

Do you ever feel kind of dull, like you're never getting noticed? Have you ever wanted to drive down the street and really turn some heads? Well if you had your choice of vehicle to do it with, what would you choose to really make people stop and look; a red-hot Ferrari, a custom Harley, maybe an expensive Italian sportbike? You might want to think again.

If you really want to get some attention the vehicle you need to be driving is the Piaggio MP3. I guarantee almost nothing will have you answering more questions at stop lights or attracting a bigger crowd in a parking lot. That's a pretty amazing thing considering the Piaggio retails for about the same price as two monthly payments on a new Ferrari.

I guess I shouldn't have been so surprised at others' interest in the new Piaggio, I sounded like a giddy four-year-old kid when asked if I wanted to ride the MP3 for two weeks. I think my response was: "Hell ya, I want to ride that thing, when can we get one?"

So maybe I was a little too excited to ride a scooter, but then again this is not your ordinary scooter. When is the last time you rode a scooter with three wheels that did 90 mph and looked as stylish as the MP3? Piaggio has a long history of building revolutionary scooters - this is the company that launched the first Vespa model in 1946.

The Piaggio MP3 is full of innovative features that will have you re-thinking the scooter market. Let's start with the most obvious, the front-end, utilizing two independently suspended 12" wheels together with parallelogram suspension, an original Piaggio design, allowing a tilt angle up to 40 degrees. You will not feel a scooter more stable and planted when cornering or hard on the brakes. With the extra wheel up front you would expect the steering to feel heavy, but it actually steers quite quickly and feels very similar to a regular motorcycle with some extra stability thrown in. It took me a while to really explore how far I could lean the MP3 over, but slowly my confidence built enough to where I managed to get it to slide a bit while attempting some photos. It was not a controlled slide however, more of a goon-looking slide with feet flailing, so we will not be posting any of those photos.

If you didn't look at the front of the MP3 before jumping on for a ride you would hardly notice the addition of a second front wheel while riding. The MP3 gives you the benefits of stability and traction while not jeopardizing any agility. When leaning it into the corners trying to get my knee on the deck (something I would not recommend), the Piaggio did have a tendency to push wide through the corner, forcing me to use all of the road on a few occasions, and I really mean ALL of the road!

The Piaggio I was riding featured the new Master 400 engine, a liquid cooled four-stroke, four-valve motor with fuel injection. The motor puts out 34 hp at 7,500 rpm. Torque output is 38 Nm at 5,500 rpm. One thing that really surprised me on the MP3 is just how fast this thing tops out. I had it up to 90 mph quite easily on the freeway and actually wasn't too scared for my life. The only scary moment coming when a California Highway Patrol Car passed me in the carpool lane - thankfully he was on his way to stopping another motorist. Acceleration is also abundant and I had no problem getting up to speed to merge onto the freeways or jet away with traffic from stop lights. Even with a passenger the motor still has plenty of steam and is capable of well over 70 mph.

There was the occasional stumble off idle and the Piaggio even stalled a few times when leaving a stop light. This can be a bit scary when you have an angry row of traffic behind you ready to mow you over. While it was a bit disconcerting, this just gave me



a good excuse to throttle it right to the pins whenever jetting away from a light.

While it has plenty of power, you do have to remember this is a scooter and you have to be careful not to ask too much of it. On a few occasions I asked a little more of the Piaggio than it was prepared to handle and it had me reminding myself this is not a motorcycle with generous amounts of suspension travel and full size wheels. When pushed too hard the suspension can start to wallow at high speeds and get harsh when hitting substantial bumps on the road. At less than breakneck speeds, however, the MP3 was very composed. The Parallelogram suspension up front coupled with two dual effect hydraulic shock absorbers and adjustable coil spring in the back offered a forgiving ride on the road.

Thanks to the extra contact patch up front and three powerful 240mm linked disc brakes with twin piston calipers the Piaggio also comes to a stop in a hurry. You can get a little wiggle at the bars when you really stomp on the brakes and it can get a bit sketchy, but overall stopping power is quite good. I was able to apply the brakes while leaning over with no catastrophic effects - something that would surely turn ugly on most standard scooters.



The MP3 also proved to be quite comfortable. I rode in a small wind/sand storm along the coast and the tall windscreen and fairing did a good job of protecting me from the elements. The seat has abundant room for a passenger and suspension handles the extra weight easily. While many people are afraid to ride on a motorcycle it seemed nobody had any fear about riding pillion on the MP3 and I had numerous requests for rides as a passenger.

One of the coolest functions on the Piaggio is a locking mechanism that allows you to lock the front suspension while parked or at a stop light. When slowing down to come to a stop, a flashing yellow light starts blinking as you reach a slow enough speed letting you know that it is safe to hit the switch that will lock the front suspension into place. If timed to perfection you can roll to a stop without ever putting your feet down. When you are ready to gas it, roll on the throttle and the suspension unlocks allowing you to speed away without ever moving your feet. The switch itself is easy enough to use, the tricky part is remembering to put your feet down when you release the switch if you did not manage to stop perfectly upright. If you happen to lock the switch while the bike is at an angle it will lock in that position and the bike can fall over when speeding away if you're not careful. I found it was safest to come to a stop by putting my feet down and then locking the suspension. It was too easy to come to a stop thinking you had successfully locked it into place only to find yourself falling over. I came close to tipping over more than a few times and decided to save myself the embarrassment by just hitting the lock switch once I was already stopped.

The gas mileage on the MP3 is great and assures that you will not be taking too many trips to the gas station. I drove the Piaggio for a full week before stopping for my first fill-up. This turned out to be a slightly bigger chore than I thought it would be due to the fact it took me 20 minutes to find out where to insert the gas hose. After about 20 circulations around the MP3 and crawling on the ground in search of the gas cap I finally gave up and went to start the scooter to go home. It was then that I discovered the fuel filler door was opened by turning the ignition key to the appropriate position. To my surprise a door popped open revealing the very secret hiding spot for the gas cap. I guess it might pay to read the owner's manual from time to time.



'The great thing about the Piaggio MP3 is that it has all the fun factor of a scooter with none of the sissy factor'

The Piaggio MP3 allows you to do more than the average motorcycle, much of this due to the insane amount of storage the scooter has. Give the fob a little 'bloop, bloop' and the rear trunk opens. This is pretty high-tech to a farm boy who thinks tilt steering is still a pretty luxurious option. The under-seat area reveals more room than some compact cars. You could easily bring back dinner and a 12-pack in the trunk of the Piaggio, hell maybe even one of those mini-kegs. I thought it was odd that for some reason I could not fit an extra helmet in the trunk. It turns out I may be a little intellectually challenged as I have since found out you just need to turn the helmet upside down, visor first and you can slide not one, but two full-face helmets right in.

The great thing about the Piaggio MP3 is that it has all the fun factor of a scooter with none of the sissy factor. I even had a group of Harley riders ride up next to me at a red light inquiring about the Piaggio, commenting how cool it looked. It was a scene that looked right out of a commercial, six burly bikers pulling up asking where they could get one of these scooters. Talk about a

wide market of appeal. Everyone from pimply faced teens to senior citizens seemed to have some interest in this Italian marvel. In fact, if I was Piaggio I would hire an army of sales representatives to grab a trunk full of business cards and go for daily rides around the city on the MP3, I must have been asked a dozen times a day where the MP3 could be purchased and how much they sell for.

While an MSRP of \$8,699.00 for the Piaggio MP3 may seem a little high considering you could own a few capable motorcycles for the same price, but the MP3 does have a lot to offer. It's a great tool to introduce the true novice to the motorcycle world with confidence-inspiring handling and an un-intimidating riding position. For the experienced rider it offers a low maintenance, fuel efficient, fun ride that is more convenient than a standard motorcycle due to its large storage capacity and its upright locking ability. The MP3 also has a huge head turning factor. If you were always the last kid to get picked in school you will finally feel very popular on this scoot.

PIAGGIO MP3 400 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

Engine Type	4-stroke 4-valve liquid-cooled Piaggio MASTER i.e.
Displacement	398.9cc
Bore/Stroke	85.8 x 69mm
Max Power at Shaft	25 kW at 7,550 rpm (34 bhp)
Max Torque	37 Nm at 5,000 rpm
Distribution	Single overhead camshaft (SOHC) with four valves
Clutch	Centrifugal

Cooling System	Liquid
Ignition	Electronic inductive discharge and integrated variable timing
Gearbox	Twist-and-go automatic CVT , torque server
Fuel Supply	Electronic injection system
Starter	Electric (freewheel) with torque converter
Max speed	88 mph (142 Km/h)
Lubrication	Wet sump
Chassis	Twin cradle tubes in high-tensile steel
Front Suspension	Parallelogram composed of four aluminum arms
Rear Suspension	Two Dual effect hydraulic shock absorbers, adjustable coil spring
Front Brake	Two stainless steel discs 240 mm, floating caliper, twin pistons
Rear Brake	Stainless steel disc 240 mm and caliper with opposite pistons
Front Wheel Rim	Die-cast aluminum alloy, 12" x 3.00
Rear Wheel Rim	Die-cast aluminum alloy, 14" x 4.50
Front Tires	120/70-12"
Rear Tire	140/70-12"
Length	85.8 in.
Width	29.3 in.
Seat Height	30.9 in.
Wheelbase	61 in.

Fuel / Tank Capacity	Unleaded / 3.2 gals. (12 liters)
Weight	538 lbs.
Available Colors	Excalibur Grey, Graphite Black, Midnight Blue

Related Reading

- [Two Wheels Good, Three Wheels Better](#)
- [Piaggio Grows MP3 Family in 2008](#)

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