

BACK FROM THE DEAD?



No room for a lid here



Pipe looks loud, but isn't



Somewhere behind all the cowling, there's an engine



Ghost does look the business in a black sort of way

Pulse Ghost moped test

Pulse Ghost, a semi-naked fifty that proves the two-stroke isn't quite dead yet...

The death of the two-stroke, like that of Mark Twain, has been much exaggerated. For years, pundits have been predicting its demise, thanks to ever more strict emissions legislation. This was all very logical, and as far as the 125cc and bigger two-strokes are concerned, they've been proved right – apart from the olde world geared scooters like the PX and LML 125s, big-bore two-stroke scooters are a thing of the past.

However (and you knew that was coming, didn't you?) it's a different story among the 50cc scoots. A quick flip through T&G's back pages reveals that over 60 of the little blighters are still available as ring-ding two-strokes. There's quite a choice as well, from sports scooters to commuters, with the Benelli Pepe as the sole big-wheel offering. Traditionally, two-strokes have been cheaper to make than fours, thanks to fewer moving parts, so it follows that the ones you can still buy are all bargain basement jobs from China. Except that there's a clear distinction between those and a new generation of fuel injected, liquid-cooled two-strokes from the Europeans, aiming to give better performance and a cleaner tailpipe than the



Exposed bars give that stripped down feel

old guard. Although there are plenty of Chinese-sourced two-strokes about, they don't appear to be any cheaper to buy than the equivalent four-strokes, so which route you take is really down to personal choice.

Llexeter knows all about choice; Britain's biggest importer of Chinese scooters and motorcycles uses two brands in the UK – Pulse and Lexmoto – which between them offer a huge range of scooters. Lexmoto is nominally aimed at middle-aged commuters and Pulse (as in 'on the...') at younger folk. Both have been a huge success with sales more than doubling in the first half of last year, though Pulse remains the junior partner in more ways than one – fewer than 400 bikes sold in the first six months of 2012, compared to more than 1500 Lexmotos.

Anyway, there's still a massive range of Pulse 50s to choose from. There's the Rhythm at £860, the sporty-looking Force at £1050; the Phantom at £930 (125 version tested in T&G 87); and at a bargain basement £650, the little Scout, which must still be the cheapest scooter you can buy which comes from a dealer, not a website; finally, there's the Ghost, which also happens to be the only two-stroke in the range.

REALLY SIMPLE

Not surprisingly, with a price tag of less than £1000, the Ghost doesn't have one of those high-tech two-stroke motors. It's a simple air-cooled job with a carburettor – and apparently none the worse for that, firing up readily with little smoke and not a lot of noise. Modern oils and more attention to decibels have made current two-strokes far more civilised than their forbears.

But what sets the Ghost apart from most other 50s on the market is its styling. This is a tricky one for manufacturers, because most small scooters are very similar under the skin, so the basic shape is pretty well determined before the styling dept gets hold of it. That's why so many have loud graphics, because it's the only route left open to make the scooter stand out.

The Ghost is slightly different in that, like the similar AJS Crazy, the handlebars are exposed, giving a bit of a naked, stripped down look and it certainly feels that way when you sling a leg over it too – you feel more exposed than on a more typical scooter. In fact, weather protection is fairly minimal, apart from for the lower legs. Big bad Harley riders call this being 'in the wind', and it's certainly that, because the seat is a high-ish 790mm, leaving you perched up with a decent view of the traffic, so the short-legged might find themselves on tip-toes, but there is plenty of room for taller types who might feel cramped on some 50s. Of course, this also emphasises being in the breeze, but then if you want a more comfy ride to work there are plenty of scooters offering greater protection to choose from.

Smoother ones too, because this simple two-stroke does transmit some vibes at idle and again all the way up to 40mph – only beyond there does it really smooth out, so if you really want a taste of two-stroke rawness, then it is here. It gave my fingers the tingles after 45 minutes, so I'm clearly too old for two-strokes now.

The Ghost is normally restricted by an electronic measurement of rear wheel speed, which I'm told gives a slight hunting sensation at the regulation 31mph. But not on this scooter because it was – hooray! – derestricted. Acceleration was unaffected (which makes sense when you think about it – the restriction only applies to top speed, surely a better way than imposing feeble acceleration as well).

In fact, the initial step off the mark wasn't that quick (though faster than some four-stroke fifties I've ridden), but after 20mph-or-so the Ghost sort of woke up. It would then pull quite perkily up to 30mph, past it, up to 40, then more slowly before maxing out with 51 showing on the digital speedo. Speaking of which, all you get instrument-wise is the speedo plus digi odometer and bar fuel gauge, but it all adds to the stripped-down look.



Ghost handles well and in derestricted form keeps up with the traffic

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TECHSPEC:

ENGINE:	Two-stroke, air-cooled, 50cc
POWER:	3bhp @ 7000rpm
BRAKES:	Discs front and rear
TYRES:	Duro, 110/70-12, 130/70-12
LENGTH:	1860mm
WIDTH:	740mm
SEAT HEIGHT:	790mm
FUEL CAPACITY:	5 litres
COLOUR OPTION:	Black
WEIGHT:	90kg
PRICE:	£980 OTR
WARRANTY:	12 months
CONTACT:	www.pulsemoto.co.uk

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: AJS Crazy 50



Price: £1199

The Ghost's closest competitor is clearly the AJS Crazy, which is pretty much identical apart from the colour and graphics. Like the Ghost, it comes with a proper 12 month warranty from a dealer and the only real difference is that it costs £220 more. If you like that old AJS badge, prefer the Crazy colour, or don't have a Pulse dealer nearby, it's a worthwhile alternative. Otherwise, we'd go for the Ghost.

The Ghost would happily maintain an indicated 45-47mph, so it shouldn't be embarrassed by 40 and 50 limits. More to the point for buzzing around town, there's enough go to get to the front of the red light queues, then accelerate away without holding up the cars you've just filtered past. Now I seldom drive a car, but I'm sure there's nothing more annoying than a moped which filters to a stop just in front of you, then wheezes away from the green light, holding everyone up – a bit like fat bloke shouldering his way to the front of the ice cream queue then taking ages to make up his mind between a Magnum and a 99. Alternatively, Mondeo man could have a bit of patience and consider how much better his life would be if he ditched the tin box for two wheels.

For an ostensibly sporty scooter, the Ghost felt slower steering than the Phantom 125 we tested recently, but then it does have a fatter 130-section rear tyre, which might have something to do with it. Whatever, it handles well on its 12in wheels, happily nipping through the back streets of Exeter and twistier B roads of East Devon – as you can tell, T&G road tests never flinch from the seedier side of life. The Duro tyres gripped well (though on a bone dry day) and the suspension as a whole feels like good quality kit, well damped and not inclined to bottom out. The brakes are superb, discs at both ends that are easily powerful enough to cope with derestricted speeds; plus the rear is sensitive enough for low speeds in traffic.

What else is there to say? The mirrors are big enough, but spoilt by vibes up to 40mph. The only storage space is under the



Single rear shock is preload adjustable

seat and there isn't enough room for a full face, but that's hardly an uncommon fault on a 50cc. This being a two-stroke, you will need to add oil every now and then – there's a warning light to give you the proverbial poke when the level gets low, and the filler is behind a hidden panel in front of the seat, accessed with a Phillips screwdriver, so it's reasonably secure. Llexeter claims an impressive-sounding 120mpg for the Ghost and I had my doubts, though the test bike managed 112mpg, mostly in town, but with about 10 miles of 40-48mph cruising as well. A restricted bike should make that 120 without much trouble.

VERDICT

In a world where many smaller scooters look similar, the Ghost does have a few things to make it stand out. It proclaims its two-stroke credentials with that tricksy-looking pipe, feels less of a commuter than some and certainly goes well enough, backed up by good handling and brakes. If the style appeals, go for it.

WORDS & PICTURES: Pete Henshaw