

ESO, the European Southern Observatory, was created in 1962 to... establish and operate an astronomical observatory in the southern hemisphere, equipped with powerful instruments, with the aim of furthering and organising collaboration in astronomy... It is supported by eight countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. It operates the La Silla observatory in the Atacama desert, 600 km north of Santiago de Chile, at 2,400 m altitude, where fourteen optical telescopes with diameters up to 3.6 m and a 15-m submillimetre radio telescope (SEST) are now in operation. The 3.5-m New Technology Telescope (NTT) became operational in 1990, and a giant telescope (VLT = Very Large Telescope), consisting of four 8-m telescopes (equivalent aperture = 16 m) is under construction. It is being erected on Paranal, a 2,600 m high mountain in northern Chile, approximately 130 km south of Antofagasta. Eight hundred scientists make proposals each year for the use of the telescopes at La Silla. The ESO Headquarters are located in Garching, near Munich, Germany. It is the scientific, technical and administrative centre of ESO where technical development programmes are carried out to provide the La Silla observatory with the most advanced instruments. There are also extensive facilities which enable the scientists to analyse their data. In Europe ESO employs about 200 international Staff members, Fellows and Associates; at La Silla about 50 and, in addition, 150 local Staff members.

The ESO MESSENGER is published four times a year: normally in March, June, September and December. ESO also publishes Conference Proceedings, Preprints, Technical Notes and other material connected to its activities. Press Releases inform the media about particular events. For further information, contact the ESO Information Service at the following address:

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The ESO Messenger:  
Editor: Marie-Hélène Ulrich  
Technical editor: Kurt Kjær

Printed by Universitäts-Druckerei  
Dr. C. Wolf & Sohn  
Heidemannstraße 166  
D-80939 München 45  
Germany  
ISSN 0722-6691

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# Contents

R. Giacconi: Recent Developments .....	1
--	---

## TElescopes AND INSTRUMENTATION

M. Tarenghi: News from the VLT Programme .....	2
J. Andersen: Scientific Priorities for La Silla in the VLT Era .....	4
M. Faucher: Is the Seeing Situation at the 3.6-m Telescope Irreversible? .....	5
L. Pasquini, L. Kaper: CAT/CES NEWS .....	9
G. Rupprecht: The FORS Focal Reducers for the VLT – a Status Report .....	9
H. Dekker: UVES (UV-Visual Echelle Spectrograph) for the VLT – a Status Report .....	11
P.O. Lagage, Y. Rio, D. Dubreuil, Th. De Graauw, J.W. Pel, T. Shoemaker: Result of the Phase A Study for the VLT Mid-Infrared Instrument: VISIR .....	13
NTT Bits & Pixels .....	16
VLT Insurance Contract Signed .....	18

## SCIENCE WITH THE VLT

A. Maeder, G. Meynet: Topical Astrophysical Problems on Massive Stars for VLT Observations .....	19
--	----

## REPORTS FROM OBSERVERS

D. Alloin, M. Santos-Lleó, G. Stirpe, B.M. Peterson: Monitoring of Active Galactic Nuclei: the Why and the How .....	25
M.E. Giannuzzo, G.M. Stirpe: On the Variability of Narrow-Line Seyfert 1 Galaxies .....	28
C. Alard, J. Guibert, O. Bienaymé, D. Valls-Gabaud, A.C. Robin, A. Terzan, E. Bertin: The DUO Programme: First Results of a Microlensing Investigation of the Galactic Disk and Bulge Conducted with the ESO Schmidt Telescope .....	31
G. Burki, F. Rufener, M. Burnet, C. Richard, A. Blecha, P. Bratschi: The Variation of Atmospheric Extinction at La Silla .....	34

## OTHER ASTRONOMICAL NEWS

A. Fontana, P. Ballester: FITLYMAN: A Midas Tool for the Analysis of Absorption Spectra .....	37
Bo Reipurth: Astronomers in Chile Meet at ESO in Vitacura .....	41
L.T. Jensen, G. Poyner, P. van Cauteren, T. Vanmunster: Amateur Astronomers and Dwarf Novae .....	43

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Telescope Software Scientist (CTR 118) .....	46
ESO Fellowships in Chile 1996/97 .....	46
ESO Fellowships in Garching 1996/97 .....	46
Postdoctoral Fellowship on La Silla – NTT Upgrade Project .....	47
Staff Astronomer (ESD 208) .....	47
New ESO Publications .....	47
Staff Movements .....	48