

Opera star



Instruments are comprehensive, but why the voltmeter?



Seat won't shut with this open-face helmet underneath

Phantom? Opera? Oh, please yourselves! The Pulse Phantom is one of the cheapest 125s you can buy from a dealer; but is it any good?

Funny things, 125s. As every T&G reader knows, anyone who has passed their CBT can ride a scooter of up to 125cc and 14.6bhp (it was 12bhp, but was raised to put us in line with those reckless Europeans). So with every horsepower counting when there are so few to start with, you'd expect every single 125 on the market to muster as much power as possible within that limit. But that's not the case – according to T&G's own Whatscooter.com – only upmarket scoots like the Vespa GTS and Suzuki Burgman come close and some 125s claim little more than half the legal limit, at 7.8bhp.

The answer isn't hard to find when you look at the cheaper end of the market (we're talking the sub-£1500 125s here, all of them made in China). One reason why some of them are half the price of a Vespa or Peugeot 125 is that they are based on old technology. Take the latest LX125 Vespa headlined in T&G issue 88. Its four-stroke motor is water-cooled and fuel-injected, using the latest technology to produce 12bhp and get through the next round of emissions legislation. Piaggio is claiming more power, more torque, more mpg and 30% less CO₂ than the previous two-valve version.

That sounds great, but it all costs money (£3449 for a spanking-new LX) which pays for the hardware and considerable R&D which Piaggio will have put into it. A typical Chinese 125 costing less than £1500 on the other hand, can't afford such a high tech engine and the typical motor is an air-

cooled two-valve job, fed by a carburettor and probably based on something designed in Japan 30 years ago. That's not necessarily a bad thing, given the cost saving and in any case, a lot of these scoots will inevitably turn to fuel injection as a means of getting through Euro 4 emissions laws.

Anyway, the Pulse Phantom 125 is typical of the breed. A sports/commuter scooter as distinct from a retro or cruiser, both of which can be had as 125s as well. It's basically a re-engined version of the Phantom 50 with the same sharp styling, CVT transmission, 12in wheels and disc brakes at both ends. The difference lies in the 125cc four-stroke single under the bodywork, which conforms to the norm, being air-cooled, carb-fed and having just two valves. A modest 7.8bhp is the claim, but the upside is an on-the-road price of just £1010, making this (I think) the cheapest 125 you can buy from a dealer (as opposed to an internet scooter), apart from the Lexmoto Gladiator and Tornado. Lexmoto of course, is a sibling brand to Pulse.

Hop on the Phantom and the first thing you notice is the very high seat, which had my little 30in legs on tiptoe. So not recommended for the shorter legged and the high position also sticks you up into the breeze. But it also gives you decent visibility in traffic that people without the inclination to ride a scooter pay megabucks for in a Range Rover. Someone should tell them to save money and buy one of these.



Disc brakes work well



Fan-cooled four-stroke engine doesn't have a lot of power



budget 125cc test



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ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: Direct Bikes' Scorpion 125



Price: £799 plus OTR

The Scorpion has a similar spec to the Phantom; the bodywork is identical and is even cheaper, so surely it's the better buy? The trouble is, it can only be ordered from a website and once you've added delivery (£85), registration costs (£55), plus all the hassle of doing the registration yourself, there's not that much in it. We'd go for the Phantom.

TECHSPEC:

ENGINE:	4-stroke, air-cooled, 124cc
POWER:	7.8bhp @ 8000rpm
TORQUE:	5.9lb-ft @ 5500rpm
BRAKES:	Discs front and rear
TYRES:	Duro, 12in
LENGTH:	1860mm
WIDTH:	705mm
SEAT HEIGHT:	840mm
FUEL TANK:	6.3 litres
COLOURS:	Black/green, black/yellow
WEIGHT:	103kg
PRICE:	£1010 OTR
WARRANTY:	12 months
CONTACT:	www.pulsemoto.co.uk

IN TOWN TODAY

The Phantom feels ideal in town; small enough to whip through gaps and slip up the side of traffic light queues. The brakes are good – as well they might, being discs having to cope with a typical 125 weight of just over 100 kilos. That's backed up by decent grip from the Duro tyres. The handling is a little bouncy and twitchy, but then this is a short wheelbase 12in wheeled scooter and to a certain extent that's what you expect. One plus point is that the twin rear shocks are adjustable for pre-load, with five settings to choose from – very handy if you've got a lot of shopping, are taking a passenger home, or if the rider has eaten too many pies. The CVT does its job smoothly and acceleration is actually quite good up to 40mph or so, which is all you need for town anyway.

The low-power limitations come outside 40mph limits. I enjoyed myself on the Phantom, threading through the lovely city of Exeter, but heading out east on the A30 dual carriageway was a different story. Once past 40mph, acceleration proceeds more slowly up to 45 and then the speedo creeps up to 50 and just over. By the time you get to an indicated 52mph, it's flat out, though by adopting a Bradley Wiggins style crouch I managed to coax it up to 54! I shouldn't have been surprised by any of this, because the official specs claim a top whack of 85kph (53mph). Mind you, it did only have 300km on the clock, so perhaps a run-in Phantom would give a little more, but it's still a significant mph down on the 60-65mph we'd expect from a 125.

Talking of mph, the speedo is marked in them, but with a kilometre 'odometer,' and flanked by a fuel gauge on one side, a voltmeter on the other. A voltmeter is very handy for telling you when the battery is in a bad way, but on a commuting scooter, an

analogue clock would be a lot more useful. I can't tell you how good (or not) the headlight is because this test was in summer daylight, but it's vertically stacked and looks pretty cool.

That high seat leaves the rider pretty exposed at higher speeds, so expect to get wet if it rains, but it's reasonably comfortable and big enough to move around on. That means there's space for a pillion (who gets proper strong grabrails, but a plastic footboard extension rather than proper motorcycle style footpegs). Under the seat, there's enough room for a modest amount of shopping, though not for my open face Schuberth lid. There's also a small bag hook and a luggage rack as part of the deal, so fitting a topbox shouldn't be difficult.

Llexeter is one of the most successful importers of Chinese scooters, with a winning formula of rock-bottom prices, plus a proper dealer network and 12-month warranty. In fact, the Phantom comes in at £1010 on the road. That's about £100 more than the similar Direct Bikes' Scorpion, which you buy from a website rather than from a dealer. But then that's the Phantom's selling point – the dealer will register and PDI the bike and if anything goes wrong, you'll know where to take it; and like most four-stroke 125s, it should be cheap to run – a morning of riding around Exeter and out on the open road gave 104.9mpg, so the average commuter should only be filling the 6.3 litre tank once a week or so.

VERDICT

Out of town, the Phantom is not quick, even by 125 standards, and if your commute includes dual carriageways, you'd be better off buying something with more oomph. But it's perfectly adequate in town, looks pretty flash and you can't argue with that low price.

WORDS & PHOTOS: Pete Henshaw