

2011 Honda PCX

Quick, Light & Priced Right
by Scott Rousseau



AT FIRST GLANCE, it might be difficult to gauge the importance of Honda's all-new PCX (125cc) scooter in the marketplace, but the PCX's reason for being is much clearer when one considers that of the approximately 14.5 million two-wheelers sold worldwide by Honda Motor Corporation each year, 55% of them are scooters—a significant market, to be sure—with the mid-displacement segment ranking second in popularity only to the 50cc-and under segment.

The PCX is the first two-wheeler to be designated by Honda as a 2011 model, and it is one of a handful of Honda models to be sold in every market in the world. It's also the first American-bound two-wheeler to be produced in Honda's Thailand factory. Naturally, the PCX is being heavily marketed to newcomers to the sport of motorcycling—Honda projects a full 60% of PCX owners will be first-time buyers.

Engine & Transmission

First-timers probably aren't interested in complex technology, and the PCX's liquid-cooled, SOHC, fuel-injected 125cc four-stroke single-cylinder motor places emphasis on proven engineering with an eye toward spirited performance and fuel efficiency. Its two-valve head, mild 11.0:1 compression ratio and undersquare 52.4mm x 57.9mm bore and stroke offer plenty of performance and excellent fuel economy. Utilizing Honda's Programmed Fuel Injection technology (PGM-FI) gives the PCX instantaneous and linear throttle response, offering plenty of get-up-and-go while maintaining a claimed 110 mpg, compared to "only" 100 mpg from its slightly smaller sister, the Elite 110. With a 1.6-gal. fuel tank, that means that the PCX is good for about 176 miles between fill-ups.

Like all of Honda's scooters, the PCX transmits its power through a Honda V-Matic belt-driven torque converter automatic transmission, making for true gas-it-and-go simplicity.

Chassis & Suspension

Beneath the PCX's sharply styled bodywork lies a steel chassis with a 51.4" wheelbase, a 27° rake and 3.4" of trail. In order to lower the 280-lb. (claimed curb weight) PCX's CofG, its fuel tank is located under the floorboard. Its 31mm hydraulic front fork provides 3.5" of suspension travel, while Honda's single-shock Unit Swingarm rear suspension boasts just 2.9" of travel.

Scooting around town aboard the PCX is great fun. It feels light and steers quickly but exhibits excellent straight-line stability, and its suspension is plush and controlled at any speed its little 125cc single can muster. The PCX's analog speedometer registered an indicated 60 mph several times (even though, since it displaces under 150cc, it isn't freeway-legal), and we never encountered any pavement undulations that were rough enough to induce headshake.

Wheels, Tires & Brakes

The PCX's 14" five-spoke cast aluminum wheels and IRC SS-560 tires (90/90-14 front and 100/90-14 rear) clearly have a positive influence on its handling. Compared to the 12" wheels on the Elite 110, the larger diameter hoops offer plenty of traction and road feel, minimizing the toylike feel exhibited by scooters with smaller wheels.

Like the Elite 110, the PCX uses Honda's Combined Braking System (CBS) that is linked rear-to-front only. Its single 220mm front disc brake is clamped by a Nissin hydraulic three-piston caliper that operates independently of the drum rear brake when the throttle-side brake lever is applied. Applying the lever on the left handlebar activates the CBS, which applies one piston on the front caliper. In an effort to balance the system, Honda has incorporated a delay spring into the front caliper that will not allow activation of the front brake before the rear drum is applied. Our experience when riding the PCX was that the front disc's power is merely adequate when applied by itself, while applying the rear and the front together produced excellent stopping power without compromising feel, making it unnecessary to even apply the right brake lever—a good thing, as most riders will probably apply the brakes in this manner anyway.

Ergonomics & Instruments

The PCX is as user-friendly as any scooter on the market. Sure, it lacks the full step-through design of the Elite 110, but the PCX's seat height is a fairly low 29.9", making for easy mounting and dismounting, and the seat itself is comfortable and also long enough to carry a passenger, something the PCX can clearly handle, as it boasts a maximum weight capacity of 348 lbs. Its handlebar is also well-placed, enhancing the PCX's riding position.

The PCX offers only a small storage compartment under the dash, but its 25-liter underseat storage is generous, offering enough space to swallow a full-face helmet while leaving plenty of room for other various sundries. There is also a lockable helmet hook under the seat. We also like the fact that the PCX incorporates both a sidestand and a centerstand, which offers more flexibility when parking as well as loading and unloading stored items.

The PCX's instrumentation is rather sparse, offering only an analog speedometer, fuel gauge, an odometer and a single trip-meter, along with water temperature and "check engine" indicator lights. We think it's time that Honda (or another manufacturer) seriously up the value of its scooters by offering some sort of navigation system, which would be really useful in urban confines.

Bottom Line

The PCX is available in Pearl White or Candy Red with an MSRP of \$3399, which includes a transferable one-year, unlimited-mileage limited warranty. It's a solid performer that packs a lot of utility into a sleek, stylish package that should prove to be attractive to first-time buyers. But even if you're an experienced rider who spends most of your time on surface streets while moving about town, the PCX could be the hot ticket. Hmm, perhaps it's time for scooter shootout in MCN! 