



# Revolutionary third wheel

## BIKE TEST

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Piaggio launched the first Vespa model in the spring of 1946 and revolutionised personal transport. Although it can hardly claim to have produced the first motor scooter, it certainly produced the one that worked and people wanted to buy.

Sixty years on, Piaggio has come up with what it is claiming as another revolutionary product: the MP3, a three-wheeled scooter with two front wheels and a highly sophisticated suspension set-up.

Just as it didn't actually invent the scooter, it didn't exactly invent this one either. It started life as the Italject Scoop, first introduced six years ago but never launched on to the market. It doesn't much matter who created the thing; what we need to know is if it works and if it really is as revolutionary as that first Vespa.

According to the Piaggio people, the "MP3 provides safety, road grip and stability levels that no two-wheeler can match". Rather ominously, they go on to suggest that "Power, performance and ease of use make for a very entertaining ride." Someone should tell them that in English, "entertaining ride" is a code phrase that usually means "terrifying instability".

As it turns out, it's not a problem. The front assembly, with two independent tilting wheels, is far more stable than any two-wheeled scooter I've ridden.

When I took the MP3 off the road on to the deeply rutted gravel tracks at the Canberra launch site, it felt far more stable than any scooter and even better than a lot of motorcycles. The reason seems to be the almost complete absence of bump steer, with the two wheels evening things out between them and tracking true. This is a little less obvious on the

road but is still there.

According to the factory blurb, it will take on "cobblestone streets, patchy asphalt and tram tracks with the greatest of ease, remaining safe and stable all the while".

All perfectly true and of course very handy in Italy with its appalling urban roads.

What came to my mind when I thought about the MP3's performance was that it's just like a scooter in most ways but better. It handles and turns better, copes with poor surfaces better and stops a lot better. Piaggio claims a 20 per cent improvement in parking and that seems about right. It's easy to park and the electro-hydraulic suspension locking system (a button on the dash) means there is no need to put it on its stand.

The one I rode was a 250, but we will probably see it here as a 400 as well. If we do, I've got my hand up to do some touring on one. With its electronic fuel injection, even the 250 delivers 16.9 kW, making it perfectly capable of handling reasonably long distance rides in the country.

It clearly rings bells with people you would not expect to be interested in a scooter: on the day I tried it, people who would never have thought of buying a scooter became quite interested and admitted to me they were considering buying an MP3 for commuting. If they are any indication, we may be looking at a significant increase in the number of potential "scooter" buyers.

The MP3 is clearly a good thing, but is it as revolutionary as the Vespa was? Everyone will have a different view on that but, for me at least, the answer is: no, not really.

But I do want to have a play on one out in the country. And I will, too. By the time you read this, the MP3 should have been approved for sale in Australia. The price is yet to be announced but I for one can't wait.

### THE LATEST SCOOTING

While we're on the subject of Piaggio, here are the latest developments in Australia.

The all-new Beverley 250 is now on sale at \$7490, plus on-road costs. The Beverley has large-diameter alloy wheels and a low-emission Euro 3 compliant liquid-cooled engine. The scooter's hydraulic shock absorbers offer adjustable preload, there's the now just about obligatory anti-theft immobiliser and front and rear disc brakes.

The large wheels provide an almost motorcycle-like ride and make it easier to cope with poor roads.

The NRG Pure-Jet 50 features West Australian "Sarich" fuel-injected technology for incomparable performance and economy, costing only \$3990. The Pure-Jet features electric-start for its 50cc engine, a 140 rear and 120 front tyre for maximal grip, and premium-quality suspension. This scooter can be ridden on a car licence in Queensland, SA, the NT and WA.

One step up in capacity from Piaggio is the snappy Zip 100, which is now on sale at a remarkable \$2490. Like its 50cc sibling, the Zip 100 is nimble and easy on the hip pocket and features a Euro 2 compliant four-stroke engine. All Piaggio scooters come with a two-year unlimited-kilometre warranty.



**Three-wheeler: Piaggio's MP3 handles and turns better than a scooter.**