

Small wonders



Words: Iggy Grainger / Mel Falconer
Pics: Joe Dick

IF YOU'RE reading this as a middle-aged former teenage bike fan then you'll no doubt remember your very first day on the road. You morphed overnight from a BMX bandit into a biker; you'd got the kit, saved up your Saturday job money (or got a loan/generous parent) to buy your first 125cc bike,

With the entry level 125 market booming, it's never been easier (or cheaper) to buy a brand new learner legal bike

got it insured as cheaply as possible and were out there burning petrol like it only cost 34 pence a litre... oh, it did in 1988!

Although they were good times and petrol was cheap, bike choice was limited to mostly Japanese

smokers. Fast forward to 2011 and the world's your oyster. Far Eastern imports mean that new bike prices are often cheaper than they were back in the day and there are plenty of different models to choose from. As good as the best-selling Yamaha

YZF-R125 is, we've picked three alternative new 'race to the chippy' learner legal bikes on the market now. With our three machines ranging in price from just £1199 to £3399 we'll find out if the old adage 'you get what you pay for' is still true.

Despite the skinny tyres, the Lexmoto rides well



Lexmoto XTR S 125: £1199

Let's start with the cheapest of the three test bikes, the Lexmoto XTR S 125. Visually, the Chinese built XTR S has wheels skinnier than you'd find on the aforementioned BMX, the fairing is a bit weedy looking but 'fits' the bike well with no gaping holes anywhere and the frame welds aren't too messy either.

Annoyingly the sidestand flicks up if you take any weight off it and the analogue clocks are very 1980s. But let's put cosmetics to one side for the time being - remember, this is a brand new bike with a 12-month warranty for less than the price of the computer I'm typing this on. In these cost-straitened times, that counts for a lot.

Like most modern small capacity bikes the Lexmoto comes with a simple air-cooled four-stroke engine; it's got a five-speed box and our test bike came with an aftermarket can already fitted (available from parts website www.cmpo.co.uk). The XTR S starts fairly easily on the button (it also has a kick-start), but needed a bit of choke from cold. The skinny looking tyres didn't really fill me with confidence but

How to ride a 125

Currently, to ride a motorcycle legally on the road you must be 17 years old (16 for a moped) and have category A (for motorcycles) on your provisional driving licence.

If you already have a full car driving licence this automatically gives you provisional motorcycle entitlement. If you do not have any of these licences then you need to apply for your first provisional driving licence from the Post Office or apply online at www.direct.gov.uk and go to the Motoring section. It costs £50 for the licence.

This provisional motorcycle entitlement lets learners ride a bike up to 125cc with a max power output of 11kW (14.6bhp), with L-plates. Remember, you cannot carry pillion or ride on motorways with a provisional bike licence.

Once you have your provisional licence, you need to successfully complete a Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) course before you are allowed to ride on the road. If you have a full car licence issued before February 1, 2001 and only want to ride a 50cc restricted moped then you are not required to do a CBT, but you will have to if you want to ride any motorcycle over 50cc.

On completion of the CBT you will be issued with a DL196. After two years, if you want to carry on riding a learner legal 125cc motorcycle and don't want to put in for your full motorcycle licence, then you will have to take your CBT again.

If you don't want the hassle and expense of redoing your CBT every two years, then there are currently three options: the A1 motorcycle licence, the A2 motorcycle licence and Direct Access (DA is only for the over-21s).

For further info on getting started riding and details on the different types of full licences go to www.geton.co.uk



Old fashioned or retro? You decide



Simple air-cooled 124cc motor

I must admit I was pleasantly surprised once I got the bike out on the road. The motor performs quite well and will top 70mph; it sounded like a pit bike through the stainless steel exhaust as

well so should impress down the chippy. The single disc front and rear brakes are superb and it's easy to lock the rear wheel if you're a bit heavy with the back pedal, great for... err..., backing it in on your favourite bends! The Lexmoto actually goes round corners better than I expected on its 100-section rear Continental ContiGo rubber so you can have a bit of fun on it, although the wildly oscillating fuel gauge is a little off-putting. Out of our three test bikes the Lexmoto was second quickest on the road, and was also the best for pillions, with a surprisingly well-padded seat and a handy rear grab rail. The XTR S looks a little dull in its black paint scheme but the alternative white and red options provide more street appeal.

Lexmoto has gone all-out to reassure potential customers that buying a cheaper bike doesn't mean you're on your own in terms of parts or dealer help. There is full backup with more than 60 dealers in the UK and currently 15 different learner legal bikes and scooters in the range, from £839 through to £1599.

TECH SPEC

Lexmoto XTR S 125



Price: £1199 (plus first reg and tax)
Engine: 124cc, air-cooled, five-speed four-stroke single
Power: 11.3bhp @ 9000rpm
Tank capacity: 11 litres
Wheels/tyres: Continental ContiGo - F: 80/90 x 17; R: 100/80 x 17
Colours: Black, white, red

www.lexmoto.co.uk



Budget Lexmoto is a smart choice

Which one would we buy?

There's no mistaking that all three bikes are very different, in looks, style, price and performance.

The WK sits in the middle price-wise but would actually be at the bottom of our three bikes' shopping list. The brakes let it down badly and it's a bit too slow when put up against the others. The Rieju is the coolest looking without a doubt – it's the best to ride, the quickest but also the most expensive.

However, if you're looking for a stunning learner legal bike, and your budget will stretch to it, then the RS3 is a winner. Having said that though, it's not the most practical (not that many teenagers are bothered about practicalities, but hey, we can always dream).

But it was the Lexmoto that surprised us – on paper it looks a bit tame and isn't the fastest 125 on the planet but it is lively and comfy enough. It's pretty similar to look at and ride as a Honda CBF125 and if you're only keeping a 125 for a year the wise shopper would spend £1199 on a half decent bike that is cheap *and* cheerful, such as this. Think of it another way: you can spend the £2200 you've kept by not buying a fancier machine on passing your bike test and saving towards your first big bike instead.