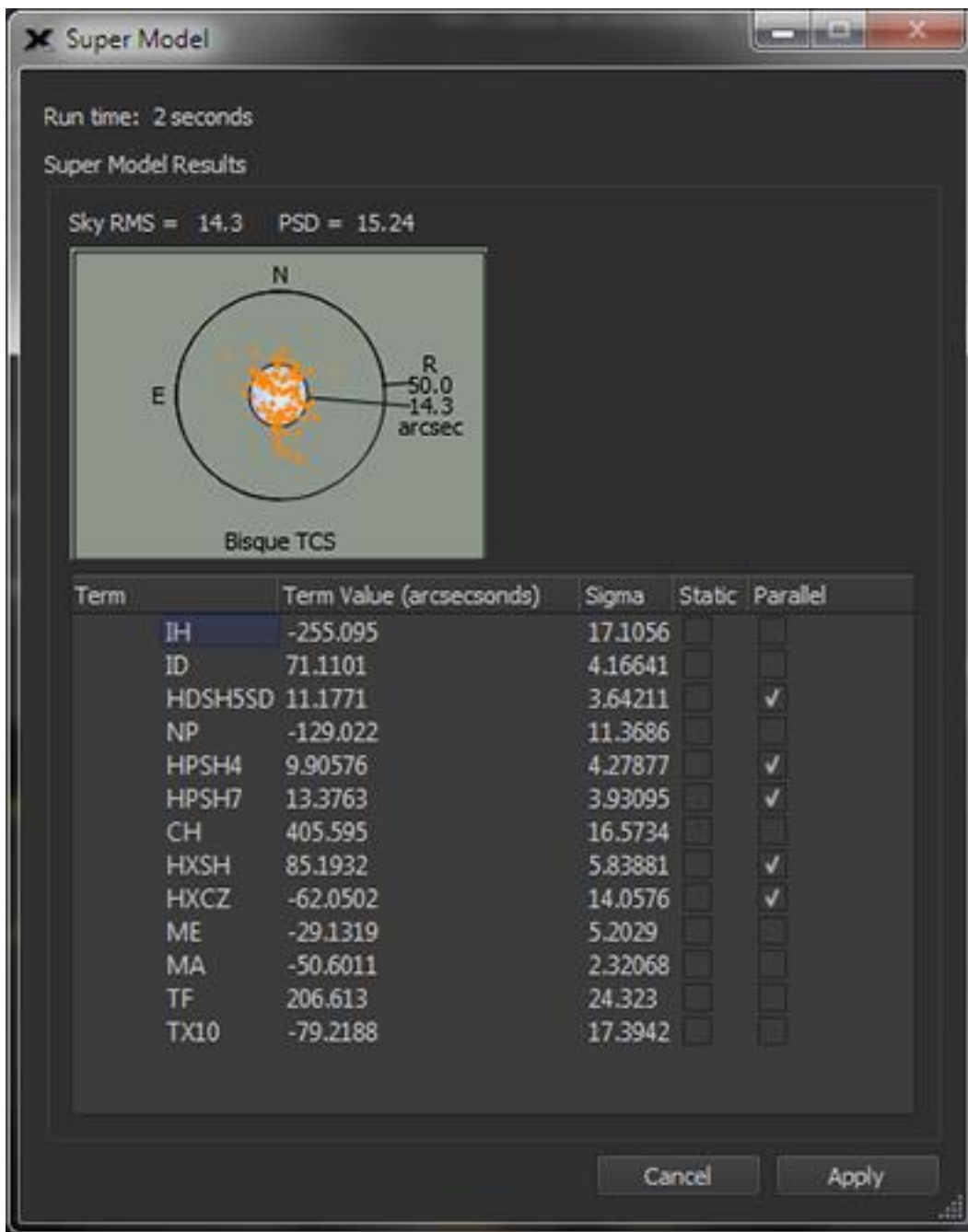


Figure 18: The Super Model window showing the optimal model for your data.

Apply

Click the **Apply** button to update the terms in the TPoint model to use the Super Model.

Super Model and Parallel Processing

Computing a Super Model is an extremely processor intensive process, and the more pointing samples, the more time required to determine the solution. If your

computer has multiple processors, turn on the **Use All CPUs** checkbox (page 30) to divide the work across every processor.

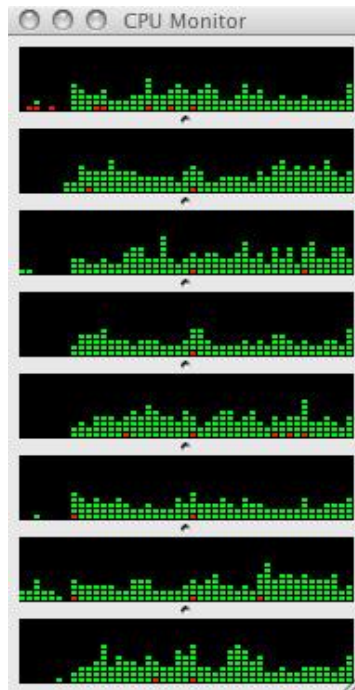


Figure 19: The Mac CPU Monitor Window showing the CPU usage during a Super Model run (eight CPU machine).

Figure 19 shows the Mac’s CPU monitor window during a Super Model run. The graphs of the CPU usage show that, while every processor is being used, not *100 percent* of the processing capability each CPU is utilized. The obvious question is, “Why not?” The following analogy attempts to explain why optimal parallel processing isn’t always possible for a given task.

Take, for example, the process of shutting down an observatory that has a roll off roof, where the entire process consists of two tasks (shown in the table below):

Task	Description	Time to Complete (seconds)*
1	Slew the mount to the park position	30
2	Close the roll off roof	30
*For this example, we assume that each task cannot be completed in less time.		
Case A	If both tasks can be run simultaneously, the time to shut down the observatory is 30 seconds	
Case B	If the roll off roof can strike mount unless the mount is at its park	

	position, both tasks cannot be run simultaneously. Task 2 must follow the completion of Task 1. So, the time required to shut down the observatory in this case is 60 seconds.
--	--

Most sophisticated computations like Super Model are analogous to case B. In other words, parallel processing is prohibited because of the nature of the algorithm where tasks and or computations depend on an earlier computation being completed first. *Only when computations are completely independent can they be run in parallel.*

Super Model FAQs

Question	Answer
<i>What is the minimum number of calibration points required by Super Model?</i>	<p>While a Super Model can be applied to any number of calibration points, for best results, acquire a minimum of 40 calibration points that are distributed on both sides of the meridian.</p> <p>Fewer than 40 points is not enough to let Super Model “get into its stride,” as it must settle for a very cautious model using only a handful of terms. At 40 points and higher, Super Model will use more terms and best cope with the whole sky.</p>
<i>There are terms used in the Super Model that don't seem to apply to my imaging system. Should I remove them?</i>	<p>For optimal pointing accuracy, the best practice is to use all the terms in the Super Model and not make <i>any</i> adjustments. To achieve optimal pointing, the Super Model algorithm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes statistically invalid points • Adds terms to the model in the specific (optimal) order • Fixes specific terms in the model • Adds terms in parallel <p>Changing, adding or removing terms makes the Super Model less effective.</p>
<i>My computer has eight CPUs, why isn't Super Model eight times faster when the Use All CPUs checkbox is turned on?</i>	<p>Given the nature of the Super Model algorithm, fewer than 50% of the computations can be performed in parallel (see the observatory shut down analogy</p>

	above). Therefore, on a given computer, the best possible speed increase is about 50%, or nearly two times as fast.
<i>When computing a Super Model, not every computer core is used. Is this normal?</i>	Given the nature of the Super Model algorithm, fewer than 50% of the computations can be performed in parallel (see the observatory shut down analogy above). Moreover, for this particular task, the parallel computations are short lived and the overall algorithm goes in and out of serial and parallel processing as necessary. Pegged CPUs do not tell the whole story; the Super Model “Total Run Time” when the Use All CPU’s checkbox is turned on and off reveals the benefits of parallel processing for this task.
<i>How do you compute how many times faster the Super Model is using all CPUs?</i>	<p>For a given set pointing calibration data, run the Super Model with the Use All CPUs checkbox turned on and off and compare the Run Times (see Figure 18).</p> <p>Run Time using a single CPU = 100 Run Time using all CPUs = 50 Times Faster = $(100-50)/50 = 2$</p> <p>The inverse of this result is the percent faster: $\frac{1}{2} = 50\%$ faster.</p>

Using TPoint to Quantify Polar Alignment



TheSkyX Professional Edition, in conjunction with the Camera Add On and TPoint Add On, offers the Accurate Polar Alignment feature (page 42) to efficiently and accurately achieve optimal polar alignment on a variety of commercial telescope mounts.

While, as described below, the results of the TPoint Polar Alignment Report can still be used as viable means to achieve polar alignment, Software Bisque recommends using the Accurate Polar Alignment feature instead.

Equatorially mounted telescopes need to be aligned with the celestial pole before they can point and track accurately. Although there are several techniques for pointing the mount's polar axis at the celestial pole, *TPoint* works best.

The Super Model feature uses the calibration pointing samples to determine the magnitude, expressed in arcseconds, of polar misalignment in elevation (ME) and azimuth (MA); the mount's polar axis can be adjusted accordingly.

If, like Paramount mounts, your mount has calibrated mechanical polar alignment adjustments, and is designed to allow precise adjustment to one axis at a time without disturbing the other, then only one *cycle* of polar axis adjustment should be necessary to achieve good or excellent polar alignment, without any need for further iterations.

For mounts that do not have calibrated polar adjustments, or mounts where altering the position of the elevation axis affects the position of the azimuth axis, or vice-versa, multiple TPoint runs may be required to achieve optimal polar alignment.

Once you are familiar with process of telescope calibration, you can begin a calibration run. If the mount's polar alignment is way off, even short "star-hopping" slews will require the destination star to be re-centered in the eyepiece.

Simple Polar Alignment Litmus Test

After synchronizing the telescope on a known star, slew the mount to a second star, two or three degrees away, but on the same side of the meridian. If the second star does not fall anywhere near the field of view in a typical eyepiece, polar alignment is a likely contributing factor for this pointing error.

Assessing Polar Alignment



The Accurate Polar Alignment feature (page 42) uses the TPoint model to determine the polar alignment error, then offset slews a star so that it can be re-centered using the mount's mechanical polar alignment adjustments.

Accurate Polar Alignment methods is preferable to using the polar alignment report, as mechanical hysteresis may result in less than ideal polar alignment.

After collecting six to ten pointing samples, use the ***Polar Alignment*** tab on the ***TPoint Add On*** window to assess the mount's polar alignment. Using the bright stars in a constellation (Ursa Major, for example) works well.

After six pointing samples are collected, the telescope's pointing accuracy should improve noticeably.

Procedure for Assessing Telescope Calibration and Polar Alignment

1. Accurately set the computer clock each night. Inaccurate time introduces right ascension offset errors.
2. On the *TPoint Add On* window, click the **New** command from the **TPoint Add On Settings** pop-up menu on the **Setup** tab.
3. On the **Calibration Run** tab, click the **Start** button.
4. Synchronize the telescope on a bright star. When performing a *TPoint* calibration, synchronize the telescope *once* for each run. Synchronizing more than once requires a new *TPoint* model.
5. Click **OK** on the **Start Calibration Run** window (page 59).
6. Slew to a nearby star (by identifying the star in *TheSkyX* and clicking the **Slew** button), center the star in the eyepiece, and then click the **Add Pointing Sample** button. The pointing data now has one pointing sample. After collecting six pointing samples, pointing should greatly improve. Now, you're ready to collect pointing samples over a larger portion of the actual night sky.
7. After collecting about 20 pointing samples, click the **Model** tab and add additional terms to the *TPoint* model so that the RMS value is as small as possible, without increasing the PSD value.
8. Review the suggestions in the polar alignment report by clicking the **Polar Alignment** tab on the *TPoint Add On* window. Adjust the mount's polar axis accordingly.

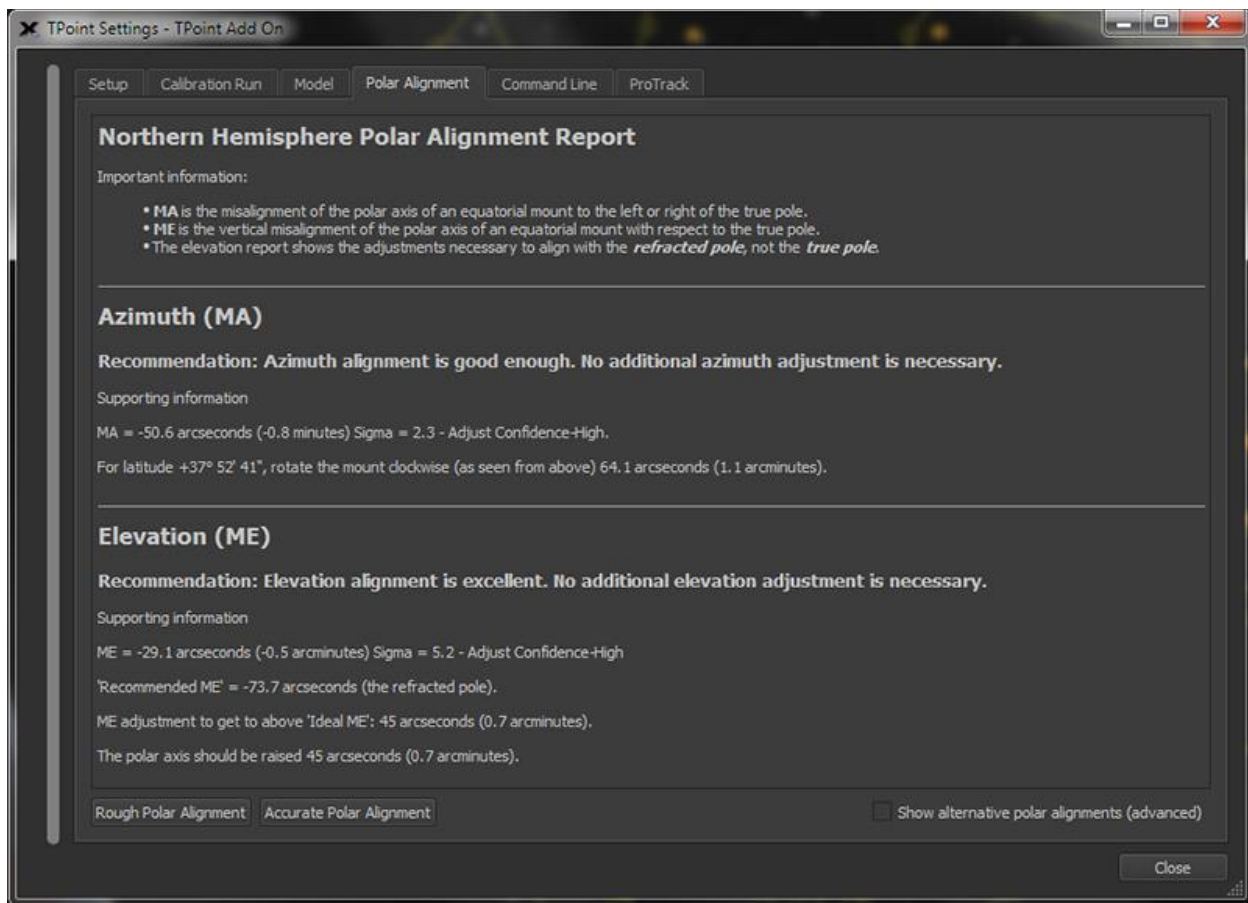


Figure 20: Sample Polar Alignment Report.

Optimum Location of the Polar Axis

The optimum location of the polar axis depends on what declination and hour angle you're observing, and your observing goals. For observations on the meridian, somewhere between the true and refracted pole is best. Ideally, one should shoot for the refracted pole.

The *TPoint Polar Alignment Report* on the *Polar Alignment* tab makes suggestions to align with the refracted pole automatically. For reference, the table below shows the angular distance (in arcseconds) between the refracted and unrefracted poles for different latitudes and elevations.

Angular Distance Between the Refracted and Unrefracted Poles (Latitude vs. Elevation)								
Latitude (deg.)	0m	250m	500m	1000m	1500m	2000m	2500m	3000m
85	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4
80	10	10	9	9	8	8	8	7
75	15	15	14	14	13	12	12	11
70	20	20	19	18	17	17	16	15
65	26	25	25	24	22	21	20	19

60	32	31	31	29	28	26	25	24
55	39	38	37	35	34	32	30	29
50	47	46	45	42	40	38	36	35
45	56	54	53	50	48	46	43	41
40	66	65	63	60	57	54	52	49
35	80	78	76	72	68	65	62	59
30	96	94	92	87	83	79	75	71
25	119	116	113	108	102	98	93	88
20	152	148	145	138	131	125	118	113
15	205	200	195	185	176	168	160	152
10	305	298	290	276	263	250	238	227

Sample Polar Alignment Report

The polar alignment report below is based on a pointing calibration run with 233 points that was acquired using automated pointing calibration (page 47).

This *sample pointing data* is included with the TPoint Add On and the report can be reproduced by:

1. Choose the **TPoint Add On** command from the **Telescope** menu.
2. Choose the **Import Pointing Data** command from the **TPoint Add On Settings** pop-up menu on the **Setup** tab.
3. Choose **Burnett.dat** and click the **Open** button.
4. Click the **Super Model** button on the **Model** tab and click the **Apply** button on the **Super Model** window once the Super Model has been computed.
5. The report below is now displayed on the **Polar Alignment Report** tab.

Northern Hemisphere Polar Alignment Report

Important information:

- ME is the vertical misalignment of the polar axis of an equatorial mount.
- MA is the misalignment of the polar axis of an equatorial mount to the left or right of the true pole.
- The altitude report shows the adjustments necessary to align with the refracted pole, not the true pole.

Azimuth

Recommendation: Azimuth alignment is excellent. No additional azimuth adjustment is necessary.

Supporting information

MA = -25.5 arcseconds (-0.4 minutes) Sigma = 2.7 - Adjust Confidence-High.

For latitude $+30^{\circ} 12' 49''$, rotate the azimuth axis East 29.5 arcseconds (0.5 arcminutes).

Altitude

Recommendation: Make the following altitude adjustment...

Supporting information

ME = 43.2 arcseconds (0.7 arcminutes) Sigma = 7.9 -
Adjust Confidence-High

'Recommended ME' = -98 arcseconds (the refracted pole).

ME adjustment to get to above 'Ideal ME': 141 arcseconds (2.3 arcminutes).

The polar axis should be raised 141 arcseconds (2.3 arcminutes).

Polar Axis Settings to Satisfy Various Criteria Related to Field Rotation and Unguided Tracking

ME	MA	Description
+43	-25	current setting
-98	+0	refracted pole, (recommended, same as report above)
-45	+0	minimize field rotation
+166	-99	minimize unguided declination drift
+178	-112	minimize unguided total drift
+269	-93	simulated drift method

The polar axis is currently 43 arcsec below and 25 arcsec to the left of the true pole.

To reach the refracted pole, (recommended, same as report above) raise the polar axis by 141 arcsec and rotate the mount clockwise by 29 arcsec.

To minimize field rotation, raise the polar axis by 88 arcsec and rotate the mount clockwise by 29 arcsec.

To minimize unguided declination drift, lower the polar axis by 123 arcsec and rotate the mount anticlockwise by 86 arcsec.

To minimize unguided total drift, lower the polar axis by 135 arcsec and rotate the mount anticlockwise by 100 arcsec.

To simulate the drift method, lower the polar axis by 226 arcsec and rotate the mount anticlockwise by 78 arcsec.

As the report describes, for this mount, polar alignment in azimuth is “excellent” (90 arcseconds or less from the refracted pole) and no adjustments are necessary when shooting for the refracted pole. The elevation of the polar axis should be raised 141 arcseconds.

After adjusting the mount’s polar axis, the model can be recalibrated using the portable option (page 42) and produce excellent pointing.

Show Alternative Polar Alignments (Advanced) Checkbox

When the **Show Alternative Polar Alignments (Advanced)** checkbox is turned on, the polar alignment report includes information about alternative polar alignment techniques; it even shows how to align the polar axis to simulate the results that would be achieved using the drift method for your mount and optical configuration.



There is no one correct polar axis alignment that gets “everything right.”

Determining the optimal position for the mount’s polar axis with respect to the actual pole is a matter of picking your compromise.

For example, minimizing declination drift is what you might choose if your mount can guide in right ascension, but not in declination. This method was common in antique telescopes where the only method of guiding was to change the clock rate. Minimizing total drift is a good compromise for unguided tracking all over the sky.

The standard recommendation is the refracted pole, which sacrifices a little bit of unguided performance to minimize difficulties when you want to get close to the pole. Observers at low latitudes who rarely try to observe “in the murk” near the pole might be better off with the “minimize total drift” choice.

Rough Polar Alignment

The Rough Polar Alignment Procedure described in the Paramount User Guide is available as a wizard. Choose the **Rough Polar Alignment** command from the **Tools** menu, or click the **Rough Polar Alignment** button on the **Polar Alignment** tab, then

carefully follow the step-by-step instructions to approximately align the mount with the celestial pole.

Accurate Polar Alignment

After the mount's mechanical polar axis has been approximately aligned with the celestial pole using the rough polar alignment procedure, perform an Automated Pointing Calibration Run (page 47) to collect enough pointing calibration samples to quantify the mount's polar misalignment (say, a minimum of 25, acquired on both sides of the meridian). Once complete, choose the **Accurate Polar Alignment** command from the **Tools** menu, or click the **Accurate Polar Alignment** button on the **Polar Alignment** tab to begin the accurate polar alignment process.

Recalibration

To use an "established" *TPoint* model in future imaging sessions, ideally, the model should be *recalibrated* each night. Recalibration is a process that reestablishes the relationship between the telescope and an existing *TPoint* pointing model. Recalibration is usually performed at the beginning of each observing session on telescope mounts that cannot be homed or cannot be unparked to an accuracy of one arcsecond, or that do not employ expensive absolute encoders.

For permanent installations, most of the mount's geometrical errors remain constant from night to night. Therefore, the geometric terms in the existing model can remain fixed even when the telescope is recalibrated. For example, the polar misalignment terms, non-perpendicularity terms and tube flexure terms do not change unless physical adjustments are made to the telescope.

However, the terms representing the Hour Angle offset (IH) and the declination offset (ID) are "polluted" (and become meaningless) when the telescope is synchronized on a single, arbitrary star. The errors for each geometrical term at the synchronization coordinates are unknown. Even if a model exists that more closely estimates the pointing effects at the synchronization position, we do not know the exact magnitude of each term at this position.

Additionally, the axis of the imaging device may change slightly when exchanging the CCD camera with an eyepiece. This will be manifested by a change in the CH term (OTA/Declination axis perpendicularity) when a new model is created. Recalibration also allows CH to vary along with IH and ID.

Note: Synchronizing the telescope on a single star with existing model can result in sufficiently accurate all-sky pointing. If the goal for the evening is to slew to and image only a few objects, a single star recalibration is possible.

Whereas a calibration run generally involves 15 or more pointing samples, and all pointing terms are subject to modification, recalibration requires a minimum of six pointing samples. These samples are used to establish new values for the offset terms IH and ID and CH **only**. The remaining terms, such as like polar alignment (ME and MA) remain fixed.

A Step-By-Step Guide to Recalibration

Recalibration is required when using a mount that, without TPoint, would have to be re-synchronized on a star each night, or whenever the physical mounting of the camera, focuser, filter wheel or other imaging equipment has been altered or changed, or if the polar axis alignment has been adjusted, but that has an established pointing model. Think of a recalibration as a "six or more pointing sample synchronization" that reestablishes the geometrical terms in an existing model.

The following instructions describe a manual recalibration procedure.



A working TPoint model that was generated during a previous observing session must be present and marked as "finished" before recalibration can be performed.

1. From *TheSkyX*, click the **Connect** command from the **Telescope** menu.
2. Slew the telescope to a known star, then center the star in the eyepiece. Or, when recalibrating using **Automated Pointing Calibration** (page 47), perform an Image Link to determine the astrometric position of the telescope.
3. Click the **Add Pointing Sample** button on the **Telescope** window to display the **Start Calibration Run** window. This window can also be shown by clicking the **Start** button on the **Calibration** tab.

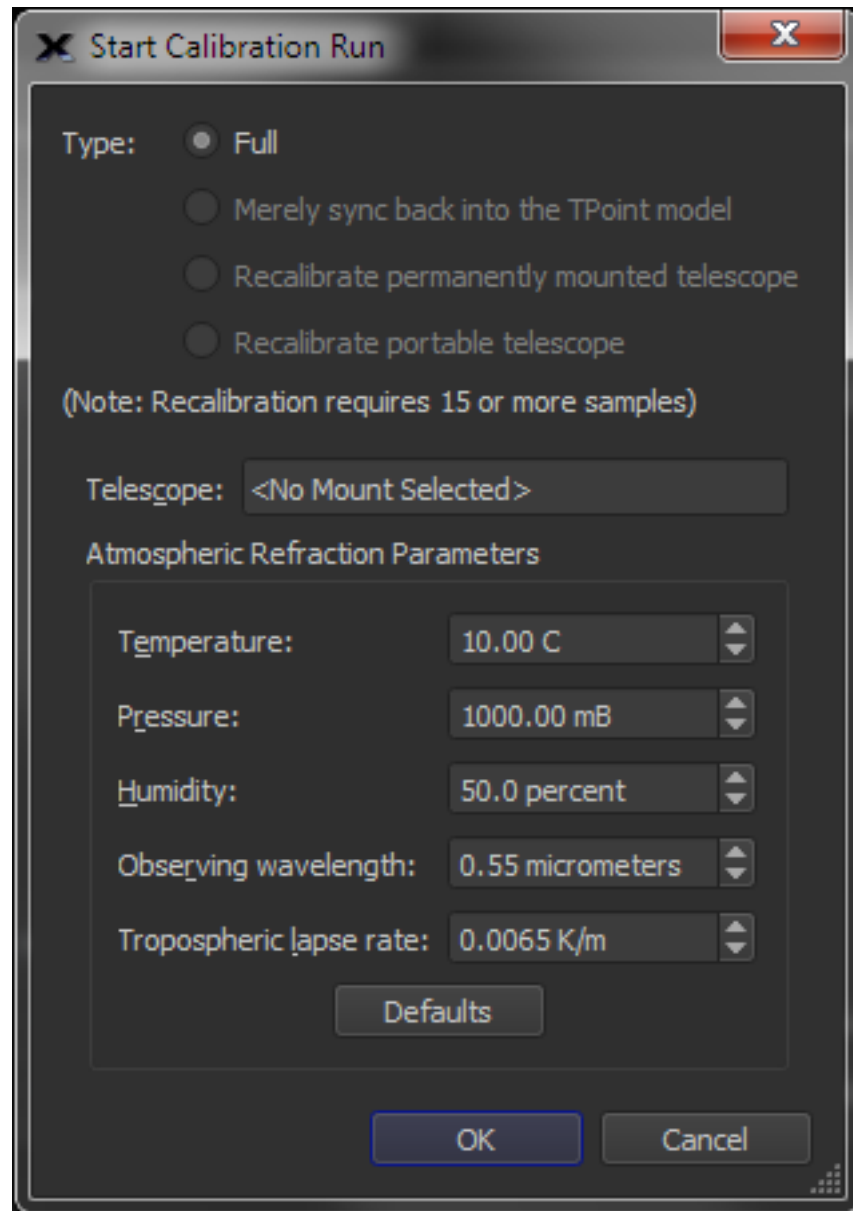


Figure 21: The *Start Calibration Run* window.

4. On the ***Start Calibration Run*** window, click the ***Recalibrate Permanently Mounted Telescope*** radio button (or, if the polar axis has moved, the ***Portable Telescope*** radio button) and click ***OK***. Note *recalibration* requires a minimum of 15 pointing samples in a previous calibration. The recalibration options are disabled otherwise.

Choosing the ***Full*** radio button will remove the existing pointing data and pointing model; in other words, start from scratch. Choosing the ***Sync Back into the TPoint Model*** radio button updates the ID and IH terms, only, based on the calibration point and is normally not recommended.

- Click the **Finish** button after a minimum of 15 recalibration pointing samples have been collected.



Automated Pointing Calibration (page 47) can also be used to automate recalibration.

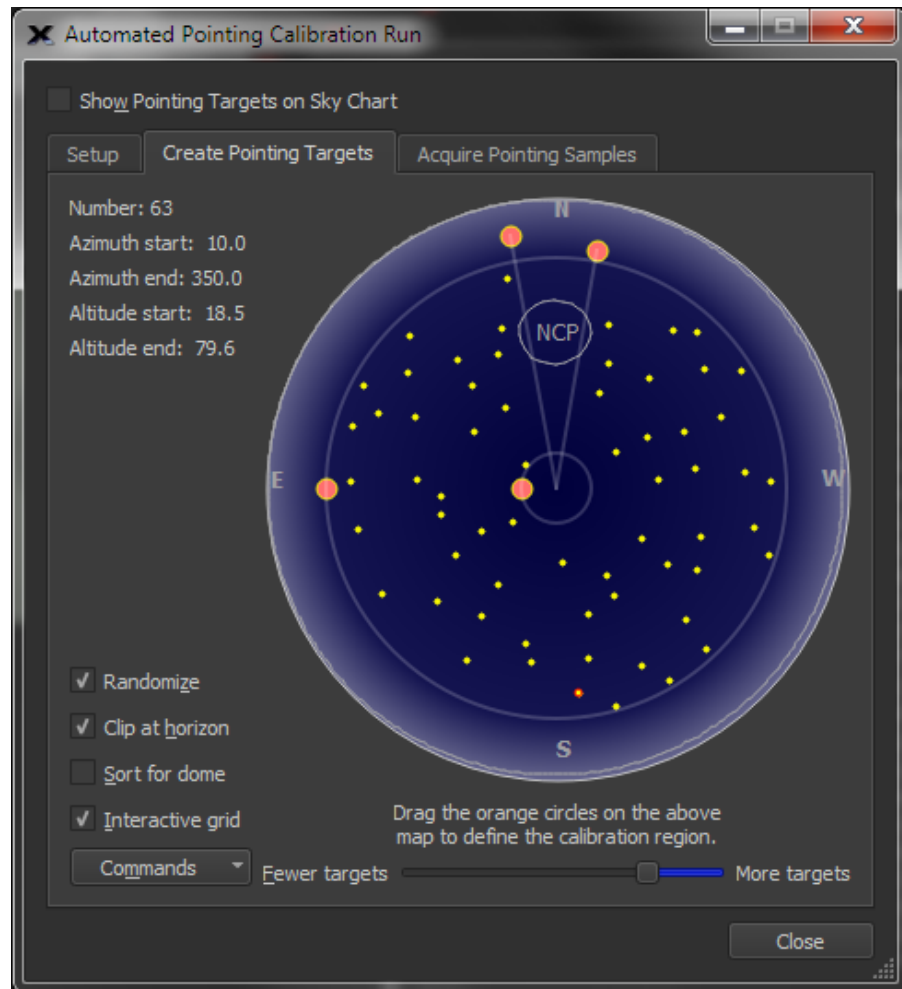


Figure 22: Create pointing targets for a recalibration.

To create recalibration targets:

- On the **Create Pointing Targets** window, choose the **Add Calibration Targets** command on the **Commands** pop-up menu to generate the first six ideally distributed calibration points described under “*Important Recalibration Pointing Sample Notes*” below.
- Turn on the **Randomize** checkbox, and the **Interactive Grid** checkbox so that additional calibration points can be added.
- Adjust the **Fewer/More Targets** slider until there are 15 or more targets. The total number of targets is displayed next to the

Number text near the top left of the window (Figure 22).

4. Open the **Acquire Pointing Samples** pane then click **Run** to begin the automated recalibration.

The table below shows each recalibration method and the terms that will be refitted.

Table 1: Calibration and Recalibration Methods

Calibration/Recalibration Method	Refitted Terms
Full	All terms
Merely Sync into Existing Model	ID, IH
Permanently Mounted Telescope	CH, ID, IH
Portable Telescope	IH, ID, CH, ME, MA

Important Recalibration Pointing Sample Notes

- Fewer pointing samples *could be* used to recalibrate the pointing model, however, in order to “pin down” the **CH** term, a minimum of fifteen pointing samples must be acquired.
- During recalibration, it is very important to point to a star or two at a high declination, say beyond $+80^\circ$ in the northern hemisphere or -80° in the southern hemisphere, as well as one or two near the celestial equator. On GEMs, such as the Paramount, go one better by including a meridian flip during the recalibration. This is so that TPoint can distinguish between the HA sync error, IH, and the OTA/declination non-perpendicularity, CH. Both terms are east–west shifts, and at low declination they mimic one another. CH gives you the same error on the sky wherever you are; IH matters at low declination but has a decreasing effect as you approach the pole. It is essential to provide TPoint with pointing samples that allow the two effects to be disentangled, by sampling the full mechanical range of the mount's declination axis.
- When performing one of the non-**Full** recalibration options, the geometric terms listed in the table above, *only*, are modified. And, these terms are modified based on the recalibration pointing samples. All other terms in the model are unchanged.
- The pointing samples collected during recalibration (and displayed on the Sky Chart) will be offset from the actual star position by the amount of the pointing error in that part of the sky. This is normal, expected behavior and is not cause for alarm.

Once recalibration is complete, the model's geometric terms have been reestablished for the current observing session. If pointing does not improve after

recalibration, click the **Undo Recal** button on the **Calibration Run** tab of the **TPoint Add On** window to restore the geometric terms to their pre-recalibration values, check to make sure time is accurate, and try again.

What Happens during Recalibration?

Recalibration re-establishes the relationship between the telescope and the celestial sphere by fixing the terms in the model that do not change from night to night, and, based on the new pointing samples, computing new values for the terms that may change.

Restarting or synchronizing each night introduces new offset errors in the model; therefore, the offset error terms IH and ID must be reestablished by pointing to a minimum of fifteen stars.

Recalibration does not change the value of the terms in the model that describe effects that are part of the mount's character, including flexures, gear errors, or the non-perpendicularity (NP) between the right ascension and declination axis. For example, if the NP term in a model derived from original pointing calibration is determined to be 425 arcseconds, then this value will not change after recalibration.

Only the offset terms IH, ID and CH are changed, plus, in the case of a mount that has been adjusted or moved, the polar axis misalignment terms ME and MA. A new CH term value must be established each session to account for changes to the imaging system, including the use of a different CCD camera, or after rotating a diagonal mirror, or the changing the optical tube assembly.

Modeling the Meade Instruments™ Mounts

Make sure *TPoint's* Pressure and Height are set to zero in the Observing Parameters window. This forces *TPoint* to ignore its refraction calculations (the LX200 and the Autostar control systems perform refraction calculations internally). See the "Start Calibration Run Window" on page 59 for details.

Automated Pointing Calibration

PROFESSIONAL

TheSkyX Professional Edition with the *Camera Add On* and the *TPoint Add On* allow pointing samples to be acquired without human intervention through a process called *automated pointing calibration*. Once the *Camera Add On* has been

configured to acquire CCD photos and your telescope and CCD camera's field of view parameters have been determined, the *TPoint Add On* can be used to generate a distribution of optimal azimuth and altitude *targets* that are used to point the telescope.

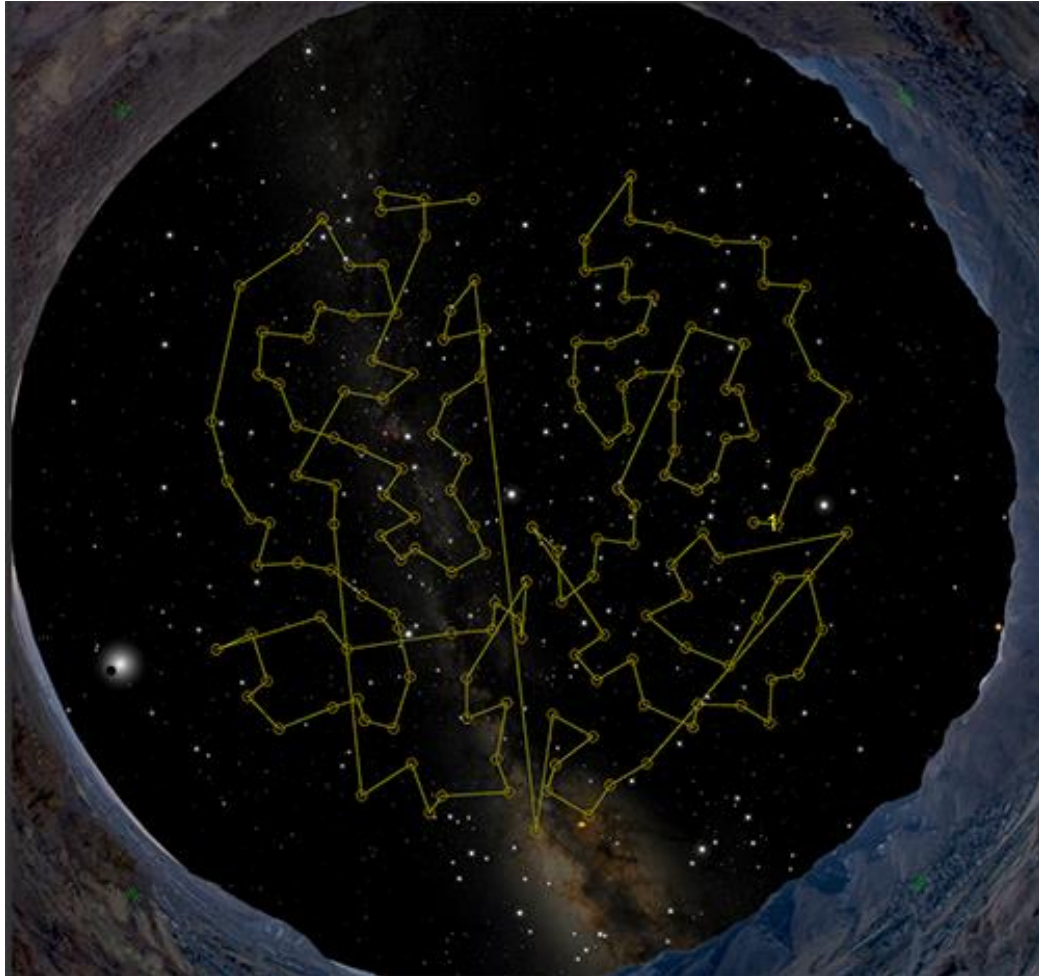


Figure 23: The yellow circles on the Sky Chart represent each azimuth and altitude target. The yellow line shows the path of the telescope.

During an automated calibration run, at each target, a CCD photo is acquired. Then an astrometric solution is computed (sometimes referred to as a *plate solve*) from the photo by comparing stars in the photo with stars from *TheSkyX's* star catalogs. The difference between the current position reported by the telescope and the actual coordinates computed from the astrometric center of the photo is recorded as a pointing sample (page 17).

This process is repeated for each target in the pointing calibration list.

Minimum Requirements for Automated Calibration

Before getting started, make sure your imaging system meets the following minimum requirements.

- *TheSkyX Professional Edition for Windows or Mac.* See *TheSkyX Professional and Serious Astronomer Edition User Guide* for details about setting up and using your camera. Note that *TheSkyX Serious Astronomer Edition* does not provide a mechanism to acquire CCD photos, so automated calibration is not possible with this Edition.
- A “go to” or robotic telescope mount that is can be controlled by *TheSkyX Professional Edition*.

TheSkyX Professional and Serious Astronomer User Guide describes how to configure *TheSkyX Professional Edition* to acquire photos using either the *Camera Add On* or *CCDSOFT for Windows*. Please carefully review this documentation, and make sure that you can take photos with your camera before proceeding.

You also need to determine the *image scale*, in arcseconds per pixel, of your imaging system, as well as the *position angle* of the CCD camera after it has been mounted to your optical tube assembly. See the **Image Link** documentation *TheSkyX Professional and Serious Astronomer User Guide* for details how. Or, click the **Take And Image Link Photo** button on the **Automated Pointing Calibration Run** window to do this step for you.

Once you have configured *TheSkyX Professional Edition* to acquire CCD images and quantified your imaging system, you are ready to perform an automatic pointing calibration run.

Create Pointing Targets tab

The **Create Pointing Targets** tab on the **Automated Pointing Calibration Run** window allows you to create, save and restore sets of pointing targets that can be used to acquire pointing samples during an automated pointing calibration run.

The circular blue region on this tab represents the visible portion of the celestial sphere from your location; the cardinal directions labeled for reference.

- 1 This line shows the current **Custom Drawn** horizon that can be defined on the **Horizon** tab of the **Horizon & Atmosphere** window (**Display** menu).
- 2 Click and drag this circle to define the starting altitude, or **Azimuth Start** for the pointing targets.
- 3 Click and drag this circle to define the ending altitude, or **Azimuth End** for the pointing targets.

- 4 Click and drag this circle to define the lowest altitude, or **Altitude Start** for the pointing targets. Note that no pointing samples are created below the custom horizon, when one is present.
- 5 Click and drag this circle to define the highest altitude, or **Altitude End** for the pointing targets.
- 6 When connected to a telescope, the current position of the telescope's cross hair is displayed.

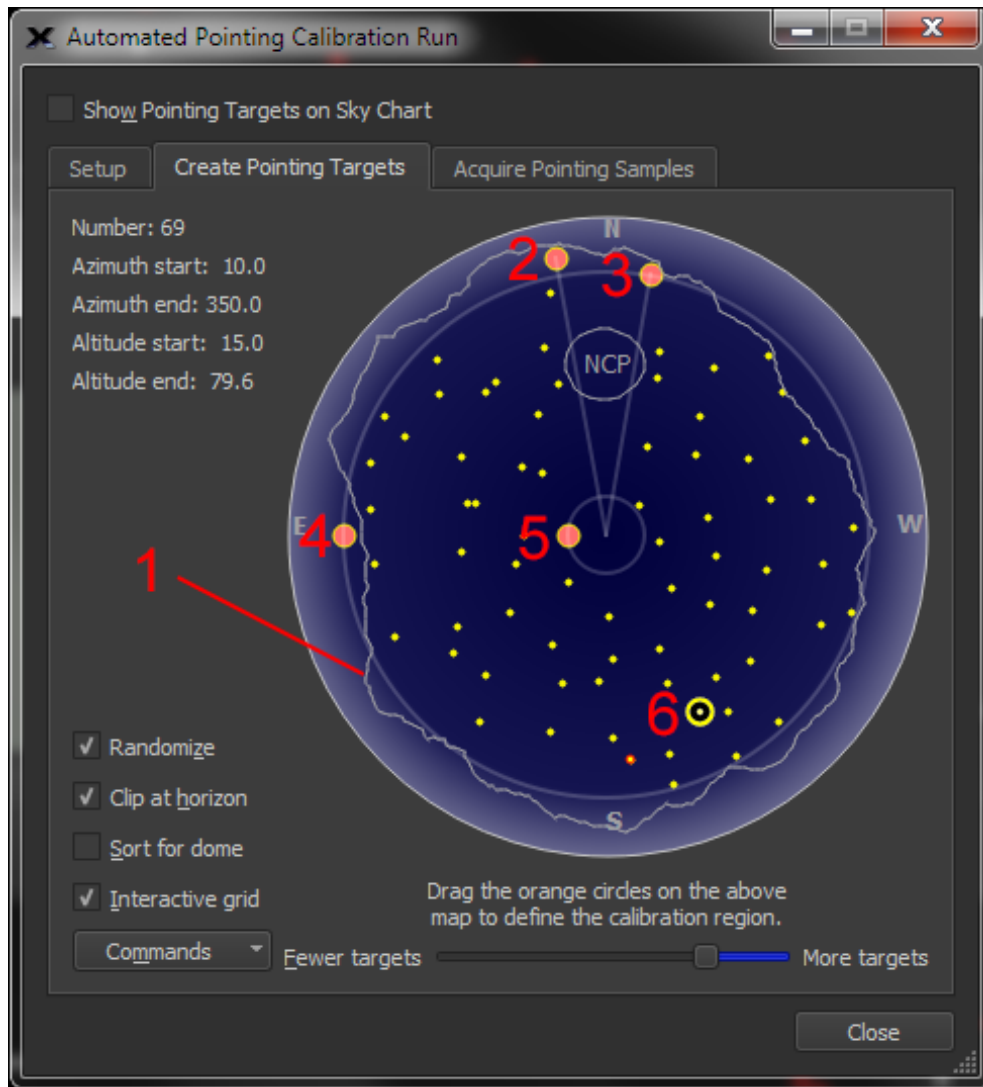


Figure 24: The *Create Pointing Targets* tab.

The upper left the **Create Pointing Targets** tab shows the number of points and the region of the sky that contains points when the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on.

The right side of this tab shows a horizon to zenith map that contains a number of helpful items:

- The four cardinal directions appear near the edge of the map.
- The text **NCP** (or **SCP** in the southern hemisphere) shows the position of the celestial pole based on *TheSkyX's* current location. The gray circle around this text represents 80 degrees declination.
- When the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on, four orange circles appear on the map that can be used to define the regions of the sky that do not contain pointing samples. Click and drag each circle to define the start and end of the region in azimuth and altitude that contains pointing samples. No pointing samples are generated in areas outside this region.
- The yellow dots on the map are automatically generated pointing targets. Turn on the **Interactive Grid** checkbox and use the **Pointing Target Separation** slider to show fewer or more pointing targets.
- When the **Clip Horizon** checkbox is turned on, pointing targets below the custom drawn horizon are removed. See the “*Horizon & Atmosphere Options*” documentation in *TheSkyX Professional and Serious Astronomer Edition User Guide* for details about drawing custom horizon lines.
- The yellow dots with red circles are user-defined pointing calibration targets. Click anywhere on the map to add a target at that position (right-click the point to remove it). Each user-defined pointing calibration target added to the map is placed at the beginning of queue. In this way, you easily add and collect pointing samples near the telescope’s current position so that, after six “nearby” pointing samples have been collected, TPoint will significantly improve the telescope’s pointing accuracy on subsequent slews, making data collection much less error prone.
- When *TheSkyX* is connected to a telescope, the yellow telescope cross hair represents the current position of the telescope.

Number

The current number of pointing targets defined on the map.

Azimuth Start

When the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on, this shows the starting azimuth of the region that contains pointing targets. Otherwise, this text is hidden. Click and drag the appropriate orange circle on the map to adjust this value.

Azimuth End

When the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on, this shows the ending azimuth of the region that contains pointing targets. Otherwise, this text is hidden. Click and drag the appropriate orange circle on the map to adjust this value.

Altitude Start

When the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on, this shows the starting altitude of the region that contains pointing targets. Otherwise, this text is hidden. Click and drag the appropriate orange circle on the map to adjust this value.

Altitude End

When the **Interactive Grid** checkbox is turned on, this shows the ending altitude of the region that contains pointing targets. Otherwise, this text is hidden. Click and drag the appropriate orange circle on the map to adjust this value.

Randomize

Turn on this checkbox to define random positions for the targets. When samples are too evenly spaced (not randomized), the TPoint model can potentially miss pointing errors.

Clip Horizon

Turn on this checkbox to exclude targets that fall below *TheSkyX's* local horizon.

Less/More Pointing Target Separation Slider

Use this scroll bar change the distance between pointing calibration targets. The smaller the distance between pointing targets, the more targets.

Commands Pop-up Menu

The commands pop-up menu contains commands to open, save or export calibration points, and quickly generate user-defined pointing calibration targets.

Open

Click this command to open a Pointing Target File (simply a space delimited, properly formatted text file) that contains a list of pointing calibration targets.

A sample Pointing Target File is below:

```

GRID: 1 155.62550 16.19201
GRID: 2 148.04368 15.63469
GRID: 3 133.07751 15.84730
GRID: 4 123.59620 15.30152
GRID: 5 109.22322 15.45653
...
GRID: 258 291.95877 71.02200
GRID: 259 269.86198 69.62564
GRID: 260 244.91223 70.50135
GRID: 261 223.29501 71.79654
GRID: 262 199.52605 69.77031

```

Save As

Click this command to save a Pointing Target File. By default, these files are saved to the *AutoCalibration* folder in *TheSkyX's* Application Support Files folder (see

TheSkyX Professional Edition User Guide for details about where settings are saved on your operating system).

Update Sky Chart

Click this command to update the Sky Chart to reflect the current pointing calibration settings.

Copy Targets As Text

Click this button to copy the list of targets to the Clipboard. This data can be used to write your own pointing calibration target scripts.

Remove User-Defined Targets

Click this command to remove all user-defined pointing calibration targets from the map. Individual points can be removed by right-clicking the mouse over them on the map.

Add Six Targets Near Telescope Position

Click this command to add six user-defined pointing calibration targets near the telescope's current position. Collecting six points "near" the telescope minimizes the initial slew distances to make data collection easier while TPoint is yet not available to improve pointing.

Add Recalibration Targets

Click this command to add six user-defined calibration points that ensure a proper recalibration. See "Important Recalibration Pointing Sample Notes" on page 46 for more information about how to achieve optimal recalibration.

Step-by-Step Automated Calibration

Once your imaging system has been setup and tested, performing an automated calibration is relatively straightforward.

Step A

1. Click the ***Automated Calibration*** button on the ***Calibration Run*** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window.
2. Click the ***Setup*** tab.

Figure 25: Setup tab on the Automated Pointing Calibration Run window.

3. Enter the ***Exposure Time***, in seconds, that is used to acquire photos at each pointing sample position. You may have to experiment with your imaging system to determine optimal exposure times. For a cooled CCD camera on a typical-sized optical tube assembly, about 1-2 seconds is normally sufficient. The exposure time needs to be long enough to acquire at least six stars in the photo and short enough to avoid saturation and star "blooming."

4. Enter the **Image Scale**, in arcseconds per pixel, for the optical system. If necessary, click the **Take and Image Link Photo** button at the bottom of this window to determine the image scale.
5. Enter the camera **Binning** option. 2x2 is recommended, especially for large format cameras and DSLRs. Binning effectively increases the sensitivity so that shorter exposure times can be used, and reduces download times, which speeds the entire acquisition process. Any perceived loss in resolution does not affect the pointing results.
6. Enter the **Filter** to use during the run. Non-clear filters will usually increase the exposure time required.

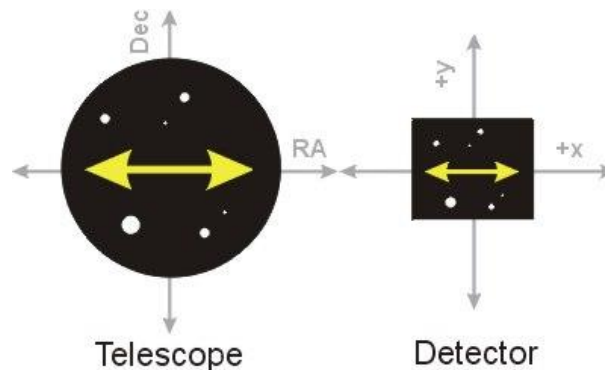


Figure 26: Recommended orientation for the CCD detector with respect to the telescope's field of view.

Figure 26 shows, rotating the camera on the optical tube so that +X and +Y on the CCD photo coincides with RA and Dec, respectively, can be helpful, but is not required.

7. Enter the **Search Area**, in fields of view, to scan when attempting to overlay the photo on the Sky Chart. Searching a larger area can help minimize the number of failed matches but may take longer to complete the calibration run.
8. Enter a number for the **Retries Near Each Target**. If no astrometric solution for the photo can be found, the telescope is slewed a small amount, and another attempt is made.
9. Turn on the **Use All Sky Image Link for Automated Pointing Runs** checkbox to use All Sky Image Link instead of the standard Image Link to find astrometric solutions. This can be helpful when the telescope has not been polar aligned, and slews are not yet accurate.
10. If necessary, click the **Source Extraction Setup** button to configure these parameters. See *TheSkyX Professional and Serious Astronomer User Guide* for details about the source extraction setup parameters.
11. If you do not know your imaging system's image scale, click the **Take and Image Link Photo** button to have *TheSkyX* determine it for you.

Other camera settings

- You may wish to enter a delay between exposures in the **Exposure Delay** text box on the **Camera** window to allow the telescope to settle.

Step B

The next step is to create the azimuth and altitude targets to point the telescope during the calibration process.

1. Click the **Create Pointing Targets** tab.
2. The blue region on this window represents an all-sky Sky Chart with small yellow circles at each target. The four orange circles can be used to define *where* in the sky the targets are created. Individually click and drag each to define the region of the sky where the targets appear. The upper two circles adjust the starting and ending azimuth. The lower two circles adjust the starting and ending altitude for the targets.

Clicking the **Update Sky Chart** button shows the new targets on the Sky Chart.

Step C

Once your imaging system has been characterized, and the targets to point the telescope have been defined, the automated calibration process can be started.

1. Click the **Acquire Pointing Samples** tab.

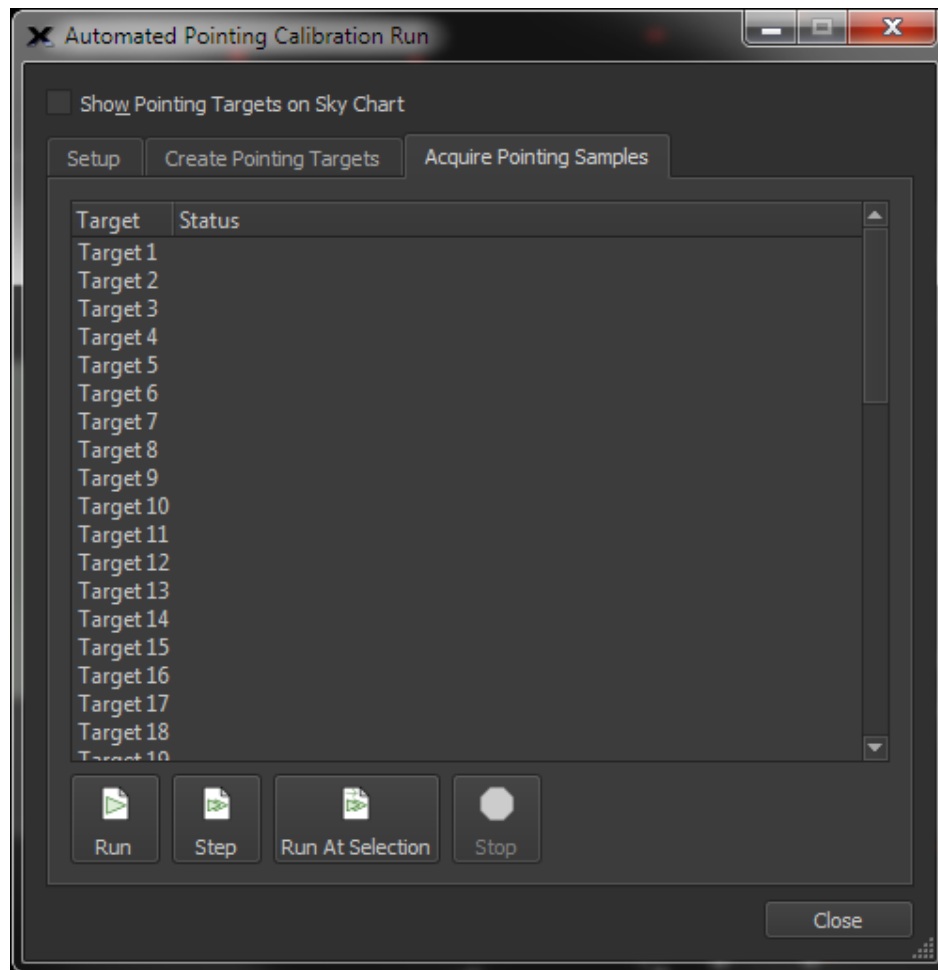


Figure 27: The Acquire Pointing Samples window.

2. Click the **Run** button to begin the automated process of acquiring pointing samples at each target.

When a pointing target is selected, its number appears next to the target's circle on the Sky Chart.



Figure 28: Sample Sky Chart when Target 1 is selected.

Run

Click this button to start acquiring the pointing samples for each target in the list.

Step

Click this button to acquire the pointing sample for the selected target only.

Run At Selection

Click this button to start the script at the selected target, then all subsequent targets.

Stop

Click this button to stop acquiring pointing samples.



TPoint needs at least six calibration points before the telescope's pointing accuracy improves. As calibration points are collected during an automated pointing calibration run, you can periodically run a Super Model (page 26) to improve the pointing model as you go.

Pointing Data Manipulation

The **Pointing Data** spreadsheet on the **Calibration Run** tab of the **TPoint Add On** windows can be used to view and sort the pointing samples and turn off erroneous pointing samples.

Removing Pointing Samples



The Super Model feature (see page 25) automatically removes bad pointing samples for you.

Recording one or more “bad” pointing samples is a common occurrence. They usually stick out like a sore thumb on the scatter plots. Ignoring the bad pointing sample is easy.

1. Click the **TPoint Add On** command from the **Telescope** menu.
2. Click the **Calibration Run** tab.
3. Click the **Pointing Data** tab near the bottom of the **Calibration Run** tab.
4. On the **Pointing Data** spreadsheet, turn off the checkbox next to the pointing sample you wish to ignore.

When the **Automatically Update Model** checkbox is turned on, the new model is computed. You should notice a decrease in the computed Sky RMS when removing the bad sample.

You can also turn off a pointing sample by clicking on the scatter plot, then selecting the **Ignore Pointing Sample Number <N>** in the context menu, where <N> is the pointing sample number.

Suggest Telescope Modeling Terms



The Super Model feature (see page 25) takes the guess work out of creating an optimal telescope pointing model. For best results, we *strongly recommend* using the Super Model feature, rather than trying to create your own model as described in the section below.

TPoint can suggest model terms to analyze the polar alignment and to minimize the RMS pointing of your telescope. After collecting about 15 to 20 pointing samples, click the **Suggest** button to add the “next best” term to the model.

If adding additional terms gives little change in the RMS value (less than about 20 percent) or the PSD begins to increase, you’re done. No more terms are necessary as the data cannot support it. As a rule of thumb, adding six to twelve *harmonic terms* is sufficient; more terms generally cannot be supported by the data.

The **Suggest** button on the **Model** tab typically allows 30 to 40 arcsecond RMS pointing without having to understand any of the complicated mathematics behind *TPoint*. Another general rule of thumb is that fewer terms is always better, and do not add terms if you are unsure.

Note that adding too many terms can “pollute” the model and lead to incorrect or meaningless RMS pointing and polar alignment information.

After adding six to eight harmonic terms, the polar alignment can be evaluated. From *TPoint*, click the **Polar Alignment Information** tab.

Note: Additional harmonic terms must be added to the *TPoint* model for the polar alignment information to be accurate.

When 30- to 40-arcseconds RMS is achieved, you will generally have accurate polar alignment information from *TPoint*.

Importing Pointing Data

The following steps are used to import pointing data from an ASCII text file. This can be useful to use existing pointing data from *TPoint for Windows*, for example.

1. Select the ***Import*** command from the ***Pointing Data*** menu button on the right side of the ***Calibration Run*** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window.
2. Navigate to the folder that holds the text file to import, select it, and click the ***Open*** button.

Exporting Pointing Data

The following steps are used to export pointing data to an ASCII text file.

1. Select the ***Export*** command from the ***Pointing Data*** menu button on the right side of the ***Calibration Run*** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window.
2. Enter the name of the text file, then click the ***Save*** button.

Start Calibration Run Window

The ***Start Calibration Run*** window is displayed when the ***Start*** button on the ***Calibration Run*** tab is clicked. While there are four different types of calibration, choose the ***Full*** option if you are just getting started. A full calibration basically starts the process from scratch. Under most circumstances, other than entering a description for the telescope, temperature and pressure are the only other parameters that need be specified; the default values for the remaining settings are sufficient.

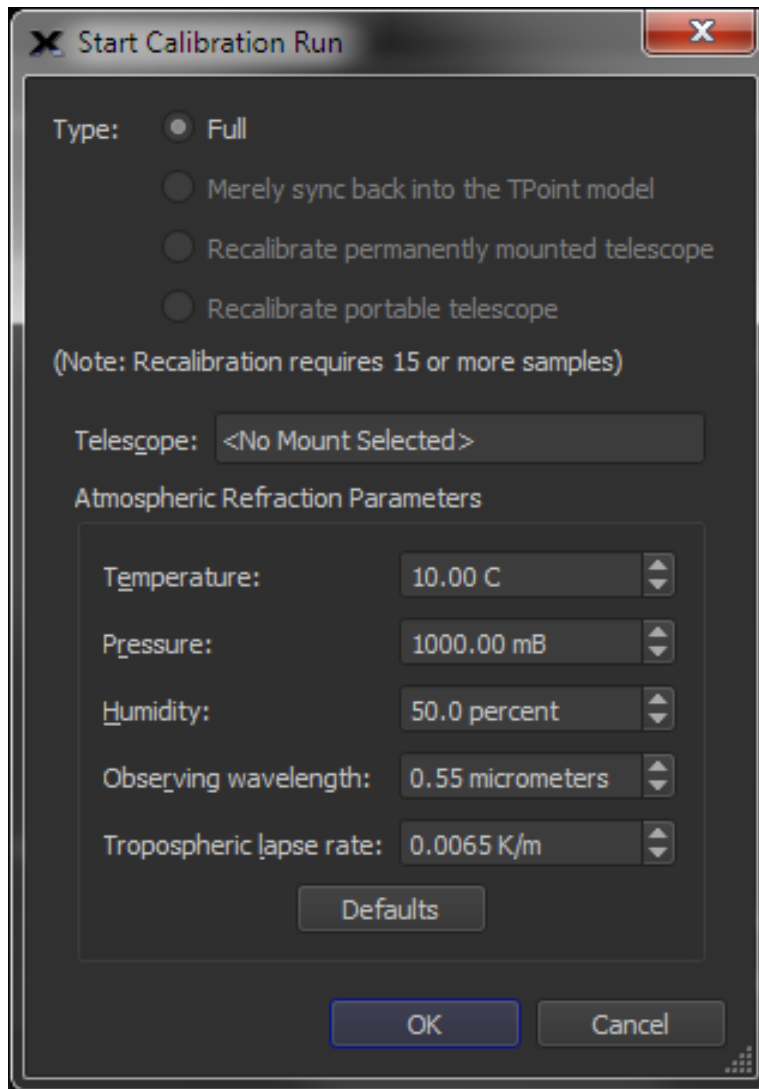


Figure 29: The Start Calibration Run window.

Calibration Type (Type)

There are four types of calibration. Choose the option that best meets your needs.

- **Full:** Select this option when you first start collecting pointing calibration samples that will be used to establish a pointing model, or, for example, when changing the equipment that is attached to the mount and a new model is required.
- **Merely Sync Back into the TPoint Model:** Select this model if the imaging system was previously calibrated, and a pointing model is in place. Syncing back into the model is effectively a single-point recalibration that reestablishes the IH and ID terms.
- **Recalibrate Permanently Mounted Telescope:** Select this option to recalibrate the pointing model for a permanently mounted telescope.

- **Recalibrate Portable Telescope:** Select this option when recalibrating a portable telescope.

Telescope

The telescope that was selected in the **Telescope Setup** window (**Telescope** menu) is listed by default. You can enter a different the here if you want. This name will appear on the bottom of the *TPoint* graphs.

Temperature

Enter the approximate temperature during the observations in degrees Celsius.

Pressure

Enter the approximate atmospheric pressure in mB. If your telescope automatically accounts for refraction (for example, all Meade Instruments telescopes) enter 0.

Humidity

Enter the relative humidity in the range 0.0 (zero percent) to 1.0 (100 percent).

Advanced Options

Turn this checkbox on to reveal advanced settings.

Observing Wavelength

Enter the observing wavelength in micrometers, the default value is 0.55. Note that the default value can be used in nearly all telescope modeling circumstances.

Tropospheric Lapse Rate

In degrees K/m, the default value is 0.01. Note that the default value can be used in nearly all telescope modeling circumstances.

Pole Checking

Pole checking rejects pointing samples in places that may cause problems – very close to the celestial pole, for instance. This option should be checked unless specific circumstances require turning pole checking off.

Diurnal Aberration Correction

The correction for diurnal aberration (maximum 0.3 arcseconds) should be disabled if the telescope control system itself omits it.

The Geometrical Terms

The six standard geometrical terms used by *TPoint* are described below. These terms quantify the various mechanical inaccuracies of the optical tube assembly (OTA) and telescope mount. Even the most expensive telescope mounts exhibit mechanical errors that ultimately affect the telescope pointing performance. Mechanical adjustments *can be* made to the telescope system to minimize the

misalignments. However, eliminating them entirely is impossible, so telescope pointing can be improved through telescope modeling.

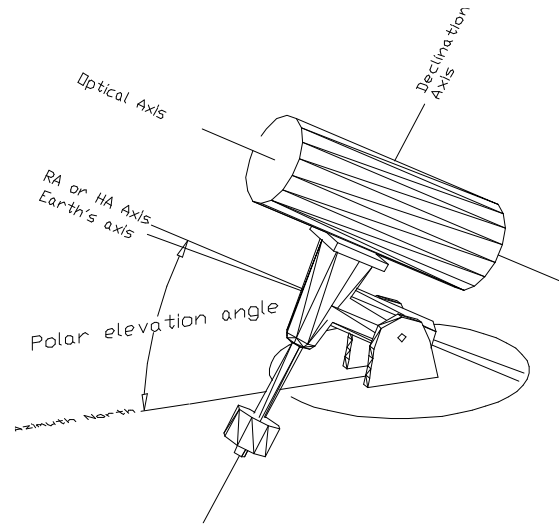


Figure 29: A German equatorial Mount.

Figure 29 and Figure 30 show the two most popular telescope mount designs. The following discussions relate to equatorial mounted telescopes. The Right Ascension (RA) or Hour Angle (HA) axis is pointed closely to the celestial pole.

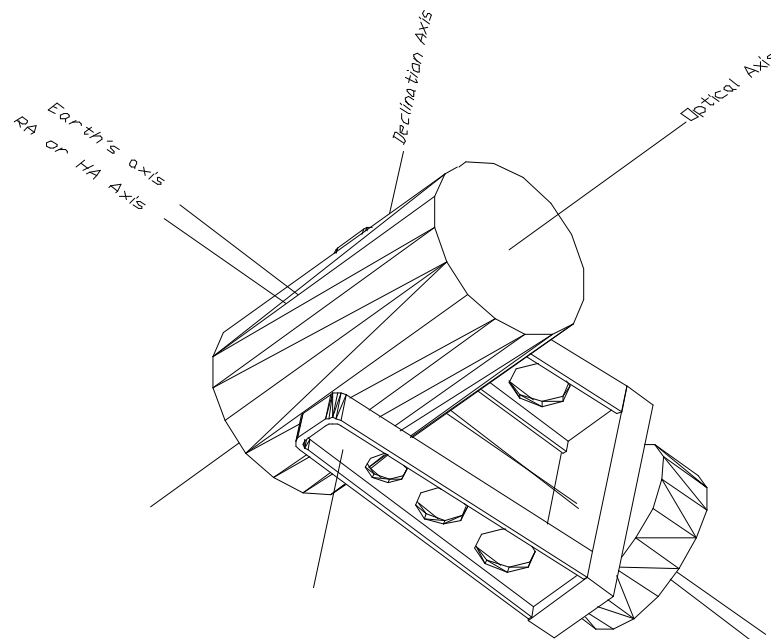
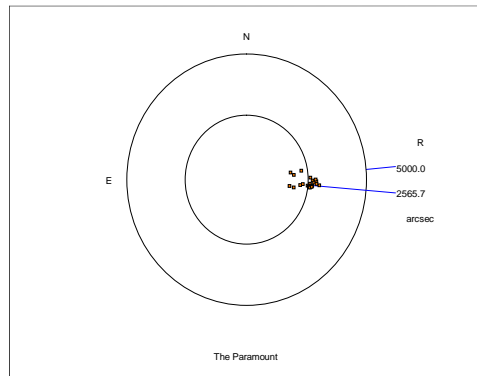


Figure 30: A Fork Mounted Telescope.

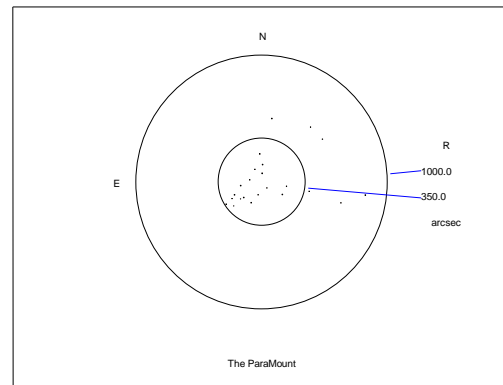
Index Errors in Hour Angle (IH) and Declination (ID)

The index errors are simply offsets to the hour angle and declination values such that the distribution of pointing errors across the sky is best fit. Looking at the scatter plots below, you can see that adding index error terms to the model moves the entire data set towards the center, thereby improving the overall pointing. Since the control system is typically synchronized on a star by a sighting through the optical path of the telescope, this initial sighting is “polluted” by the errors in the system at the time of the sighting. Averaging all the pointing samples results in more accurate pointing.



Sky RMS =2565.69 PSD =2565.69

Figure 31: Pointing data excluding the Index Error term.



Sky RMS = 350.04 PSD =
IH-Index Error in HA
ID-Index Error in Dec

Figure 32: Pointing data including the Index Error term.

Declination/Optical Axis Non-Perpendicularity

To achieve repeatable pointing, the optical tube assembly must be rigidly attached to the mount so that no motion occurs between the two as the OTA is slewed about the sky. Ideally, the optical axis should also be perpendicular to the declination axis. In practice, this can be difficult to achieve by simple mechanical means since the true optical path probably does not coincide with the physical telescope tube.

The following diagrams graphically illustrate the OTA/Declination axis term (CH) for two different telescope mounts.

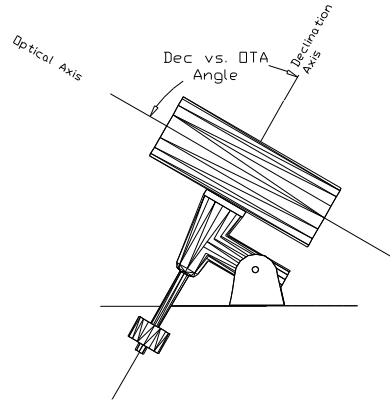


Figure 33: Side view of a German equatorial telescope mount.

After a sufficient number of *TPoint* pointing samples are collected, the magnitude of the OTA/declination non-perpendicularity can be quantified, and if it is large, mechanical adjustments can be (but *do not necessarily have to be*) made to minimize the non-perpendicularity.

While this source of *pointing error* can make centering stars difficult initially, it does not affect the *tracking performance* of the mount. In general, if the telescope is permanently mounted, and the pointing data can be collected automatically then no adjustment is necessary; once a model is established, *TPoint* will automatically correct for this error when the telescope is slewed. If the telescope is used in a

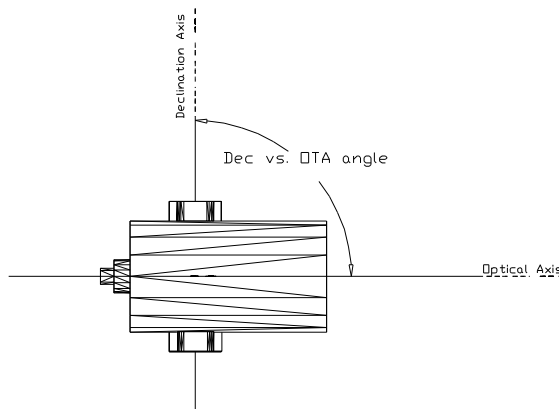


Figure 34: Top view of a fork mount.

portable setup, and stars are located visually, then you may wish to minimize this error so that unmodeled pointing is improved.

Change EW on the sky equal to coefficient CH. For a fork mount operating above the pole or for a GEM observing stars east of the meridian, positive CH displaces the pointing axis to the west of where it would otherwise be.

Note that CH and IH both move stars east or west in the field of view. The difference is that the displacement is constant for CH whereas the displacement due to IH shrinks as you approach the pole.

RA or HA axis/Declination Axis Non-perpendicularity

For north declinations, and for a fork mount operating above the pole, or for a GEM observing stars east of the meridian, positive NP displaces the pointing axis to the west of where it would otherwise be.

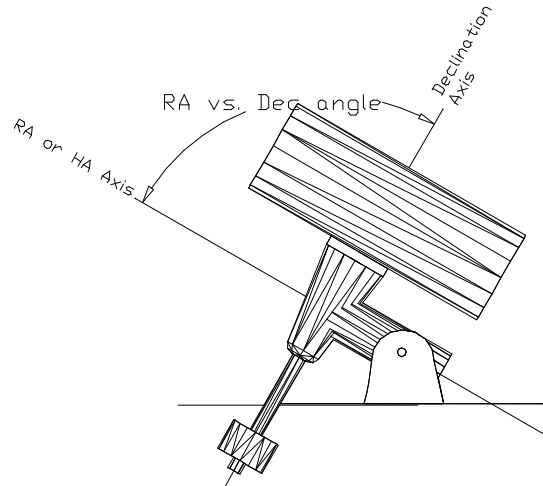


Figure 35: An equatorial mount.

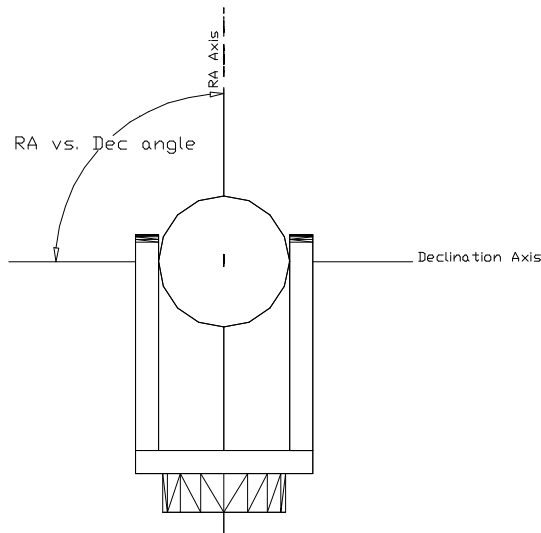


Figure 36: The front view of a fork mount.

Polar Alignment Error in Azimuth

In the Northern Hemisphere, a positive MA means that the pole of the mounting is to the right of due north. In the Southern Hemisphere, a positive MA means that the pole of the mounting is to the right of due south.

When making adjustments to correct for the MA term (polar misalignment in azimuth) you need to rotate about a vertical axis through a larger angle than MA itself. This is because MA is really a rotation about the point Hour Angle = 0, Declination = 0. The factor to inflate MA by before rotating the mount is $1/\cos(\text{latitude})$.

Polar Alignment Error in Elevation

In the Northern Hemisphere, a positive ME means that the pole of the mounting is below the true (unrefracted) pole. A mounting aligned on the refracted pole will have a negative ME. In the Southern Hemisphere, a positive ME means that the pole of the mounting is above the true (unrefracted) pole. A mounting aligned on the refracted pole will have a positive ME.

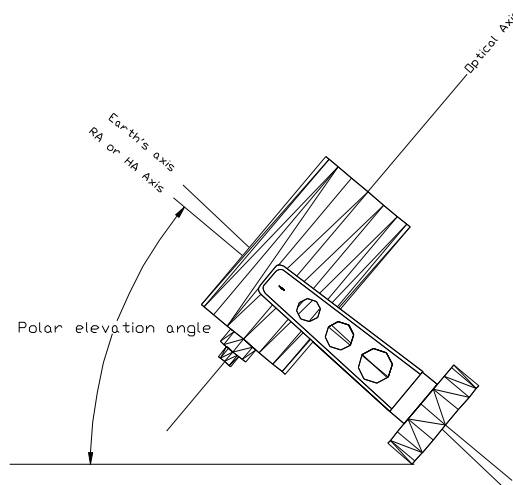


Figure 37: Fork mount.

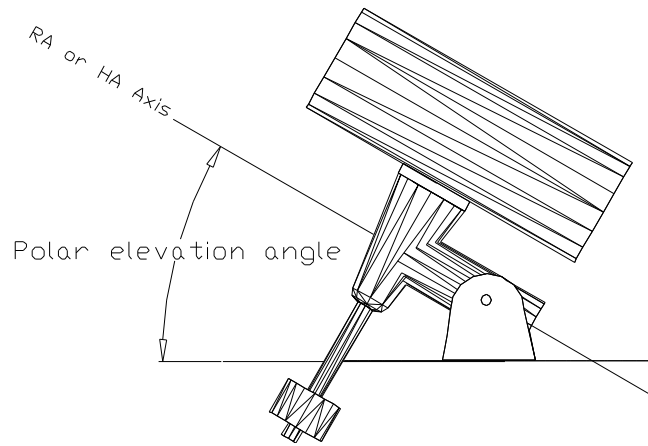


Figure 38: Equatorial mount.

The TPoint Graphs

Fourteen different graphs are available for plotting the pointing data to reveal systematic errors in the telescope system. Choose which graph to display by clicking the **Graph** pop-up menu on the **Setup** tab of the **TPoint** window (Telescope menu).

The general telescope analysis strategy is to plot different components of the errors against vs. time or position. Terms can then be added to the model to target any systematic effects that are seen. Some plots are more likely than others to have a mechanical interpretation and attention should be initially confined to these plots.

Pointing samples are saved in time order. Therefore, graphing y-data vs. N plots are useful for exposing shifts or drifts that have occurred during the pointing run. Other x-axis meanings can be contrived by appropriately sorting the observation file.

The numerous plots have a variety of presentation and diagnostic roles.

Scatter Plot

The scatter plot shows pointing errors displayed on a “shooting target.” The inner circle shows the RMS value, in arcseconds. As well as being a good way of presenting overall pointing performance, the scatter plot exposes errant observations and abnormal distributions.

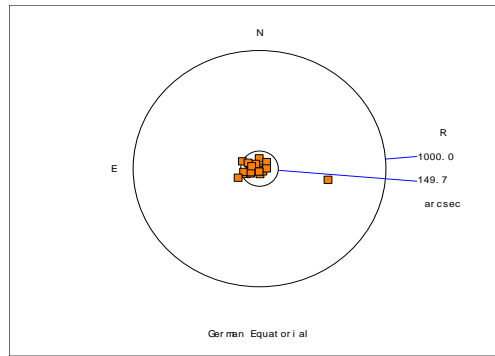


Figure 39: Scatter Plot Example 1

Figure 39 contains a pointing sample error. Errors are more likely to occur with a large number of samples since using fainter stars increases the possibility of misidentification. Note how the errant star causes a misleading tight clustering of the remaining stars by changing the overall plotting scale.

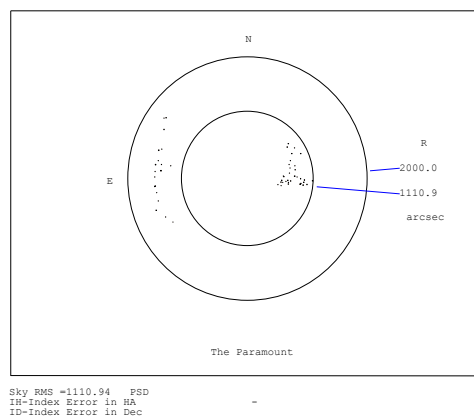


Figure 40: Scatter Plot Example 1 (continued)

Figure 40 shows two distinct distributions of stars. This is the result of a very large Declination axis and OTA non-perpendicularity on a German Equatorial mount. On the East side, the angle causes observations to be misplaced in one direction while on the West side, they are misplaced in the opposite direction.

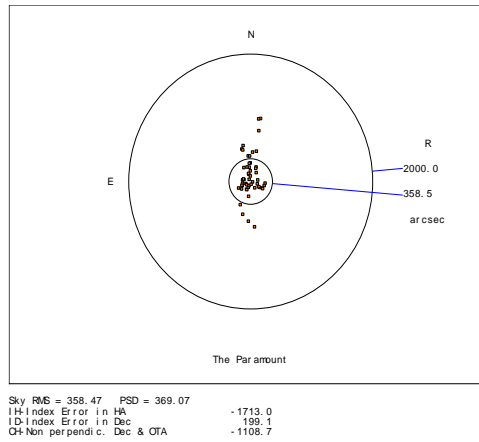


Figure 41: Scatter Plot Example 1 (continued)

Figure 41 shows the same data after the Dec/OTA term has been added.

Error Vectors: Orthographic

Figure 42 displays the residuals as error vectors on an orthographic projection, showing each observation and a line indicating the size and direction of the pointing error. The vectors (lines projecting from the square symbols that mark star positions) are the great circle continuations of the pointing residuals.

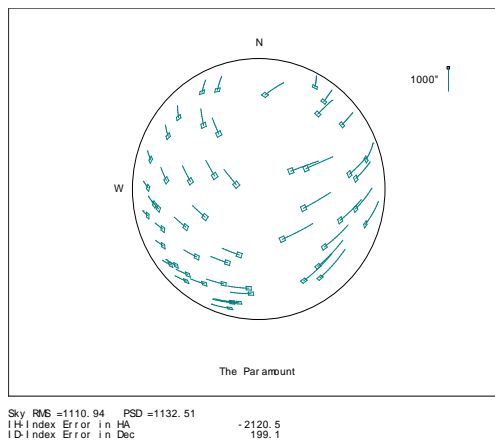


Figure 42: Error vectors graphed using an orthographic projection.

Error Vectors: Cylindrical

Figure 43 represents an all-sky map (cylindrical HA/Dec projection) showing each observation and a line indicating the size and direction of the pointing error.

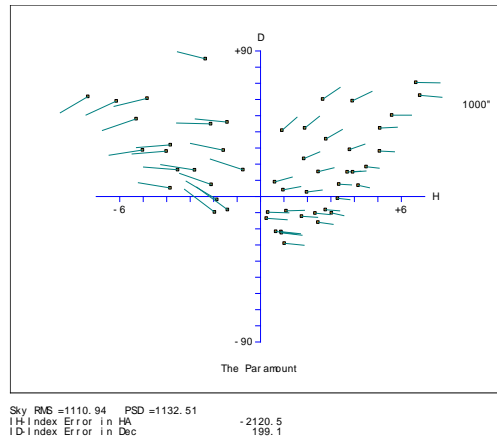


Figure 43: Error vectors on a Cartesian Cylindrical projection.

Hysteresis

In Figure 44 each blob is an observation, and the line indicates the size and direction of the pointing error. The position of the blob shows the direction of the preceding slew. This assumes that the data file contains all the observations in the correct order, and that hysteresis is related to the direction of the large-scale movements in cylindrical coordinates (either HA/Dec or Az/EI). Summing the residuals oriented relative to the telescope movements makes a numerical estimate of the hysteresis.

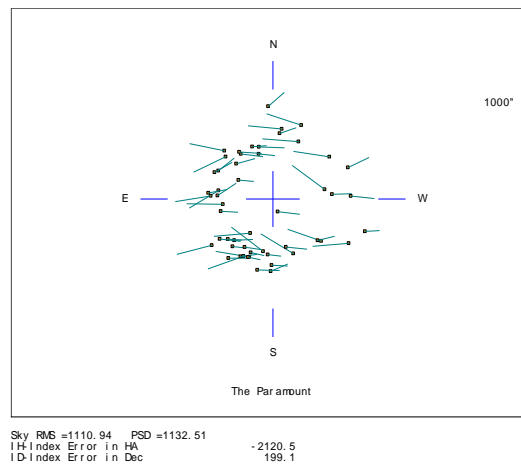


Figure 44: Error vectors vs. telescope direction.

Changing Axis Alignment

This graph looks for changing polar/azimuth axis misalignment. Each residual is interpreted as being due to a misalignment of the specified “roll” axis—either polar or azimuth as specified. A histogram is plotted to show if the residuals do, in fact,

favor one direction. The mean direction is calculated and reported, and then the component of each residual in the direction of this misalignment is plotted.

Error Distribution

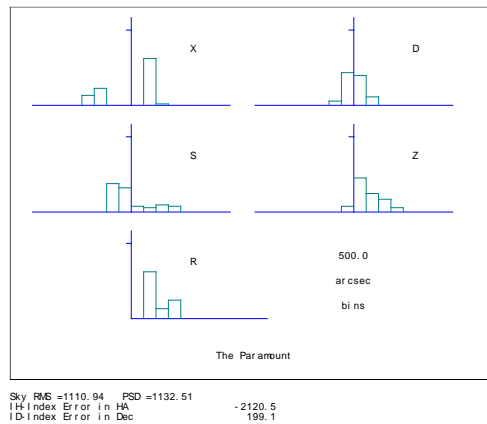


Figure 45: Error Distribution graph.

Figure 45 plots multiple histograms that show various sorts of error distributions and is useful for testing whether the residuals are reasonably normal. In the example the X (east-west) plot shows a suspicious double peak.

Other Graphs

The following graphs can be selected from the *TPoint Add On* window:

- **Observation number vs. Declination:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the declination component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is observation number (in effect time).
- **Observation number vs. Hour Angle:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the hour angle component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is observation number (in effect time). n.b. Because the vertical axis is hour angle differences, large readings may appear at higher declinations.
- **Hour Angle vs. EW on sky:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the east/west component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is observation number (in effect time).
- **Declination vs. Declination:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the north/south component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is the declination coordinate in degrees.
- **Declination vs. Zenith Distance:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the vertical component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is the zenith distance coordinate in degrees.

- **Declination vs. EW on sky:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the east/west component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is the declination coordinate in degrees.
- **Hour Angle vs. Declination:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the north/south component of the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is the hour angle coordinate in hours.
- **Hour Angle vs. HA/Dec non-perpendicularity:** The blobs are observations. The vertical axis is the amount of HA/Dec non-perpendicularity that would be needed to produce the pointing error, in arcseconds. The horizontal axis is the hour angle coordinate in hours.
- **Changing Polar Axis Alignment:** The histogram shows which hour angle meridian the polar axis would have to be moved along in order to reduce the pointing error: a single bin with a large value suggests the polar axis is not perfectly aligned. The blobs, one per observation, show how much of the pointing error could be accounted for by a polar axis misalignment: and even scatter suggests good alignment.
- **Error Distributions:** Each histogram shows the proportion of the pointing error in the nominated coordinate. X is east/west on the sky; D is north/south; S is left/right on the sky; Z is up/down; R is total error.
- **Multiple Graphs:** A selection of nine of the most useful plots. dX, dD and dZ are the east/west, north/south and vertical components of the pointing error, while dP is how much NP would be needed to explain the pointing error, all in arcseconds. HA axes are in hours, Dec and ZD axes are in degrees.

Determining an Observation Number from a Graph

Bad observations usually stand out in one or more of the graphs. For example, in Figure 46, most of the observations are clustered tightly, while there appears to be a single observation that is inconsistent with the remaining data.

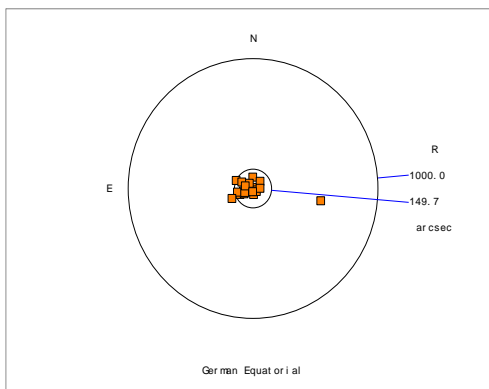


Figure 46: Scatter plot with erroneous pointing sample.

Left click on the orange rectangle, then click the ***Ignore Pointing Sample Number*** <N> command in the pop-up menu to remove it from the model.

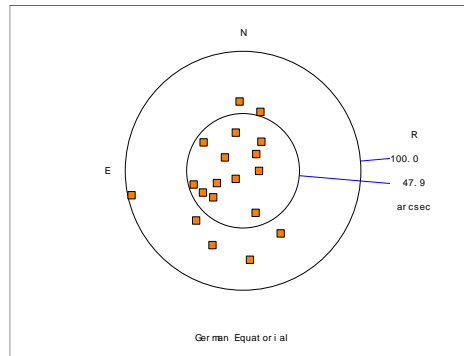


Figure 47: Scatter diagram without erroneous pointing sample.

Generic Terms

There are two types of Generic terms defined in *TPoint*, where the name of the coefficient spells out the required polynomial or harmonic formula.

Polynomial Terms

Polynomial terms have names in the form:

$Prc[i [c[i]]]$

One example is a term PXH2D1, which models an effect that produced an east-west shift on sky (X) proportional to $h^2\delta$ (H2D1).

The initial P identifies the term as a polynomial.

The *r* field describes the result, and is one of the following:

- H Result is in hour angle.
- X Result is east west on the sky.
- D Result is in declination.
- U Result tilts polar axis up or down.
- L Result tilts polar axis left or right.

- P Result changes HA/Dec non-perpendicularity.
- A Result is in azimuth.
- S Result is left-right shift on the sky.
- Z Result is in zenith distance.
- N Result azimuth axis north or south.
- W Result tilts azimuth axis east or west.
- V Result changes Azimuth/El non-perpendicularity.

The two *ci* fields indicate the independent variables and their powers. Each *i* is in the range 0-9; each *c* can be any of:

- H Hour Angle.
- D Declination.
- A Azimuth.
- Z Zenith distance.
- Q Parallax angle.

Harmonic Terms

Harmonic terms have names of the forms:

$H r f c [i] [f c [i]]$
or $H r f c i i$

One example might be the term HXSH2, which would model an effect that produced an East-West shift on the sky (X) proportional to the sine (S) of 2h (H2).

The initial 'H' identifies this term as a harmonic.

The *r* and *c* fields describe the result and an independent variable respectively, and are as for polynomials, above.

Each *fci*, *fci* and *fci* indicates a function of an integer multiple of an independent variable *c*. The *f* field is either S for sine or C for cosine. Each *i* is in the range 0-9, allowing frequencies from 0 to 999 cycles per revolution in the case of simple one-coordinate harmonics, and 0 to 9 cycles per revolution in the case of compound two-coordinate harmonics. An omitted *i* defaults to unity, as does an omitted trailing *fci*.

Adding a Generic Term

To add a polynomial or harmonic term to a model, enter the term using the forms described above into the edit box located in the Create New Term group box. The

Add Term button will remain grayed until a legitimate term has been typed into the edit box. Legitimate terms are unique terms that follow the form described above.

Once the desired term is entered, click Add Term to add the term to the current model. The Use check box will automatically be marked when a new term is added. The new term is placed at the end of the Terms list box.

For example, to model a gear-centering error in declination, a harmonic term must be created. The result, r , and the independent variable, c , are in declination. Both the sine and cosine components must be accounted for in order to allow arbitrary phase, so the two necessary terms are as follows:

HSDS and *HDCD*

To add these to a model, type in HSDS in the Add Term edit box, then click Add Term. Do the same for HDCD. You will now see these new terms listed at the end of the terms list box.

Suggest Terms (Legacy Feature)



The Super Model feature (see page 25) takes all the guess work out of creating an optimal model for your pointing data. We strongly recommend relying on the Super Model, rather than trying to create your own model.

Click this button to have *TPoint* analyze the existing pointing data, then list all the possible terms that may be added, sorted by magnitude of the correction. This option is a handy way to determine which terms have the greatest impact on the RMS pointing.

Sizes of the Coefficients

The mathematical expressions used by *TPoint* are rather simple and designed to give results of adequate accuracy when not too close to the pole of the mounting and *when the pointing errors of the telescope are small*. Flexures and misalignments of up to a few arcminutes are unlikely to give problems; they will not interact significantly with one another and will be calculated by *TPoint* to sufficient accuracy. However, terms with larger coefficients may not be so well behaved, especially near a pole.

In practice, a source of problems is collimation error, the non-perpendicularity of the chosen pointing axis with respect to the declination or elevation axis of the mounting. If the measuring device – eyepiece, video, CCD etc. – is offset too far,

there may be unmodeled pointing errors due to such effects as optical distortion. The best plan is to ensure that the measuring device is offset no more than a few minutes of arc. If this is impossible, try to pre-process pointing observations to remove the bulk of the offset before the *TPoint* run. This might involve rigorous calculation of the tangent-plane projection and optical distortions.

Advanced Modeling



The Super Model feature (see page 25) takes all the guess work out of creating an optimal model for your pointing data. We strongly recommend relying on the Super Model, rather than trying to create your own model.

TPoint allows a straightforward model for a telescope to be generated easily and without requiring great cunning or insight, but also provides the tools more experienced and determined users will need when conducting more exhaustive analyses.

As already described, the general strategy for modeling a telescope from scratch is to load a data file, set up the basic geometrical model (clicking Equatorial on the Fit Data window) and watching the term values and selected graph.

With the various graphs, plots of residuals can then be made and inspected for signs of systematic error. Plausible flexure terms can be tried, and any others that the telescope design suggests.

When adding new terms, pay attention to the standard deviation of the new coefficient, the effect on other terms, and whether the population standard deviation has gone down. A new term will almost always reduce the RMS pointing but population standard deviation is a better indication of whether the improvement is real.

If an attempt is made to use two terms that are indistinguishable (for example, the identical terms, CH and PXH0), the condition will be reported. If this occurs, eliminate one of them. In such ill-conditioned cases, the singular value decomposition (SVD) methods used by FIT will normally return a meaningful model, with the “true” value of a duplicated term being shared out between the two (or more) coefficients involved. Two common cases are (i) if two inseparable terms are present from the start, they each receive an equal share of the value, and (ii) where a new term is added to an already fitted model, and that term is inadequately distinguished from something already present, then the new term will be left close to zero.

Do not try to extract more information from a given sample of data than the size of the sample justifies. A preliminary assessment of a telescope's capabilities can be made using perhaps 20-30 stars. Routine fitting of a typical operational telescope model, consisting of six geometrical terms, two or three flexures, and perhaps a few scale adjustments, centering corrections, etc., calls for 50-100 stars, well-distributed over the whole observable sky. A campaign to expose high-frequency flexures and bumps should not be embarked upon without a sample of 500-1500 stars. Even with this large number of stars, fitting a full set of polynomials or harmonics up to the required degree in one go is impractical, and new terms must be tried out in groups of no more than about 20.

When first analyzing a new telescope, it is not uncommon to see obvious systematic residuals on the simple graphs of error in one coordinate plotted against that or another one--plotting error in zenith distance versus against zenith distance (Z Z plot) for example. However, once these straightforward effects have been treated, systematic errors can still hide in what looks like noise. Some of these can be exposed by using more specialized plots -- zenith distance errors against parallactic angle (Z Q plot), errors in HA/Dec non-perpendicularity plotted against HA (P H plot), and so on. However, certain effects that depend simultaneously on two coordinates may prove more stubborn; given a data set of adequate size, the solution is to use the MASK and UNMASK commands to select bands in one coordinate, allowing the residuals for that one band to be plotted.

At various stages the Hysteresis plot should be examined to assess whether the current pointing accuracy seems to be limited by hysteresis.

When pursuing low-level flexures and irregularities, difficult questions may arise. To what extent is the model physically meaningful? Has adding empirical terms affected the supposedly well-understood underlying model? Is it worth trying to keep a grip on physical reality, or wouldn't it be just as good to fit a massive set of polynomials or harmonics?

An approach that seems to preserve the considerable advantages of having a model firmly based on mechanical reality yet allows all the power of empirical modeling to be unleashed, is to construct a model that includes both physical and empirical terms. At no stage should both sets be free to float during fitting.

Finding Harmonics: An Example

Often after the geometric terms have been added to a model, other systematic errors present themselves in the various graphs generated by *TPoint*. Though not always obvious, close examination of the various graphs reveal patterns that provide insight into which additional terms should be added. The following example

illustrates how adding two harmonic terms to the pointing model below improved the RMS pointing from two arcminutes to about one arcminute.

First, examine the graphs on the *TPoint Add On* window. Taking a close look at the delta-declination vs. declination graph shows as it shows a strong pattern in the form of the cosine function. The frequency appears to be 1-1/2 cycles per 90 degrees or 6 cycles per revolution.

A harmonic term that produces a declination shift on the sky proportional to the cosine (C) of $6d$ (D6) should be added to the model. The term name is **HD CD6** (i.e. **Harmonic Declination proportional to the Cosine of Declination*6**).

On the **Model** tab, add the term HD CD6. Once the term you have added has the correct syntax and is unique (i.e. the term is not already present in the list of terms) the **Add Term** button will become undimmed. Click **Add Term** to include this new term in the model.

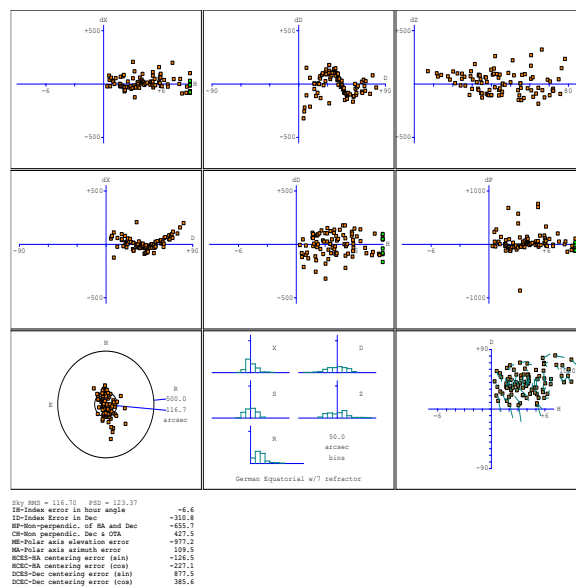
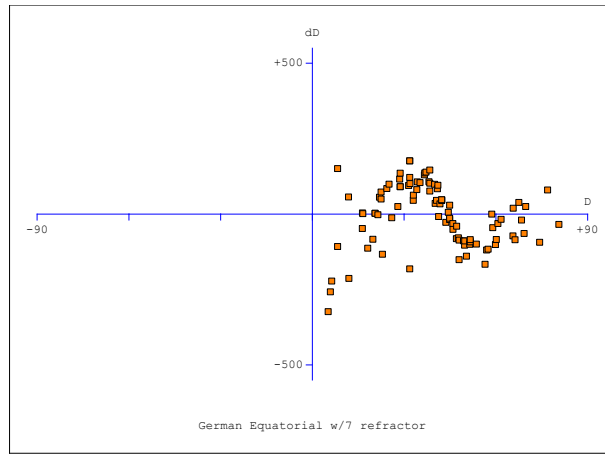


Figure 48: Multiple graphs.



Sky RMS = 116.70	PSD = 123.37	
IH-Index error in hour angle		-6.6
ID-Index Error in Dec		-310.8
NP-Non-perpendic. of HA and Dec		-655.7
CH-Non perpendic. Dec & OTA		427.5
ME-Polar axis elevation error		-977.2
MA-Polar axis azimuth error		109.5
HCES-HA centering error (sin)		-126.5
HCRC-HA centering error (cos)		-227.1
DCES-Dec centering error (sin)		877.5
DCEC-Dec centering error (cos)		385.6

Figure 49: Figure 46: Graph of dD vs. Declination Before Adding the HDCD6 Term (RMS Pointing = 116 arcseconds).

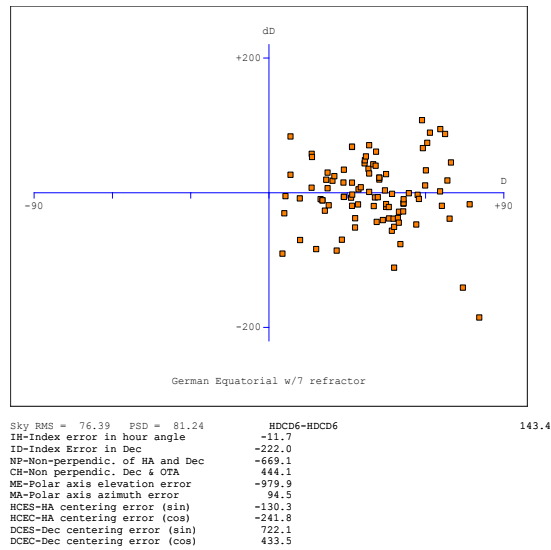


Figure 50: Graph of dD vs. Declination After Adding the HDCD6 Term (RMS Pointing = 76 arcseconds)

Note the RMS pointing decreases from 117 arcseconds to 76 arcseconds. Also note the scale of the Y-Axis changes from +/- 500 to +/- 200 arcseconds.

Examining the various graphs on the terms window shows another harmonic present in the dX vs. Declination graph.

In this case, a harmonic term that produces an east-west shift on the sky proportional to the cosine (C) of $2d$ (D2) should be added to the model. The term name is HXCD2 (i.e. **Harmonic X (east-west shift) proportional to the Cosine of Declination*2**).

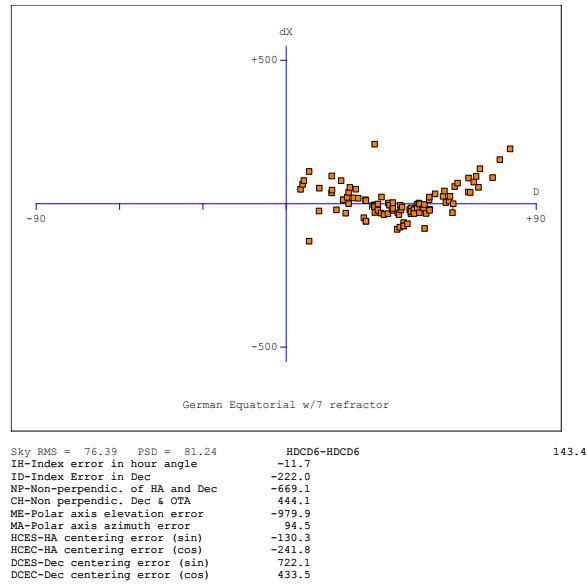


Figure 51: Before Adding the HXCD2 Term (RMS = 76 arcseconds).

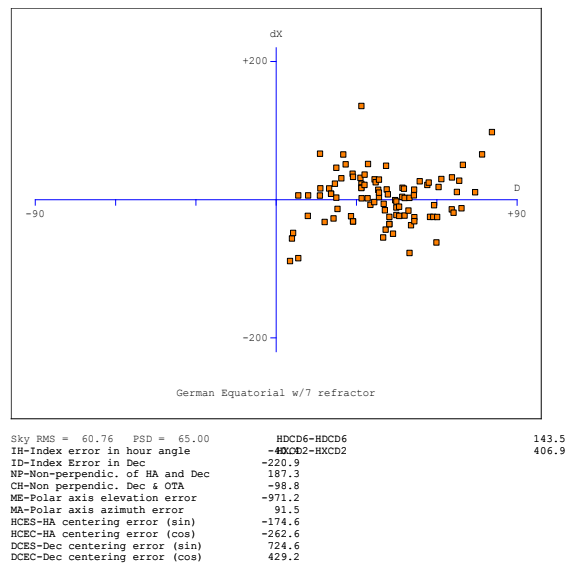


Figure 52: After Adding the HXCD2 Term (RMS = 61 arcseconds).

TPoint Workflow



The Super Model feature (see page 25) takes all the guess work out of creating an optimal model for your pointing data. We strongly recommend relying on the Super Model, rather than trying to create your own model.

The following real-world *TPoint* modeling example using Paramount ME is intended to show the general workflow for analyzing data and how to optimize the model to get the best possible pointing.

Before doing *any* modeling, take some time to assess the mount's pointing *accuracy* versus the mount's pointing *repeatability*. Pointing accuracy relates to how close the telescope points to a given star or object after a slew. Pointing repeatability relates to how close the mount points to a star after slewing to a star that is 15 degrees (or so) away, then back again.

Try this simple "litmus" test with your mount. Slew to any star, then center the star in the eyepiece. Next, slew about 20 degrees away, then slew back to this star. Is the star centered in the eyepiece? If not, your mount probably suffers from "non-repeatable errors" (including backlash, out of round gears, mirror slop or other errors) that make it less than ideal for telescope modeling.

The most common source of random error is mirror slop. Mirror slop is motion of the primary or secondary mirror as the telescope is slewed to different positions.

General Pointing Improvement Suggestions

- If your mount uses a Schmidt-Cassegrain (SCT) optical tube assembly, minimize SCT mirror flop and mirror shift for best overall pointing performance. LX200 owners might consider Scope Stuff's LX200 Mirror Stabilizer product.
- Use a motorized focuser (for example, an Optec, RoboFocus, JMI SmartFocus, or other model focuser) to minimize mirror shift. Although this will not improve pointing performance directly, it will make using your telescope much easier.

If the mount does not point accurately, then *TPoint* will help. If the mount is unable to point reliably, then there are most likely random errors that will degrade the overall pointing performance. To achieve good all sky pointing, every effort should be taken to minimize random telescope errors.

Polar Alignment for German Equatorial Mounts

Probably the most common source of pointing error in a German equatorial mount (GEM) is polar misalignment. This error is most noticeable when a GEM is slewed to the opposite side of the meridian and the polar alignment error appears as an offset pointing error; the size of the offset is related to the distance the mount's polar axis is from the pole. Use *TPoint's* Polar Alignment Report to get within one arcminute of the refracted pole before proceeding.

Accurate Time

Accurate time is essential for accurate pointing. Every second of error in time equates to pointing error. Make sure to update your computer's clock using an accurate time base before

Analyzing Your Pointing Data

Let's review a set of pointing data that was acquired with a Paramount ME.

1. Click the ***TPoint Add On*** command from *TheSkyX's Telescope* menu.
2. On the ***Setup*** tab, click the ***Import Pointing Data*** command on the ***TPoint Add On Settings*** pop-up menu. On the ***Import Pointing Data*** window, highlight the file named ***Burnett.dat*** (under Windows, the file name may appear as ***Burnett*** if the file extensions are not shown) and click the ***Open*** button.

The *TPoint* scatter plot should now show the pointing data along with the model's computed Sky RMS and PSD values using the six standard terms IH, ID, NP, CH, ME and MA.

Our goal is to get the best possible pointing (by minimizing the Sky RMS with an eye on the PSD) from this data.

Removing Bad Pointing Samples

Generally, after collecting your pointing data (from 30 to 200 pointing samples, or more, depending on your observing goals, it's time to optimize the telescope's pointing.

The first step is to remove any errors; that is, points where the telescope's coordinates and the coordinates of the observed star do not closely match. There are no hard criteria for choosing outliers, which in most cases are caused by mistaken star identification. Generally, you look for points that stand out from the majority.

For our example data, the scatter plot in Figure 53 shows a point that is clearly an error. To ignore this point, either click or right click on the small orange rectangle that represents the point on the scatter plot then click the **Mask Pointing Sample Number <N>** command, where <N> is the sample number.

The screenshot displays the TPoint Settings - TPoint Add On window. On the left, a scatter plot shows a circle with a radius of 1000.0 (50.2 arcsec) and a small orange rectangle representing a pointing error. The plot is labeled 'Paramount ME' and has a 'Graph: Scatter plot' dropdown. The status bar shows 'Sky RMS = 49.86' and 'PSD = 52.75'. On the right, the 'Pointing Data' tab is active, showing a spreadsheet with the following data:

Use/Sample #	Star RA	Star Dec	Scope RA	Scope Dec	LST
✓ #18	23h 03m 37.45s	+42° 19' 43.9"	11h 05m 43.63s	+137° 37' 05.0"	22 21.010
✓ #19	23h 38m 00.09s	+48° 58' 22.8"	11h 40m 17.55s	+130° 58' 30.6"	22 21.370
✓ #20	00h 22m 42.24s	+54° 47' 29.3"	12h 25m 13.52s	+125° 09' 34.4"	22 21.750
✓ #21	02h 31m 00.73s	+61° 50' 59.9"	14h 33m 50.95s	+118° 07' 07.5"	22 22.610
✓ #22	02h 39m 08.96s	+54° 45' 56.9"	14h 41m 38.38s	+125° 12' 36.1"	22 23.790
✓ #23	01h 38m 50.44s	+53° 34' 58.6"	13h 41m 20.80s	+126° 23' 10.9"	22 24.190
✓ #24	02h 30m 30.07s	+46° 15' 43.3"	11h 59m 45.49s	+133° 41' 28.6"	22 24.960
✓ #25	02h 30m 59.83s	+40° 52' 43.2"	11h 20m 05.94s	+139° 04' 23.1"	22 25.330
✓ #26	22h 45m 19.01s	+34° 47' 14.4"	10h 47m 16.21s	+145° 10' 03.5"	22 25.690
✓ #27	22h 47m 46.53s	+33° 49' 56.7"	10h 49m 42.99s	+146° 07' 20.4"	22 26.000
✓ #28	23h 24m 53.77s	+38° 44' 12.3"	11h 26m 57.32s	+141° 12' 46.6"	22 26.360
✓ #29	00h 07m 30.60s	+42° 48' 42.2"	12h 09m 40.96s	+137° 08' 25.4"	22 26.730
✓ #30	01h 47m 04.65s	+47° 27' 26.5"	13h 49m 21.61s	+132° 30' 18.2"	22 27.500
✓ #31	02h 40m 11.76s	+47° 37' 28.8"	14h 42m 27.37s	+132° 20' 53.5"	22 27.880
✓ #32	03h 32m 37.39s	+46° 16' 58.6"	15h 34m 49.47s	+133° 42' 12.4"	22 28.270
✓ #33	03h 24m 05.99s	+38° 41' 27.1"	15h 25m 43.91s	+141° 28' 51.4"	22 28.620

The spreadsheet also includes checkboxes for 'Show pointing data', 'Show Only Bright Stars', 'Show pointing data path', 'Automatically update model', and 'Graph unused samples'. A 'Close' button is located at the bottom right.

Figure 53: Ignoring a bad pointing sample.

Alternatively, you can turn off the checkmark next to this sample on the **Pointing Data** spreadsheet. To view a specific sample, click the small orange rectangle on the scatter plot. Or, click the **Calibration Run** tab, click the **Pointing Data** tab and then scroll the spreadsheet to the desired sample.

When the **Automatically Update Model** checkbox is turned on, the scale of the scatter plot adjusts to reflect the new model.

Additional points that seem to lie outside the majority are now more prominent, and some of them probably should be excluded as well. How many is purely subjective but the goal is to have to model account for the factors that affect the majority of the pointing and not try to explain each and every odd mechanical effect. A better strategy would be to identify unique mechanical oddities and fix them. In the interim however, excluding several of these outlier points will allow

the model to account for the general and predominant mechanical errors of the mount and optics that affect slews to most locations.

Adding Terms

After the “bad” pointing samples points have been removed, in addition to the six standard geometrical terms, more pointing terms should be added to the model (see “The Geometrical Terms” on page 61 for more information).

Only add terms that actually improve the mount’s pointing. How do you know *which* terms to add? As terms are added to the model, there are four different values that should be used to decide whether the term should be added, and whether those terms that are already added should be retained. These values are:

- Sky RMS
- PSD
- ME sigma
- MA sigma

Sky RMS and PSD are displayed on the top left of the *TPoint Add On* window, below the *TPoint* logo. Sigma values for each term are shown on the right-most column in the table of terms.

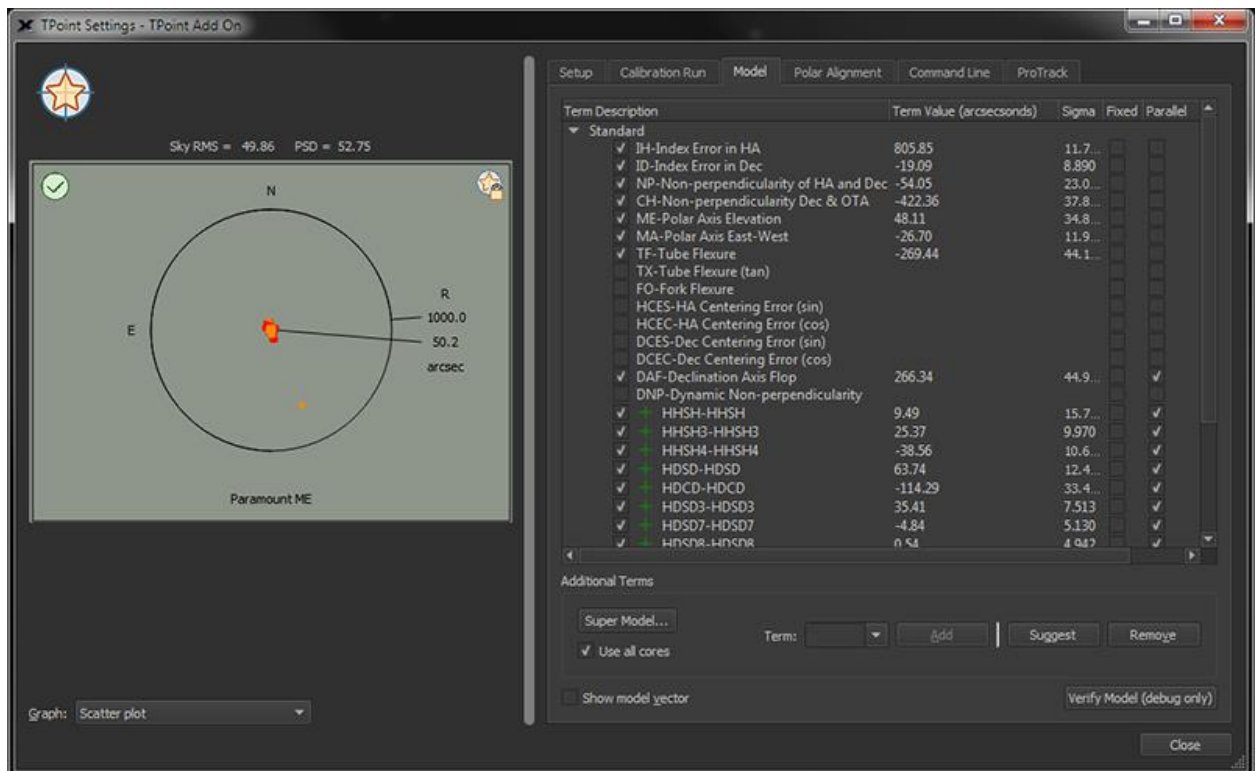


Figure 54: The Model tab on the TPoint Add On window.

There are four qualifications for keeping a term or deciding that prior terms should now be removed. This set of evaluation criteria should be considered for each new term before keeping it in the model:

- Choose new terms only if they reduce the *PSD* by at least 10 percent.
- Discard any term (new or old) if its *value* is not at least 3 times its *sigma*.
- Discard a new term if it causes either the *ME sigma* or the *MA sigma* to increase.
- Watch other added terms (outside the six geometrical terms – IH, ID, NP, CH, ME and MA) and discard them if they no longer meet the above criteria.

Order to Add Terms

Before adding additional terms, make sure the six standard geometrical terms are turned on. These terms are the basis for every pointing model. From here...

- Add the term **DAF** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Add the term **HCES-HA** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Add the term **HCEC-HA** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Add the term **DCES-Dec** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Add the term **DCEC-Dec** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Add the term **DNP** – then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.
- Click the Suggest Terms button to add one harmonic term at a time until no more terms satisfy the evaluation criteria.
- Add **TX** or **TF** (choose the one with the greatest positive affect) - then evaluate – keep or remove based on those criteria.

Use the **Suggest Terms** button to add one harmonic term at a time until no more terms satisfy the evaluation criteria.

At this point, you should have optimal pointing for your imaging system.

Model Tab Options

Term Abbreviation

Enter the two or four-character abbreviation for TPoint terms that are not shown in the **Standard Terms** list. Entering a single character in the text box will all the terms that begin with that character. (See Figure 55.)

Add Button

Click this button to add the term to the model. This button is enabled only when a valid term appears in the **Term Abbreviation** text input.

Suggest Button

Click this button to optimally add new terms to the model.

Remove Button

Click this button to remove the selected term from the model.

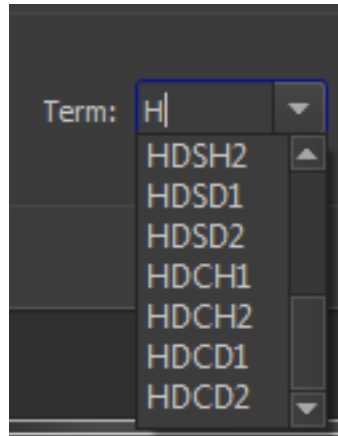


Figure 55: Entering a single character lists all terms the related.

Show Model Vector

Turn this option on to draw an arrow at the center of the Sky Chart that indicates the magnitude and direction of the *TPoint* correction.

Using ProTrack

ProTrack™ is *TPoint-specific* software technology that improves the Paramount's tracking accuracy. Based on your pointing calibration data, and the resulting pointing model, small corrections are periodically made to the telescope's position that compensate for mechanical tracking errors, such as tube flexure and out of round gears as well as other systematic errors, such as atmospheric refraction. This same tracking enhancement technology is used on many of the world's largest telescopes, such as the 8-meter Gemini telescopes.

ProTrack gives amateur astronomers the ability to take long unguided exposures (up to 20 minutes at 100-inch focal length) with pinpoint stars. *Unguided exposures* of this duration at moderate to long focal lengths, with pinpoint stars, are simply not possible without this type of software and hardware integration.

ProTrack works best with a Super Model that has been generated from an extensive set of pointing calibration data set (50 or more pointing samples) and is typically used in permanent installations. However, ProTrack can provide useful tracking corrections using a smaller number of pointing samples, making it useful for semi-portable or mission critical portable setups.

ProTrack Minimum Requirements

ProTrack requires the following minimum hardware and software.

1. A Paramount MX, Paramount ME, Paramount ME II, or MKS Series Software Bisque Telescope Control System (Bisque TCS).
2. TheSkyX Professional Edition.
3. *TPoint Add On*.
4. A telescope with a fixed mirror. (The random motion caused by mirror flop can make precision tracking nearly impossible.)
5. An extensive set of TPoint modeling data (50 to 200 stars or more recommended).

Getting Started with ProTrack

A robust mount coupled with superb modeled telescope pointing is required for superb modeled telescope tracking. Here are the keys to getting excellent ProTrack results:

- Make sure every component of the imaging system is robust, from the pier mounting to the camera mounting and everything in between. Loose mechanics, or even poorly mounted cabling can introduce random errors that cannot be corrected by TPoint and therefore degrade ProTrack's performance.
- Use the *TPoint Add On's* Automated Pointing Calibration feature to obtain an accurate pointing calibration data set.
- Employ a TPoint Super Model that is based on a large number of pointing calibration samples.

Activating ProTrack

1. From *TheSkyX Professional Edition*, choose the **Connect** command from the **Telescope** menu to connect to the Paramount.
2. Turn on the **Activate ProTrack** checkbox on the **ProTrack** tab of the **TPoint Add On** window to view a table of ProTrack corrections that will be applied to tracking.

Turn on the **Enable Tracking Adjustments** checkbox to apply the corrections to the mount's position while tracking.

Appendix A: The Pointing Terms

This appendix defines the *TPoint* pointing terms.

The pointing terms obey the following nomenclature and sign conventions:

- Hour angle: h is positive west of the meridian.
- Declination: δ is positive north of the equator.
- Parallax angle: q is positive west of the meridian.
- Azimuth: *TPoint's* internal convention such that A is zero for due south and 90 degrees for due east.
- Zenith distance: ζ the distance from 90 degrees altitude.
- Elevation: $E = 90 - \text{zenith distance}$.
- Hour angle and east-west corrections: Δh and $\Delta X (= \Delta h \cos \delta)$ are positive when corrected telescope position is west of the uncorrected position.
- Declination corrections: Δd is positive when corrected telescope position is north of the uncorrected position.
- Azimuth and left right corrections: ΔA and $\Delta S (= \Delta A \cos E)$ are positive when the corrected telescope position is to the left of the uncorrected position as seen by someone standing at the telescope looking at the sky.
- Elevation corrections: ΔE is positive when the corrected telescope position is above the uncorrected position.

TheSkyX provides the sequence of transformations and corrections needed to bridge the gap between:

- (i.) the cataloged object's position and
- (ii.) where the telescope needs to be pointed to see the object, that is, transforming them to the "observed place."

Term: ACEC

The cosine component of the once-per-revolution cycle errors produced by a mis-centered azimuth setting-circle.

Notes: The sine component is ACES.

Term: ACES

The sine component of the once-per-revolution cycle errors produced by a mis-centered azimuth setting-circle.

Notes: The cosine component is ACEC.

Term: AN

In an alt-azimuth mount, misalignment of the azimuth axis north south: rotation about a horizontal east-west axis equal to coefficient AN.

Notes: AN is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all alt-azimuth mounts, the others being IA, IE, CA, NPAE, AW.

If AN is positive, the pole of the mounting is north of the zenith.

The other (that is east-west) component of the azimuth axis misalignment is the term AW.

Term: AW

In an alt-azimuth mount, misalignment of the azimuth axis east west: rotation about a horizontal north-south axis equal to coefficient AW.

Notes: AW is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all alt-azimuth mounts, the others being IA, IE, CA, NPAE, AN.

If AN is positive, the pole of the mounting is west of the zenith.

The other (that is north-south) component of the azimuth axis misalignment is the term AN.

Term: CA

In an alt-azimuth mount, the collimation error is the non-perpendicularity between the nominal pointing direction and the elevation axis. It produces a left-right shift on the sky that is constant for all elevations.

Notes: CA is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all alt-azimuth mounts, the others being IA, IE, AW, NPAE, AN.

A non-zero CA on its own means there is an area round the zenith inside which the telescope cannot point (irrespective of velocity and acceleration limits close to the zenith).

Collimation error has many causes—misalignment of the optics, an inaccurately centered eyepiece reticle and so on.

Term: CH

In an equatorial mount, the collimation error is the non-perpendicularity between the nominated pointing direction and the declination axis. It produces an east-west shift on the sky that is constant for all declinations.

CH is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all equatorial mounts, the others being IH, ID, NP, ME and MA.

A non-zero CH on its own means there is an area around the pole inside which the telescope cannot point.

Collimation error has many causes -- misalignment of the optics, an inaccurately centered eyepiece reticle and so on.

Term: DAF

Downward sag of cantilevered declination axis. English cross-axis and German equatorial mountings), proportional to the sine of the zenith distance of the declination axis.

Note: The sign convention corresponds to a declination axis that emerges from the polar axis towards the west when the telescope points at the meridian.

Term: DCEC

The cosine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered declination setting-circle.

The sine component is the term DCES.

Term: DCES

The sine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered declination setting-circle.

The cosine component is the term DCEC.

Term: DNP

For an equatorial mount, a change in the non-perpendicularity proportional to $\sin h$.

Notes: The static form is the term NP.

Term: ECEC

The cosine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered elevation setting-circle.

Term: ECES

The sine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered elevation setting-circle.

Term: FO

Flexure in an equatorial fork mounting: change in declination proportional to $\cos h$.
Notes: This model of fork flexure is based in the idea that the flexure is at a maximum on the meridian, that it affects only declination, and that at $h = 6^h$ the flexural displacement leaves the pointing direction unaffected. These assumptions are usually borne out well in practice.

Term: HCEC

The cosine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered hour angle setting-circle.

Term: HCES

The sine component of the once-per-revolution cyclic errors produced by a mis-centered hour angle setting-circle.

Term: IA

Azimuth index error in an alt-azimuth mount: the zero-point error in A.

Take care with sign conventions: inside *TPoint*, azimuth increases counterclockwise.

Notes: On many alt-azimuth telescopes, IA is arbitrarily set at the start of each night by pointing at a calibration star, and on telescopes without absolute encoders or readouts there is no choice; under these circumstances the IA value returned by *TPoint* has no lasting significance. However, note that IA is not the same thing as a horizontal error on the sky, such as might be caused by a badly adjusted primary mirror; the latter, addressed by the CA term, would produce the same image displacement at all elevations, whereas IA has a lessening effect as the zenith is approached.

IA is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all equatorial mounts, the others being IE, CA, NPAE, AN and AW.

Term: ID

Declination index error in an equatorial mount: the zero-point error in declination.

Notes: ID produces a fixed offset of the image north south. On many telescopes, it is arbitrarily set at the start of each night by pointing at a calibration star, and on telescopes without absolute encoders or readouts, there is no choice; under these circumstances the ID value returned by *TPoint* has no lasting significance. It is indistinguishable from other north-south shifts, such as those caused by a badly adjusted primary mirror.

ID is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all equatorial mounts, the others being IH, CH, NP, ME and MA.

Term: IE

Elevation index error in an alt-azimuth mount: the zero-point error in E.

IE produces a fixed vertical offset of the image. On many alt-azimuth telescopes IE is arbitrarily set at the start of each night by pointing at a calibration star, and on telescopes without absolute encoders or readouts there is no choice; under these circumstances the IE value returned by *TPoint* has no lasting significance. It is indistinguishable from various other vertical shifts, such as those caused by a badly adjusted primary mirror.

IE is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all alt-azimuth mounts, the others being IA, CA, NPAE, AN and AW.

Term: IH

Hour angle index error in an equatorial mount.

Notes: IH has the same effect on pointing as an error in the clock or using an inaccurate value for the site longitude. On many telescopes, it is arbitrarily set at the start of each night by pointing at a calibration star, and on telescopes without absolute encoders or readouts, there is no choice; under these circumstances the IH value returned by *TPoint* has no lasting significance. However, note that it is not the same thing as an east-west error on the sky, such as might be caused by a badly adjusted primary mirror; the latter, addressed by the CH term, would produce the same image displacement at all declinations, whereas IH has a lessening effect as the pole is approached.

IH is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all equatorial mounts, the others being ID, CH, NP, ME and MA.

Term: MA

Misalignment of the polar axis of an equatorial mount to the left or right of the true pole: a rotation about an axis through $h = \delta = 0$ equal to coefficient MA.

Notes: In the Northern Hemisphere, positive MA means that the pole of the mounting is to the right of due north.

In the Southern Hemisphere, positive MA means that the pole of the mounting is to the right of due south.

To avoid unwanted field rotation effects it is best to eliminate MA mechanically by an appropriate azimuth adjustment. To eliminate MA arcseconds of polar axis azimuth error, rotate the mounting MA sec ϕ arcseconds counterclockwise as seen from above.

The other (that is, up and down) component of the polar axis misalignment is the term ME.

Term: ME

Vertical misalignment of the polar axis of an equatorial mount: a rotation about an east-west axis equal to coefficient ME.

Notes: In the Northern Hemisphere, positive ME means that the pole of the mounting is below the true (unrefracted) pole. A mounting aligned the refracted pole (for most telescopes probably the simplest and best thing to aim for in order to avoid unwanted field rotation effects) will have negative ME.

In the southern hemisphere, positive ME means that the pole of the mounting is above the true (unrefracted) pole, and a mounting aligned the refracted pole will have positive ME.

The other (that is left-right) component of the polar axis misalignment is the term MA.

Term: NP

In an equatorial mount, if the polar axis and declination axis are not exactly at right angles, east-west shifts of the image occur that are proportional to $\sin \delta$.

Notes: NP is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all equatorial mounts, the others being IH, ID, CH, ME and MA.

The image displacement produced by NP is zero on the celestial equator and reaches a maximum at the pole.

Most telescope sites lie well away from the equator of the Earth and hence the correction for NP tends to be the same sign most of the time. Furthermore,

because there is more sky at lower declinations than near the pole there are likely to be fewer pointing observations in a given declination-band near the pole than in a similar band nearer the equator. These two effects conspire so that the NP effect tends to be poorly sampled when pointing tests are made, and hence the NP coefficient is apt to be poorly determined. In some cases, it can be better to omit NP from the model and rely on other terms mopping up any NP-like effects that are preset.

A non-zero NP on its own means there is an area around the pole inside which the telescope cannot point.

Term: NPAE

NPAE is one of the six purely geometrical terms that affect all alt-azimuth mounts, the others being IA, IE, CA, AN and AW.

The image displacement produced by NPAE is zero on the horizon and reaches a maximum at the zenith.

Just as E is always positive, the correction for NPAE never changes sign. Furthermore, because there is more sky at lower elevations than near the zenith there are likely to be fewer pointing observations in a given elevation-band near the zenith than in a similar band nearer the horizon. These two effects conspire so that the NPAE effect tends to be very poorly sampled when pointing tests are made, and hence the NPAE coefficient is apt to be poorly determined. In some cases, it can be better to omit NPAE from the model and rely on other terms mopping up any NPAE-like effects that are preset.

A non-zero NPAE on its own means there is an area around the zenith inside which the telescope cannot point (irrespective of velocity and acceleration limits close to the zenith).

Term: NRX

In a Nasmyth alt-azimuth mount, a horizontal displacement between the elevation axis of the mount and the rotation axis of the Nasmyth instrument-rotator produces an image shift on the sky with a horizontal component proportional to cosine elevation and a vertical component proportional to minus sine elevation.

(Take care with sign conventions: inside *TPoint*, azimuth increases counterclockwise.)

Notes: The same corrections apply even if there is no Nasmyth rotator, except that the displacement is between the elevation axis and the nominated pointing-origin in the Nasmyth focal-plane.

NRX is positive when the elevation axis emerges from the Nasmyth focal plane to the right of the rotator axis.

Term: NRY

In a Nasmyth alt-azimuth mount, a vertical displacement between the elevation axis of the mount and the rotation axis of the Nasmyth instrument-rotator produces an image shift on the sky with a horizontal component proportional to sine elevation and a vertical component proportional to cosine elevation. (Take care with sign conventions: inside *TPoint*, azimuth increases counterclockwise.)

Notes: The same corrections apply even if there is no Nasmyth rotator, except that the displacement is between the elevation axis and the nominated pointing-origin in the Nasmyth focal-plane. NRY is positive when the elevation axis emerges from the Nasmyth focal plane above the rotator axis.

The NRY correction has an identical form to the two terms NPAE and TF acting in combination. This unfortunately prevents simultaneous fitting of pointing observations to a model containing all three terms. The recommended procedure for Nasmyth telescopes is to determine a canonical value of TF from observations at a non-Nasmyth focus (prime, Cassegrain, Newtonian etc., and then to fit Nasmyth pointing observations to a model which includes TF fixed at this value.

Term: TF

Classical tube flexure: change in zenith distance proportional to $\sin \zeta$.

Notes: This is the classic tube flexure model, which assumes that the telescope obeys Hooke's Law. In practice there is often a rapid increase in the vertical displacement towards the horizon, and it is sometimes found that a tangent law is a better approximation than a sine law: see the TX term.

Term: TX

Empirical tube flexure: change in zenith distance proportional to $\tan \zeta$.

Notes: The classical tube flexure model, TF, which assumes that the telescope obeys Hooke's Law, is a sine rather than tangent law. In practice there is often a rapid increase in the vertical displacement towards the horizon, and it is sometimes found that the present term, TX, is a better approximation than TF.

Note that TX will compensate for any scaling error in the refraction corrections.

Appendix B: Importing Models from TPoint for Windows

The steps below describe how to use an existing TPoint model from *TPoint for Windows* in the *TPoint Add On*.

Step I: Import the Pointing Calibration Data

1. From *TPoint for Windows*, open the TPoint document (.tpt) that holds your working model (keep TPoint for Windows open for now, you'll need to access it again soon).
2. Export the pointing calibration data (called "mapping points" in TPoint for Windows) by clicking **File > Export Text File**.
3. Enter the name of the text file and then click **Save**. Remember the folder where this text file resides.
4. Select the **Import** command from the **Pointing Data** pop-up menu on the **Calibration Run** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window.
5. Select the text file from step 3 and then click the **Open** button.

Your pointing calibration data is now displayed in the **Pointing Data** table and on the scatter plot.

Step II: Use the Appropriate Terms

The next step is to turn on the terms that were used in the *TPoint for Windows* model in the *TPoint Add On* model.

1. From *TPoint for Windows*, select the **Command Line** command from the **Model** menu.
2. Type the text "FIT" (case does not matter, no quotes) in the **Command** text input on the **Command Line** window.
3. Click the **Execute** button. The **coeff** column of the FIT report lists all the terms used in this model. These same terms should be used in the *TPoint Add On* model.
4. From the **Model** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window, turn on the check mark next to the terms that are listed in the *TPoint for Windows* FIT report.

Hint: To turn on multiple terms, type "USE" in the **Command** text input on the **Command Line** tab of the *TPoint Add On* window, followed by the space separated terms. For example, for the following FIT report:

* FIT

	coeff	change	value	sigma
1	IH	+0.194	+824.65	11.699
2	ID	+1.097	+29.47	11.414

3	NP	+0.335	-53.66	25.624
4	CH	+0.059	-772.27	13.814
5	ME	-0.581	-45.08	9.213
6	MA	+0.683	-3.39	18.542

You can type the following text in the TPoint Add On Command text input:

USE IH ID NP CH ME MA

then click the **Execute** button. Type FIT then click the Execute button to compare the *TPoint Add On* results with the *TPoint for Windows* results. The *TPoint Add On* model should now be identical to the *TPoint for Windows* model.

Step III: Recalibrate the Model

The last step is to reestablish the IH, ID and CH terms for the pointing data. Please see "A Step-By-Step Guide to Recalibration" on page 43 to proceed from here.

Appendix C: Revision History

Revision Number	Changes
1.66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarified description of the calibrated polar alignment adjustment.
1.65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarified that a TPoint model with sufficient number of stars to quantify polar misalignment must be present before starting the Accurate Polar Alignment (APA) procedure. Note that TheSkyX Pro's APA wizard attempts to make this point abundantly clear.
1.64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed legacy options. Minor miscellaneous documentation changes.
1.63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added minor modifications to the Super Model documentation.
1.62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added step by step automated <i>recalibration</i> instructions.
1.61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminated contradictory documentation related to using an established model.
1.60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempted to clarify that recalibration does not required manual pointing calibration sample collection and that automated pointing calibration can also be used.
1.58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bug in Microsoft Word results in cross references that contain additional or incorrect text. The cross reference to the importance of recalibration that also contained unrelated text was corrected.
1.57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added rough and accurate polar alignment wizard documentation. Updated polar alignment documentation to describe the Show Alternative Polar Alignments (Advanced) checkbox.
1.56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarified wording about using TPoint to quantify polar alignment.
1.55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrected and clarified the description of beyond the pole coordinate convention.
1.53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added statement about using TPoint with third-party pointing correction software.

Revision Number	Changes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added ProTrack™ details. • Miscellaneous revisions.
1.51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated recalibration documentation to include portable case.
1.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented new features for automated pointing calibration.
1.47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct size of Jupiter's disk in Figure 14 and fixed a typographical error on page 29.
1.46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrected captions for Figure 29 and 30 and the control system used by Mountain Instruments mounts.
1.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrected typographical errors.
1.44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated automated pointing calibration run window and documentation.
1.42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrected spelling error on page 60.
1.41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrected Figure reference.
1.40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added Super Model documentation.

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