



# Scooters

Two wheels can be better than four: weaving through traffic, the sun on your face...not to mention saving money and the environment

**'M**y scooter is great fun – I look forward to getting on it. And it saves me time and money on my daily commute.' Dev Chopra has owned his bike for two years. And he's typical of the new breed of owner who is causing scooters to undergo an urban renaissance.

Congestion, high petrol prices and parking problems have all boosted two-wheeled ways to get from A to B, and London's congestion charge gave them another fillip – all bikes, motorised or not, are exempt from the £8-a-day charge for driving through the capital. As a result, more than 45,000 Londoners now own a scooter.

## THE PROS AND CONS

Scooters have lots of benefits in the city. They're easy to manoeuvre around slow-moving traffic. And reserved parking spaces for two-wheeled vehicles are often free in city centres.

Petrol bills are also less than half of what it costs to fuel up even the smallest supermini. Filling the tanks of the best on test 50cc and 125cc scooters (from Aprilia and Honda, respectively) will set you back less than £275 a year, based on an average drive of 150 miles a week. Even the most fuel-hungry model on test, the Piaggio (number 11 in the table, p34), costs far less in petrol than a car, at just under £420 a year, compared with more than £1,000 a year for a family car.

Choosing a scooter will also reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) you produce, according to Future Forests, an environmental organisation that advises people on how to reduce carbon emissions. CO<sub>2</sub> is a greenhouse gas that

contributes to climate change. Future Forests estimates that a 1.4-litre petrol-engine car pumps out two tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year doing a 20-mile round-trip a day, while a diesel car with a small engine cuts your carbon dioxide output to 1.3 tonnes a year. By comparison, we reckon both 50cc and 125cc scooters produce less than a third of this over the same distance.

If all this tempts you to ditch two of your wheels, you'll need to complete Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) to drive a moped or motorcycle. CBT covers both theory and practical aspects of motorcycling. The DVLA can direct you to a test centre. After successfully completing CBT, you have two years in which to pass both the theory and practical parts of the motorcycle test.

You are exempt from taking CBT if you passed your car driving test before February 2001 but we recommend you take it for safety reasons. Motorcyclists are 50 times more at risk of being killed or injured in a road traffic accident than car drivers. However, statistics show that the risk decreases the more riding experience you have.

You and your passenger must always wear a helmet, and you may want to invest in other protective clothing, too, such as special leather jackets, trousers, boots and gloves.

Don't be put off by the 60s' connotations of scooters. The market's moved on since the days of mods and rockers, when Italian makes like Vespa and Piaggio dominated. There's been an Asian invasion, and bikes from Honda, Suzuki and Yamaha now give the Italians a run for their money, although they lack their retro chic.

## 50cc Best Buys

Our three 50cc Best Buys (this page and overleaf) have decent acceleration and responsive brakes, tackle hills with confidence and offer drivers a comfortable ride.

BEST  
ON  
TEST

## 1 Aprilia SR 50 Factory 69%

£2,000

### 50cc engine

You couldn't ask for a better ride from a 50cc bike. The sporty and efficient Aprilia fires up without problems, even in cold weather, and sprints from zero to 25mph in just seven seconds, with a respectable top speed of 29mph. More importantly, you'll feel in control when driving it. The high seat gives a good view, the lights are excellent, its brakes are responsive, and it holds the road well. Unlike a lot of small scooters, it doesn't get too shaky on steep climbs.

Talking of shakes, there's little noticeable vibration from the smooth, if rather noisy, engine. Good suspension makes the ride comfortable, even on bumpy roads. In fact, only passengers have comfort problems: they have handles to hold but foot space is limited.

The Aprilia is easy to park because it is small and manoeuvrable. There's plenty of storage space for your helmet (as well as a small glove compartment and bag carrier).



### STOPPING AND STARTING

Driving in cities is very stop and start – so you want a scooter that pulls up smartly and makes light work of setting off again.

To see how you'll fare when the lights change, we tested how well each bike pulls away on a 1-in-13 hill (with driver only). All the 125cc bikes were fine, as was this Best Buy Aprilia 50cc. The Piaggio (7) and Suzuki (8) struggled.

Stopping distances were generally good. But the Gilera (9) and Honda (17) are slightly twitchy and nervous under heavy braking.

### THEFT AND INSURANCE

Scooters aren't just attractive to commuters: thieves drive off with 34,000 mopeds, scooters and motorbikes each year, 80 per cent of which are never seen again.

Electronic immobilisers make it hard for a thief to start the engine, reducing its risk of theft. This Aprilia has one, as do our two Best Buy Peugeots (2 and 12).

An immobiliser can make your insurance cheaper (although this depends on the company). Insurance premiums also vary by age (yours and the bike's), where you live and your claims history. Bring down the premium by securing your bike when you aren't riding it, keeping it in a garage overnight or taking certain qualifications for advanced riders.

**1 Aprilia**  
50cc

## NEED TO KNOW

Technically, a scooter is a moped or a motorcycle with an engine smaller than 50cc and a top speed of 30mph. This definition is largely ignored – we tested scooters with 50cc and 125cc engines. You can tell a scooter from a motorbike in several ways. A scooter is narrower, its wheels are smaller (eight to 14 inches in diameter), and it has a step-through frame with the engine close to the rear wheel.

**50cc vs 125cc**  
50cc bikes usually have smaller frames and engines. They're ideal for short commutes and city roads, but can be less comfortable over long distances. Acceleration tends to dip with a passenger and many smaller bikes don't offer a comfy pillion seat. These bikes don't have windshields but you won't be too windblown since they can't reach the top speeds of the 125cc scooters.

The 125cc bikes reach higher top speeds, tackle hills confidently and have better suspension, offering comfort even on bumpy roads. Acceleration doesn't suffer, even with a passenger aboard. They're good commuter bikes, and the best are good for touring and longer distances, too.



## 2 Peugeot Vivacity Basic 67%

£1,500

### 50cc engine

The Peugeot is a pleasure to ride, is easy to manoeuvre and holds the road well. Visibility is average, with reasonable mirrors and decent lights, although the high beam could be brighter. A nippy ride is assured, with acceleration from zero to 25mph in less than ten seconds and a top speed of 27mph.

This bike was the favourite of our test riders, who took it through its paces on smooth and bumpy roads as well as through an obstacle course – it impressed on them all. Its stability and sufficient oomph for tackling hills instill confidence in the rider, while the suspension makes bumpy roads bearable. Although comfortable for drivers, the bike is not ideal for a passenger.

The Peugeot also has the best brakes of all the 50cc bikes on test – our test riders found them very responsive. When you park, you can store your helmet under the seat, but not much more. An electronic immobiliser offers good security.

### TABLE NOTES

We tested best-selling models from leading brands. New Vespa 50cc models came out too late to include in our tests.

### Specification

**Price** List price. Unlike with cars, you aren't likely to be able to negotiate much off this price.

**Kick-start** All the scooters have an electric starter, but a kick-start is a useful fall-back in case the battery fails.

### Performance

**Hills** Performance when going up a 1-in-13 slope from stationary.

**Brakes** Based on responsiveness of brakes and braking distance required.

### Comfort

**Driver/Passenger Seat** comfort and legroom.

### Safety

**Mirrors** Number, shape and size of mirrors and how much of the road they show. **Lights** Brightness, spread and depth, on both full and dipped beam.

### Security

**Immobiliser** Whether scooter has electronic mobiliser.

### Fuel

**Use** Consumption based on driving 150 miles a week.

**Range** Based on fuel consumption and full tank.

### Emissions

**CO<sub>2</sub>** Calculated at half throttle.

### GAS GUZZLERS

All the 125cc bikes we tested have four-stroke engines, which use petrol, like a car. They are generally quieter and more fuel efficient and have cleaner emissions.

All the 50cc bikes except the Piaggio (5) have two-stroke engines, which use a mixture of oil and petrol as fuel. Their simple design means they're cheaper to make and hence buy.

We measured fuel consumption over a special test route, which included city

traffic and motorway driving (for the 125cc bikes), as well as curvy and bumpy roads. The 125cc Honda (10) Best Buy will go 213 miles on a full tank, second only to the 50cc Gilera (9) which goes almost 247 miles on a single tank.

Filling up this Yamaha was a breeze, with a big reservoir to catch spills (below). But the fuel caps on the Piaggio (7), Gilera (9), Peugeot (12) and Vespa (15) were all trickier to reach and had no reservoir for spills.



PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK WRIGHT, JONNY THOMPSON

## Scooters

### 50cc

- 1 Aprilia SR 50 Factory
- 2 Peugeot Vivacity Basic
- 3 Yamaha Neo's
- 4 Peugeot Speedfight
- 5 Piaggio Liberty
- 6 Peugeot Ludix Elegance 50
- 7 Piaggio Fly
- 8 Suzuki RD 50 AY50 Katana
- 9 Gilera Runner

### 125cc

- 10 Honda FES 125 Pantheon
- 11 Piaggio X8 125
- 12 Peugeot Elystar 125
- 13 Yamaha Majesty 125
- 14 Suzuki UH 125 Burgman
- 15 Vespa GT 125
- 16 Aprilia Atlantic 125

- 17 Honda Lead
- a Does not have a full beam

### SCORE

This ignores price and is based on:

Driving characteristics	30%
Ease of use	25%
Brakes	15%
Fuel consumption	10%
Visibility	8%
Emissions	6%
Noise	4%
Simple maintenance	2%

### KEY

★	☆	○	◐	●
Best				Worst
■ Best Buy				■ Don't Buy





## 3 Yamaha Neo's 66%

£1,900

### 50cc engine

You won't struggle to weave your way through traffic on this bike, which was the easiest 50cc model to use. It starts reliably, even in the cold, and has an electric starter as well as a kick-start for back-up.

It accelerates well, from zero to 25mph in ten seconds, and has a top speed of 27mph. Petrol consumption is average. It isn't as confident on hills as the Aprilia (1), and with a passenger on board steep slopes could prove a struggle.

The rider's comfort is assured, thanks to a decent-sized seat and lots of legroom. But the passenger seat is a bit small, so this model isn't ideal if you frequently want to give friends a lift.

The mirrors offer good visibility so you can see the road ahead and spot any potential hazards well. Being seen at night isn't a problem either, as it has a reasonable headlight.

## DON'T BUY

There are a couple of bikes we suggest that you avoid.

The 50cc Gilera (9), £1,900, is badly let down by unresponsive brakes. On top of that, it is slow to accelerate from zero to 25mph, taking 14 seconds, and it was one of the worst scooters on test for tackling hills.

Add in complaints from our riders about having difficulty in filling the tank, because there is

nowhere to catch any spills, and this model doesn't have much going for it.

The 125cc Honda Lead (17) is cheap, at £1,350, but let us down on many fronts, not least of which was shaky brakes that, while not unsafe, are unresponsive. The Lead has drum brakes, which are an old-fashioned technology. All the other bikes on test have much better disc brakes.

The top speed of the Lead is just 46mph, the lowest of all the 125cc bikes. It has decent acceleration with just a driver, taking 21 seconds to go from zero to 37mph, but it labours when carrying a passenger as well.

A poor high beam, not much protection from wind and very little storage space all mean there is really nothing to recommend this scooter.



Specification			Performance			Comfort		Safety		Security	Fuel		Emissions	Score
Price (£)	Height (cm)	Kick-start	Top speed (mph)	Hills	Brakes	Driver	Passenger	Mirrors	Lights	Immobiliser	Use	Range (miles)	CO <sub>2</sub>	(%)
2,000	125		29	☆	☆	○	●	○	★	✓	★	162	★	69
1,500	124	✓	27	○	★	○	●	○	☆	✓	○	136	☆	67
1,900	127	✓	27	○	☆	☆	○	★	○		○	137	☆	66
1,600	120	✓	27	○	☆	●	★	○	○		☆	165	☆	61
1,500	124	✓	29	●	○	●	☆	●	○		☆	155	☆	59
1,150	125	✓	26	○	☆	○	●	●	○		●	125	☆	58
1,550	124	✓	26	●	☆	☆	○	●	○		●	137	★	56
2,100	125		25	●	☆	●	○	★	○		★	205	★	42
1,900	121	✓	27	●	●	○	★	○	○ <sup>a</sup>		☆	247	☆	37
2,500	145		60	★	★	★	★	★	☆		☆	213	☆	75
2,600	137		61	★	☆	★	○	★	☆	✓	●	178	☆	69
2,500	131		60	★	★	★	☆	☆	☆	✓	○	146	○	65
2,900	133		59	★	☆	★	☆	★	☆		○	189	☆	63
2,900	132		57	★	☆	★	★	★	○		○	181	○	61
2,650	130		58	★	☆	☆	●	★	☆	✓	○	146	○	61
2,800	143		63	★	○	★	☆	○	☆	✓	○	154	☆	57
1,350	121	✓	46	★	●	●	○	☆	○		☆	121	☆	33

BEST  
ON  
TEST10 Honda  
125cc

## 10 Honda FES 125 Pantheon 75%

£2,500

### 125cc engine

The best of the 125cc models we tested, the Honda is quiet, reliable and easy to start, even when cold. The driving seat has great suspension so bumpy roads won't mean a sore bum, and it wins top marks for passenger comfort, too.

At 20 seconds from zero to 50mph, it had the fastest acceleration of the 125cc bikes, even with a passenger, and a top speed of 60mph. Like all the 125cc bikes, it has no problem tackling hills.

The brakes are effective and it's easy to park. Its low fuel consumption means it's also cheap to run.

BEST  
BUY11 Piaggio  
125cc

## 11 Piaggio X8 125 69%

£2,600

### 125cc engine

This stable bike holds the road well. It's zippy, going from zero to 50mph in 21 seconds, but can be a little unwieldy to manoeuvre on the go because it's heavy. It's also fuel-hungry, resulting in the highest running cost of any of the bikes on test.

With two people on board it's comfortable, with good wind protection, and acceleration doesn't suffer. Two big mirrors give good views, and effective lights, including a bright high beam, ensure you'll be seen.

Storage is good, and it's one of the few 125ccs on test that has an electronic immobiliser.

## 125cc Best Buys

All our Best Buy 125cc bikes accelerate well, make light work of hills and have good brakes, as well as being comfortable for both drivers and passengers.

### STORAGE

This Piaggio and the 125cc Suzuki (14) can store two large full-face helmets (below), plus extras like a jacket, a few tools, gloves and a lock.

By contrast, none of the 50cc bikes has particularly generous storage. They can't store two helmets out of sight, and the Peugeot (6) can store only small helmets.

Other bikes that had little storage room were the Piaggio (5), the Vespa (15) and the Honda (17).

BEST  
BUY12 Peugeot  
125cc

## 12 Peugeot Elystar 125 65%

£2,500

### 125cc engine

An easy starter and reliable in cold weather, this Peugeot suits both city driving and touring, but is one of the noisiest models on test. It has a respectable top speed of 60mph but it takes 25 seconds to go from zero to 50mph. Our road testers deemed the brakes 'excellent'.

Driver comfort is assured with a high seat position, and it's OK for a passenger, too. There is room to store one large helmet or two small ones, as well as a handy bag carrier. In addition to a steering lock (which all the bikes on test have), it has an electronic immobiliser and a further integrated lock to deter theft, making this one of the most secure bikes we looked at.

BEST  
BUY13 Yamaha  
125cc

## 13 Yamaha Majesty 125 63%

£2,900

### 125cc engine

You'll feel as if you rule the road with the Yamaha's comfortable wide seat, high driving position, great wind protection and good visibility from two big mirrors. Suspension isn't great so beware of bumps.

It starts easily, even in the cold, but lacks a back-up kick-start. It has a respectable top speed of 59mph and takes 25 seconds to go from zero to 50mph.

This is the only scooter we tested with a lockable fuel cap. Although this could make filling up time-consuming, it's great for both safety and security: the ignition isn't switched on while you fill up, and you're less likely to leave the key in the ignition while paying for fuel, denying opportunist thieves.