

# A CHEAP CHINESE

The Pulse Adrenaline 250 is half the price of its KTM and Honda rivals, but does it leave a nasty taste after trying?

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**Y**ou need something simple, functional and economical for commuting around busy city streets. Something naked, light and agile, which won't break the bank. But at the same

time you want to have some style, be taken seriously and be able to out-drag those pesky taxis - a 125 simply won't do. So where does the smart money go? Do you save for years, buy big and go for the known brands? Or do you grab a bargain, spend half as much and hope for the best?

The Chinese-made Pulse Adrenaline is a 250cc, single cylinder city bike with a price that cannot be ignored. At £1999 it's half the price of its competition - the KTM Duke 200 and Honda's new CRF250SM. While many would turn their noses up at the basic price and unknown brand, when you factor in the 12-month warranty and the 126-strong UK dealer network, on paper at least, the Pulse should not be sniffed at.

The KTM Duke 200 is the next cheapest at £3995. Launched in 2012, the Duke uses the same chassis as its

## WHAT'S THE STORY?

These three supermoto-style machines have a lot to offer, but can the 2014 Pulse 250 give Honda's new CBR250R-powered CRF250M supermoto and KTM's Duke 200 a run for their money. With both costing around £4000 the £1999 Pulse Adrenaline simply cannot be ignored and it's all set up for an intriguing contest.

125cc sibling but features a bored and stroked version of its high-tech, single-cylinder engine. The 200 proved a hit in previous MCN tests and, even though KTM UK has taken the decision not to import it into the UK in 2014, there are still a few zero-mile examples around on [MCNbikesforsale.com](http://MCNbikesforsale.com).

Which leaves the newest bike here - the Honda. Introduced last year, the CRF250M shares much of its spec with the CRF250L trailie, but it's been given a supermoto makeover, including more conventional wheel and tyre sizes.

All three of these bikes are perfect for fighting through the hustle and bustle of Central London, although I have to admit that from our starting point in the warmth of the Ace Café, slurping a mug of tea, the thought of

venturing out into the snarling, rain-soaked traffic was about as appealing as a poke in the eye with a blunt stick.

The rain ran rivers down the windows and even after wiping away the condensation, I could only just make out the silhouettes of our three bikes outside in the car park.

Looking through steamed-up glass you'd never guess the Pulse Adrenaline is half the price of the KTM, and £2300 cheaper than the Honda. It's only on closer inspection that you can see why. Unlike the more sophisticated KTM and Honda, the Pulse's engine is a tad basic: air-cooled, fuelled by carbs and even having both a manual choke and fuel



**'All three of these bikes are perfect for fighting through the traffic hustle and bustle of Central London'**

tap. The clocks are basic to say the least, although they've tried to funk up the styling with racy spoked wheels and eye-catching (if a little 90s) graphics.

Next to the Pulse the KTM looks like something from 2018. It's a genuinely good-looking machine, thanks to its underslung exhaust, WP suspension and bold design. But like the Pulse, the Indian-built KTM tries its best to disguise its budget origins. There's no mistaking giveaways like the Indian-made tyres, ByBre (a subdivision of Brembo) radial brakes and clocks which, although they have more functionality than both the Pulse and Honda, still look cheap.

In this company there's no doubting that the Spanish-made CRF250M exudes quality. Its gold rims are a nice touch and to an untrained eye it looks like a 'real' supermoto. Even so, I still



HONDA  
CRF250M £4299

This new supermoto is powered by a water-cooled single from the successful CBR250

KTM DUKE 200  
£3995

Built in India to KTM standards, the Duke features a bored and stroked version of their high-tech 125 single

Wouldn't you rather buy one of these than splash out on a railway season ticket?



feel Honda could have been a little braver with the design.

We left the Ace with the rain still pouring. I purposely opted for the Honda, as I banked on it being a doddle to ride in these horrendous conditions. The CBR250R-based, liquid-cooled motor plods along with minimum effort, with pleasing enough torque and an instant zap of power at almost any revs, even low down. On the odd occasion on the North Circular the little Honda even topped 60mph, no problems. The gearbox was relatively smooth, too, it's just a shame that the exhaust tone was about as riotous as a Cliff Richard Christmas song.

But as the traffic slowed I had a few giggles. The Honda's bars are a little too wide, meaning you end up 'rowing' between car mirrors. And in slower traffic

you really notice the on/off feeling of the fuel injection, which is a little jerky. Oh, and if I'm going to be picky, the front brake lever isn't span adjustable, either. That said, the Honda's brakes are the best of the bunch.

The CRF cut through the standing water without a problem and grip was never an issue. Despite its more off road stance the Honda remained stable at speed and the Showa suspension coped remarkably well with the countless pot holes around inner London.

### Taming the traffic

Central London was gridlocked, so for the next stage to Trafalgar Square I chose the nippy KTM and it immediately felt like a toy. The lightest and smallest bike here (15kg less than the Honda) the Duke feels like a mountain bike with



an engine! Its seat height is much lower than the Honda's and you can dab a foot with ease for extra confidence on tight turns. Shorter or inexperienced riders will love the KTM, it's so easy to fling around with confidence.

It's not perfect, though. The KTM's low seat means you feel more intimidated by traffic and you can't peer over cars as easily as you can on the Honda. By comparison, the CRF feels more of a 'proper' motorbike and other road users are more aware of you.

Apart from being lower, the KTM's riding position is also racier and less likely to suit taller riders (but this does mean you are more in tune with the chassis). The KTM also doesn't deal with speed bumps and potholes as well as the Honda, as its suspension travel

is shorter. On the flip side, the Duke's stopping power isn't bad and it's also the quickest of the bunch, despite being 49cc smaller, although you do have to rev it to have fun. You end up riding the KTM quicker, diving into impossible gaps between traffic and sliding the rear around on the brakes with confidence. The Duke turns short city hops into a giggle; it makes dull commuting fun.

It would be all too easy to write the Pulse off as a bad experience, because there's no hiding the fact that it simply doesn't compare dynamically. The 18bhp air-cooled single is breathless, vibrates and its gearbox is agricultural. The brakes are poor and the handling isn't much better, with a slight weave above 60mph. The build quality is also lacking.

But here's the flip side: the Pulse is also incredibly charming in a simple, robust way. The carburettor fuelling has none of the snatchiness of its fuel-injected rivals, it feels like it will chug along all day long, gives the impression it could take a few tumbles without any trouble and makes you confident that you could leave it locked up all day outside a tube station without worrying if it'll still be there on your return.

Then there's the price: £1999 for a 250 single with a 12-month warranty is incredible value for money. There's an awful lot to be said for cheap and simple transport if you just want to get from A to B quickly and economically. It's a great option for those on a budget.



## READER OPINION

JUSTIN HAYZLEDEN,  
DAILY COMMUTER

All three bikes proved they're more than capable of holding their own amidst the mayhem of a London commute, and given the road and weather conditions I was as happy to tackle the traffic on any of them.

The KTM has the most character; it's a tight little package that feels firm and responsive, with an eager motor. The chassis makes light of potholes and threading past wing mirrors. It looks and sounds great, too. With an extra 50cc the Honda shows how quickly the 200cc KTM can run out of puff. The sleek CRF has the build quality, handling and power to make it the ideal tool for the job – if not the price, which is where the Pulse comes in. Okay, it might not be as refined or have the finish of the others, but at less than half the price I know what I would spend my money on. Reliability could be a concern, as the brand isn't as well-known, but you get a 12-month warranty as standard and some dealers are offering an extended three-year warranty, so it would seem daft not to take that up.

## THE THREE SUPERMOTO MUSKATEERS IN DETAIL



Honda's proven CBR250 engine nestles between the CRF's steel cradle frame



Basic, but informative, the CRF's clocks highlight its build quality



296mm disc and twin-pot caliper make CRF's brakes the best of the bunch



It may give 49cc away to the competition, but rev it hard and the Duke flies



Top yoke and instrument assembly both accurately ape the bigger KTMs



Caliper is made by ByBre – which is actually short for 'By Brembo'



Pulse has an air-cooled single, fuelled by a carb. It vibrates but has charm



Clocks are useless during the day and even worse at night. Poor quality



The Pulse doesn't inspire much confidence in the braking department

## THE FACTS



HONDA CRF250M  
£4299



KTM DUKE 200  
£3995



PULSE ADRENALINE  
250 £1999

Engine:	Liquid-cooled, 250cc (76 x 55mm), dohc, 4v single. 6-speed gearbox, chain final drive.	Liquid-cooled, 199.5cc (72 x 49mm), dohc, 4v single. 6-speed gearbox, chain final drive.	Air-cooled, 249cc (72 x 61.2mm), sohc, single. 5-speed gearbox, chain final drive.
Claimed power:	23bhp @ 8500rpm	26bhp @ 10,000rpm	18bhp @ 9000rpm
Torque:	16ftlb @ 7000rpm	14.75ftlb @ 6800rpm	14ftlb @ 7000rpm
Frame:	Tubular steel semi-double cradle, cast aluminium swingarm	Tubular steel trellis, cast aluminium swingarm	Tubular steel cradle, box section steel swingarm
Suspension:	43mm inverted telescopic forks, no adjust, front; Pro-link single shock with preload adjust, rear	WP 43mm inverted telescopic forks, no adjust, front; WP single shock with preload adjust, rear	Inverted telescopic forks, no adjust, front; single shock with preload adjust, rear
Claimed kerb weight:	145kg	126kg	127kg
Front brake:	296mm wavy disc with twin-piston caliper	280mm disc with four-piston caliper	Wavy disc with twin-piston caliper
Rear brake:	220mm wavy disc with single-piston caliper	230mm wavy disc with single-piston caliper	Wavy disc with single-piston caliper
Front tyre:	110/70 x 17	110/70 x 17	110/70 x 17
Rear tyre:	130/70 x 17	150/60 x 17	130/70 x 17
Fuel capacity:	7.7 litres	11 litres	10.6 litres
Seat height:	855mm	810mm	880mm
Wheelbase:	1446mm	1367mm	1400mm
Contact:	www.honda.co.uk	www.ktm.co.uk	www.pulsemoto.co.uk



## VERDICT

ADAM CHILD,  
SENIOR ROAD TESTER

If I have to recommend a bike it has to be the Honda. The CRF is the best bike here. It feels like a 'proper' bike, has the best build quality and can be used as an everyday machine as well as a commuter. Its riding position will accommodate most riders most of the time and it's exceptionally easy to ride and confidence-inspiring.

What's more, the engine has enough punch to keep up with regular traffic on dual carriageways and also has some low down torque to make light work of low speed filtering. Styling-wise Honda could have been braver, but the CRF is still not a bad looking bike. It's the best all-rounder here. But it's also the most expensive.

The KTM is the joker of the pack;

it's certainly the most fun despite only having 200cc. It's light and flickable – the best-handling of the bunch. The Duke is also the best-looking and, arguably, the most appealing for a younger audience. But its build quality isn't as good as the Honda's and for many it will be a little too toy-like and small. But if you just want a fun commute and aren't worried about size then the KTM is the one to go for.

You may be laughed at for opting for the Pulse, but you'll be the one laughing all the way to the bank. A 250 single for under £2000 is unbelievably good value for money. Naturally, the Pulse is not the quickest, the most refined, or the most appealing, but it is very tempting. If all you want is transport to beat the traffic then it's a simple decision. Judged on price alone it would be easy to make the Pulse the winner in London Town.



The CRF (left) might not stand out in grey London, but its performance does