



by Franke Santos

**S**COOTERS HAVE ENJOYED a resurgence in the last few months, due to record gas prices. As a result, Piaggio's scooter sales in 2008 have grown more than 90% over last year's, according to a company spokesman. FYI, the Piaggio Group owns Aprilia, Vespa and naturally the Piaggio scooter brands.

The Sportcity 250 i.e. rounds out the middle of Aprilia's six-scooter lineup in the US. It has several features that make it well-disposed to commuting, including lots of torque across the low end of the powerband, a comfy seat with a no-slip texture and larger wheels than most scooters for greater stability.

### Engine

The Sportcity is powered by a four-valve SOHC 244cc single, and is among the first scooters to use electronic fuel injection to clean exhaust emissions and improve mileage. With its continuously variable transmission (CVT), all you have to do is twist the throttle and go. But this simplicity takes a bit of getting used to if you're like us and are accustomed to a motorcycle with a manual transmission. We quickly learned to never grab a handful of "clutch" when it felt like it was time to shift or slow, since on this machine, the left handlebar lever is the rear brake!

The little scooter is fairly light at just 357 lbs. wet, so its modest power gives plenty of pep, maintaining a steady pace even going up steep grades. The bike's torque curve builds in a linear manner until it peaks at 12.71 lb.-ft. @ 6750, which is where the CVT likes to keep the engine rpm, smoothly and automatically changing ratios to match the road speed. But there is a limit, and the power begins to fade at about 60 mph indicated. On surface streets, this limited capability is fine, but on the highway, it often struggles to keep up with high-speed traffic.

### Handling

The Sportcity handles surprisingly well, and it is actually quite flickable, bending quickly into smooth corners, thanks

to its 15" wheels and motorcycle-like steering geometry (25.5° of rake and 3.7" of trail). But its underdamped suspension limits the amount of fun you can have on a bumpy canyon road, as it allows the scooter to continually bounce through the corners—which does nothing for your sense of control. The bouncy suspension is probably due in part to the machine's rear-biased weight distribution (40.7% front and 59.3% rear unladen). Its short suspension travel doesn't help either: a skimpy 3.2" rear, front only 3.9". And the feet-forward riding posture means that you can't lift yourself up on the pegs to help cushion an impending big bump—although perhaps you could learn to stand on the passenger pegs, which fold up almost directly under the rider's seat. Another gripe: The narrow front tire with its circumferential siping seemed to enjoy tracking rain grooves on the freeway, and pavement seams posed an even bigger challenge, especially when they ran at a shallow angle to the lane.

However, the Sportcity's double-disc front brakes are strong and easy to modulate, even from high speed. Plus, the hand-operated rear brake can be used very sensitively, once you've

adapted to the design.

The step-through layout demands an upright seating position, which feels natural, with one's arms extended a comfortable distance to the handlebars. If it weren't for the shocks delivered by the weak rear suspension over poor roads and the lack of wind protection, it would remain comfortable. It fit our 5'6" tester well, but much taller riders may find the ergonomics a bit cramped. Our tester found that despite the 31.6" seat height and her short inseams, getting her foot on the ground was not difficult, due to the slim profile of the front of the seat.

### Instrumentation

The instruments are very readable, with a huge analog speedo and large digital clock. It also has a fuel gauge and a coolant temp gauge—but during our time with it, we did not find the fuel gauge accurate. After 80 miles, using a little over half of the tank's 2.4-gal. capacity, the gauge was still showing the scooter's tank as full. However, the low fuel light is supposed to come on when the rider has reached the reserve level of 0.4 gal. It did, at about 140 miles, which is just about right. Two tripmeters, an odometer, and battery voltage round out the instruments. The usual idiot lights for high beam, turnsignals and oil pressure are included, along with a useful service reminder light and a check engine light.

### Attention To Detail

The Sportcity's underseat trunk is surprisingly small for a scooter. It's enough to crunch a jacket into, not enough for a full-face helmet, but it will store a half-helmet. Since Aprilia is trying to sell the Sportcity as a commuter vehicle, it would be nice if extra storage space for lunch, a briefcase or other bag came standard. To add to its standard storage space, two topboxes in 28L and 35L capacities are optional, with prices of \$124.95 and \$169.95 respectively, and a



passenger backrest can be added to the front of the topbox for \$64.95. If it were ours, we would immediately add a topbox. Also, the latch for the trunk was terribly fiddly, until we learned that to open it, the seat must be pushed down.

Other features make the scooter appealing as an everyday ride: The placement of the centerstand and its ease of its deployment. (However, there is no sidestand.) Also, the seat is covered with a grippy fabric that prevents the rider from sliding forward under hard braking, something much appreciated when there is no gastank to squeeze between your legs. In addition, the back of the leg cover includes a handy little bag clip. But the owner's manual warns that its capacity is only 3.3 lbs., so it is not intended for bags much heavier than a down pillow. The back of the leg cover also has a "glove" box, which is divided into two small areas. The left side lets you carry a cell phone, a thin wallet, and a small map, but not much else, while the toolkit is stored on the right side. Also on the right, there's an outlet useful for charging a cell phone, but you must have a folding-style charger if you want to use it and still be able to close the cover of the glove box. Under the seat, there is an anti-theft hook that's intended to attach to a cable. The optional 5' long cable is \$69.95, and the 4' cable is \$39.95.

The little windscreen is in place, it seems, only to protect the instruments and not necessarily the rider. The windblast at speed gets tiring after about an hour. (Aprilia's accessory catalog offers both a tall windshield and a short "sport" windshield as accessories. But these won't be available until mid-2009, pending US DOT approval.) The mirrors are nicely shaped and placed, giving the rider a good rear view.

Only one of the two headlights lights in low beam or high beam. Given the slim profile of the front of the scooter, we would have hoped that both lit on low beam, to make it more visible.

## Value

At \$4599, the Sportcity offers Italian flair and the easy usability of a scooter, and it is priced very competitively. For example, the 244cc Honda Helix is \$5349 and the 249cc Kymco Grandvista is \$4399, while its Vespa cousin, the 250cc GTS, is a comparatively pricey \$5999.

Of course, the real value may be found in its fuel economy. We averaged 67.1 miles per gallon, which may be a serious enticement for SUV owners who may be spending \$100 or more to fill up. Despite the extra cost of premium fuel that the Sportcity requires, it's still more economical to drive than a fuel-thrifty Honda Civic. Even ridden hard, with sudden stops and full-throttle takeoffs, the scooter still got 64.5 miles per gallon.

## Conclusion

The Aprilia Sportcity 250 i.e. is a good around town mount, but could be made even better by adding a topbox and fitting a superior rear shock. And its friendly powerband and comfortable seating position make it an unimpeachable introduction to traveling on two wheels. We just wouldn't recommend it for anything faster than occasional freeway travel.

Billed as a "more ecological" choice than a car, or even than many motorcycles, the Sportcity is a fun ride that sips gasoline like a proper Italian signorina sips espresso ...slowly and stylishly. 🍷

# 2009 Aprilia Sportcity 250 i.e.

## CYCLESTATS AT A GLANCE

ENGINE	ELECTRICS
Type: ..... liquid-cooled single	Battery: ..... 12 V, 12 Ah
Valvetrain: ..... SOHC, 4 valves per cylinder, screw and locknut valve adjustment	Ignition: ..Electronic inductive discharge w/ variable advance
Displacement:..... 244cc	Alternator Output: ..... 300 W
Bore/stroke: ..... 72.0 x 60.0mm	Headlight: ..... 55/55W
Comp. ratio:..... 11.0:1	
Fueling: ..... FI	
Exhaust: ..... 1 into 1	
DRIVE TRAIN	FUEL
Transmission: ..... CVT	Tank capacity:..... 2.4 gal.
Final drive: ..... belt	Fuel grade: ..... Premium
RPM @ 65 mph* / rev limiter: ..... n/a/8000	High/low/avg. mpg: ..... 73.4/64.5/67.1
*actual, not indicated	
DIMENSIONS	MISCELLANEOUS
Wheelbase: ..... 53.5"	Instruments: ..... speedo, odometer, 2 tripmeters, clock, fuel gauge, coolant temp., battery voltage
Rake/trail: ..... 25.5°/3.7"	Indicators: ..... hi-beam, t/s, low fuel, EFI, oil pressure, service interval, check engine
Ground clearance: ..... 6.0"	MSRP: ..... \$4599
Seat height: ..... 31.6"	Routine service interval: ..... 6250 mi.
GVWR: ..... 802 lbs.	Valve adj. interval: ..... 12,500 mi.
Wet weight: ..... 357 lbs.	Warranty: ..... 12 months
Carrying capacity: ..... 445 lbs.	Colors: ..... Excalibur Gray, Shot Gray, Couture Blue, Moka Black
SUSPENSION	
Front: ..... 35mm telescopic forks, non-adjustable, 3.9" travel	
Rear: ..... Double hydraulic shock, adj. preload, 3.2" travel	
BRAKES	
Front: ..... dual 260mm discs, two-piston floating calipers	
Rear: ..... 220mm disc, single-piston caliper	
TIRES & WHEELS	
Front: ..... 120/70-15 Maxxis 63P on 2.75" x 15" wheel	
Rear: ..... 130/80-15 Maxxis 56P on 3.00" x 15" wheel	

