



HONDA CB125F £2699

This bike is made in China. It's the only bike on test with twin shocks and a drum rear brake - but it is fuel injected.

HYOSUNG GT125P £2899

The Korean Hyosung is the most expensive bike here, powered by an air/oil-cooled 125cc V-twin. It also has the tallest seat.

LEXMOTO ZSX-F125 £1699

Chinese-built and the cheapest here. It has a single rear shock, rear disc brake and is a carburetted four-stroke single.

THE MCN TEST

Bargain hunt

Are the latest crop of sub-£3000 naked 125s worth it - or are you being taken for a ride?



'The ride is comfortable, the turning circle tight and the brakes ample'

Honda CB125F Old-school smiles

On face value the Honda didn't get off to the best start. It's the only bike with twin rear shocks and a drum brake on the rear, and it's near the top of our price range at £2699. The rear brake pedal assembly appears to have been taken from a Honda C90, and it's hard to decide if the all-analogue clocks are cool because they're retro, or just old-fashioned. I couldn't help but smile as I wound the mechanical trip back to zero.

The switchgear is actually modern, and not dissimilar to Honda's larger models, aping the VFR800's annoying trait of having the horn button above the indicator switch. There's an illuminated gear position indicator and on-board the styling isn't bad. There's also a centrestand, as there is on the Lexmoto.

Styling-wise the Honda scores well, and despite the twin shocks



Something charming about analogue clocks

and drum brake, it has an air of quality. With all the logos and badges removed, we all agreed we'd still pick the Honda out as the highest quality bike on test.

The four-stroke Honda is the only fuel-injected bike on test, absolving us of any need to play around with choke lever when cold. The fuelling is near-faultless, and even low down there's enough torque to make good progress. In town you don't have to dance up and down the smooth gearbox, and it'll happily pull away in second gear.

Away from the city commute it's no quicker than the rest; 55mph is about it sat bolt upright, while you might see 60mph if conditions are perfect. With a favourable tailwind, tucked in tight, I nearly saw 70mph.

The ride is comfortable, the suspension isn't bad, and despite the odd-sized wheels the handling isn't bad, either. You don't get thrown out of the seat over road imperfections, and cobbles won't rattle your fillings. The turning circle is tight, it's light and - despite their ancient design - the brakes are more than up to the job, although there's no ABS. It's a doddle to ride; no wonder riding schools up and down the land use them.

On the down side the Honda is physically small - the smallest of the bunch, in fact - and the standard Chinese tyres aren't great, especially in the wet. But as Justin said after he stepped off the Honda: 'I'd happily courier around London on one all day - and it does 100mpg.'

JASON CRITCHELL

The riders

Adam Child
Age 40 Height 5ft 6in
CV 15 years' road testing experience on all kinds of bikes.

Justin Hayzelden
Age 44 Height 5ft 11in
CV Global adventure rider and former London courier.

Liam Marsden
Age 26 Height 6ft 1in
CV MCN web producer has a vast amount of experience for someone so young.

By Adam Child
MCN SENIOR ROAD TESTER

You can buy a brand new 125cc naked bike with a 24-month warranty and dealer back-up for less than £2000. You could run around on one of these for two trouble-free years then at the end of that period of fun commuting either trade it in for a new model or sell it for £500. You'll still be quids in.

Think about it: would you rather be on the tube, sweating hot, with your face buried in a stranger's armpit - or actually enjoying the world above the surface? I know where I'd rather be.

But am I painting an unrealistic picture? How good can a budget 125cc really be? In a wintry November would I still choose two wheels, and if so where does the smart money go?

Hyosung GT125P

It's not rubbish... it's worse

I can't remember riding another new bike as bad as this. Some bikes get off to a bad start, but then you start to appreciate their character - or make concessions because of their budget price. But the Hyosung has no character, few redeeming features, and is the most expensive bike on test. Justin, our guest rider, owns a 1953 Enfield that he feels is more refined than the Hyosung.

So, where do I start? Who thought putting an air/oil-cooled 125 V-twin in what appears to be a 650 chassis was a good idea? The breathless motor has the pulling power of a one-eyed troll. A headwind or slight gradient forces you to knock back a gear to maintain any speed. There's no torque, nothing below 6000rpm, and you have to



There are few things to recommend the GT125 V-twin as a town bike. But it is solidly built...

be brutal with the revs to keep up with traffic. Above 8000rpm it can just about stay with the other bikes here, but you really need to cling to the redline. That means beasting it at close to 10,500rpm all the time.

A lack of torque makes it a nightmare in town as you are always revving the nuts out of the comically slow engine. Everyone turns around to stare as they hear a bike screaming at 10,000rpm - but only doing 20mph. And it's heavy, too. At 167kg it weighs more than a BSB bike! It's also physically big, clunky, and has virtually no steering lock. Oh, and the brakes are shocking.

It looks like my two-year-old son made the rear disc at nursery and the exhaust looks like it's been taken from a 1990s Suzuki Bandit. The engine, carbs and airbox are a mess.

The positives? It looks and feels solid,



Keep it pinned at the 10,500rpm redline

and has road presence. The big dimensions will favour larger riders, but big, heavy riders will only exacerbate the gutless delivery. The dash is the most modern of the bunch, but that's as good as it gets. Hyosung do make some good bikes, but this isn't one of them. **Continued over: Verdict, stats, accessories and typical finance deals**

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Has a dual-layered lining, quick-release anti-scratch visor and matt black finish, and is available in two shell sizes. www.sharkhelmets.co.uk

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Lexmoto ZSX-F125

Cheap and very cheerful

I remember when a packet of crisps was 20p, chips were 50p and cigarettes £1.72 for 20, but a pound isn't worth what it used to be, and I didn't have great hopes for Lexmoto's £1699 ZX-F. How can they possibly produce a good bike for so little cash?

The four-stroke motor runs a conventional carb, which means you have a manual choke and even a fuel tap – just like the Hyosung. In its favour over the newer, considerably more expensive Honda, you have disc brakes all-round, a single rear shock with preload adjustment, and they've even tried to make it sporty looking with a small headlight cowl, bellypan and red rim tape on the wheels. There's a huge luggage rack on the rear, a centrestand, and the pillion seat flips up to reveal a storage area big enough to swallow some waterproofs or spare gloves. The headlight is LED, too. Just don't look too close, as the pegs are bendy rubber-mounted items and the front wheel spindle looks like it's come from Ikea.

The fuelling might not be as perfect as the fuel injected Honda, but there is a pleasing bark from the single exhaust pipe. This is fine out of town but in the city you sound like an annoying teenage takeaway delivery rider running a scooter with no exhaust. But the immature child inside me enjoyed the odd backfire, and it lets other traffic know



Primitive digital tech, but useful fuel gauge

you are there. Like the Honda there is some useable torque, you can nip through traffic with ease, and head-down it will match the Honda on top speed. But the motor isn't as smooth as the CB's, and the gearbox is a little agricultural.

The suspension and set-up can be described in the same way. It all works, but there isn't a huge amount of damping. You get jolted out of the seat on rough roads and despite having conventional 17in wheels it didn't feel as secure or natural as the Honda. But around town it ran rings around the heavy Hyosung. The budget Lexmoto certainly exceeded our expectations.

'Useable torque lets you nip through traffic with ease'

Lexmoto has the sportiest appearance, and decent carb performance



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3 YEAR WARRANTY

0% finance

£65 PER MONTH

Over 36 months
With a deposit of £359

1

Engine	124.7cc air cooled single
Power	10.5bhp @ 7750rpm
Suspension	31mm forks, no adjustment. Twin rear shocks, adjustable for preload only
Brakes	240mm front disc with twin-piston caliper, 130mm rear drum brake
Seat height	775mm
Tyres	90/100 x 18 front, 90/90 x 18 rear

128kg

13 Litres

10.5 bhp

7.5 ftlb

19.5% finance

£55 PER MONTH

Over 36 months
With a deposit of £170

2

Engine	124.65cc air-cooled single
Power	10.9bhp @ 8500 rpm
Suspension	Conventional forks, no adjustment. Single rear shock, adjustable for preload only
Brakes	240mm front disc with twin-piston caliper, 220mm rear disc with twin-piston caliper
Seat height	780mm
Tyres	90/90 x 17 front, 110/80 x 17 rear

134kg

14 Litres

10.9 bhp

7.4 ftlb

8.9% finance

£70 PER MONTH

Over 48 months
With a deposit of £99

3

Engine	124cc oil/air-cooled V-twin
Power	14.6bhp at 10,500rpm
Suspension	Upside-down forks, no adjustment. Single rear shock, adjustable for preload
Brakes	300mm front discs with twin-piston calipers, 230mm rear disc with twin-piston caliper
Seat height	830mm
Tyres	110/70 x 17 front, 150/70 x 17 rear

167kg

17 Litres

14.6 bhp

7.2 ftlb

MCN

VERDICT

ADAM CHILD SENIOR ROAD TESTER

'Honda quality is the greatest'

Despite looking a little dated with its twin shocks and a drum rear brake, the Honda CB125F is the best bike here. It feels well put together, has a greater quality feel than the others, is smooth, easy to ride, has nice suspension and is very user-friendly.

Pushing the Honda close is the Lexmoto. For £1700 we didn't have high hopes for the Chinese 125, but it's actually rather good. If you don't care about branding and just want a great-value bike then look no further, it's incredible value for money. The headlights are more attractive than the Honda's, the clocks are digital, there's a rear luggage rack and useable storage under the seat. There is a reason they're regularly getting into the top three of the best-sellers list.

The Hyosung brings up the rear by some distance. I've chatted with some owners who love the size, and I can see why they say that – but the engine has no torque, it's too big, too heavy and too cumbersome for a 125cc commuter. It's horrendous around town, the build quality doesn't inspire confidence, and it's the most expensive on test. I'd rather have the Lexmoto every time.

COSTING THE COMMUTE

ROUTE Upminster to Holborn, EC1
DISTANCE 25 miles (by road)
DURATION 65 minutes by bike, 70 minutes on public transport
TRANSPORT FOR LONDON ANNUAL SEASON TICKET £2364
LEXMOTO ZSX-F £1699 + £82
INSURANCE £1781

Upminster is on the eastern edge of London's commuter belt, while Holborn is in the heart of the city. It's a distance of 25 miles, with a journey time of just over an hour. Unexpected delays aside, the difference in travel time between motorcycle and public transport is negligible.

An annual season rail ticket is £2364, while the Lexmoto costs under £1800 on the road (including insurance). That leaves over £500 in the kitty for fuel, tax and running costs. In year two you'd have to pay the £2364 again, but the Lexmoto would already be paid for. Plus, at the end of two year, the bike will be worth a few hundred pounds, while your travel card will just be an receipt for the punishment you've endured on public transport. **MCN**