

Picking your first scooter.

It's fair to say that the majority of Australians purchasing motor scooters have never owned or ridden one before. And it's a significant enough investment to want to make the right choice. Even as recently as two years ago the market was fairly limited, however since then the number of scooters on Australian roads is growing faster than any other type of road vehicle, and the variety of scooters now available has exploded too. Selecting the right one when there is such a wide choice might seem a bit daunting. However, there are ways to narrow the choice to a more manageable shortlist. This will make your final selection much easier. So what are the key things that you should be thinking about?

Step 1 - Purpose

Firstly, you need to assess what you will use the scooter for. If you are only going to be going relatively short distances, a 50cc machine may be more than adequate. If you intend to commute longer distances on major roads or freeways, then you'll need something with a bit more grunt, and should consider something with a larger engine, say a 125 or a 200cc. If it's for long distance touring in comfort, you may want something larger still. Will there be times that you need to take a passenger? If so, you'll need to ensure that the scooter is properly set up to take a pillion, as some are single seaters. Once you have worked out what you want to use your scooter for, move onto the next step.

Licensing determines what you are legally permitted to ride. In some states, you can ride a "moped", that is an automatic 2 wheeler under 50cc, on a car license, otherwise you will need some form of motorbike license. Check the licensing section at the back of this magazine for the rules in your state. If you do need to get an additional license to ride the class of scooter that matches your needs, you may be able to get an automatic only version - same test, but much easier to learn to master the controls of a scooter than a fully-fledged motorbike. An automatic license will restrict you to only automatic motorbikes and scooters, but if that's all you intend to ride, then you won't need a full one.

If you can manage it, try to get the right license before you buy your scooter, as if you do want to test ride you will almost certainly need the license to do so. Information about licensing is available from your local licensing board, however our experience is that if you want to get consistently accurate answers, a motorbike instructor is probably a far better source on what you can and cannot do. And if you haven't ridden before then sorting out a few lessons at the same time is an excellent idea!

The biggest mistake that people seem to make, particularly in states where you can drive them on a car license, is to get a 50cc scooter because they don't want to sit another test. Whilst a 50cc will feel extremely zippy for the first couple of weeks, it will feel slower as you get used to riding. If bought to travel longer distances and on main roads, rather than just local travel, it may very quickly

become frustrating to ride. Pick the right tools for the job you want it to do, and get appropriately trained and licensed to use them.

Step 2 – New or used.

Decision point 2. New or used. There are no easy answers on this one, however certainly in WA the used scooter market is very buoyant. Second-hand machines are fairly scarce so prices are relatively high. Before you consider second-hand, are you confident that you know enough about the machine to stop you buying a turkey? And are you sure that the previous rider is the middle aged man you are talking to on the phone, or was it his 16 year old son? We have recently seen a couple of pre-owned machines come in to the workshop which looked as good as new but one had bent forks, and the other a seizing top-end. In both cases the cost of repairs nearly equalled the money they had saved by buying a “pre-loved” vehicle. If you want to get an industry estimate on the scooters value, look it up in the Red Book – www.redbook.com.au – it may help you to get the scooter at a lower price.

With a new scooter you get the safeguards that come with any new vehicle, particularly the warranty cover – and you get to pick the colour you want! So consider the price difference and decide whether you think that it’s worth it – but remember that difference may only be a few hundred dollars.

Step 3 - Shortlist

Now that we know what size of scooter we are after, you need to know the brands that might meet your needs. There is no better way of finding out what is available in Australia than buying the latest edition of Two Wheels Scooter, and checking the Scooter Listing section. Additionally manufacturer’s websites will let you check out what the different models look like and further specifications. But you do need to know what brands are available locally. There is no point setting your heart on a Yamaha Aerox if there isn’t a dealer in town. Yellow Pages (particularly online) is a good source of up-to-date info – and there is no harm in asking any scooter rider you bump into where they got there’s from.

So now that you have short listed the brands you are interested in, you need to check out the dealers. You will require after sales support, and you may not want to have to travel too far to get it. So check out who the local dealers are, and what brands they stock. Ascertain how helpful the dealers are, and what services they provide. If you are new to the scooter game, you may have a number of queries over your first few months of ownership, so you need to check how much help they can provide, and how willing they are to provide it. Also check that they will let you take the scooters out for a proper test-ride – and I don’t just mean in the car-park, but out on the streets. If you haven’t ridden a scooter before, make sure that they show you how – you won’t get a better test of their willingness to assist than this!

Be wary of dealers who knock the competitor's products which they don't sell, but do ask them about the differences between the brands that they do sell. Is the dealer a scooter specialist, or are they a sideline for motorcycles or cars? How long have they been in business, and been selling and servicing the scooters that you are interested in? (However, remember that the scooter market has only really been establishing in Australia over the last three or four years – but a year is considerably more than 2 months!). The more reassurance you get that you won't be left high-and-dry once you have made your purchase, the better.

If you are going to buy a used scooter then these can be bought either through dealers or the general public. As with cars, dealers used vehicles will be pricier than those from the general public, but you generally have at least a chance of comeback if things go wrong! Scooters are usually advertised in the motorbike sections of newspapers, so that's the best place to look, if that's the route you intend to follow. And whilst you aren't necessarily buying from a dealer, make sure that there is one who can help you look after your purchase once you have bought it.

Step 4 - Budget

Fourthly budget. How much money do you want to spend? You will pay more for scooters manufactured in Europe and Japan than from Asia, though this can be as much about higher production, import costs and branding as about manufacturing quality. But confirm what level of warranty cover comes with the scooter, whether that includes parts and labour, and any exclusions. Also check whether any running-in services are included in the price, or are they extra and if so how much? Also consider what accessories you will need. You'll certainly need a helmet. But what about other protective wear, a topbox, security devices and insurance? If your total budget is fixed, you may want to look at less expensive models so that you can afford all that you need.

Watch out for dealers who advertise and discuss only the vehicle price. There are dealer delivery and on-road costs too which will bump up the final cost by a few hundred dollars, and some dealers have been known to omit telling you these until you are sitting down and writing out the contract. The price you need to know is the "driveaway" or "rideaway" price, as that is what you will be paying. So make sure the dealer tells you it before you make your mind up.

Also be wary of cut-price bargains. Find out why the dealer is selling that machine for a chunk less than the normal retail price. Are they going out of business? Have they lost that dealership? You might find yourself stranded, unable to get the parts that you need to keep your machine on the road.

Check what features come as standard, and what you might have to pay extra for. I recently arranged insurance for a customer who had bought his scooter from another dealer. Having already bought a rather expensive 50cc machine, he had been surprised that to add a topbox he had first to purchase a rack for

\$300 before shelling out another \$200 for the actual box. Think about future purchases and find out their costs before you buy.

Then there are the running costs. What does a year's registration cost? What is the cost of a normal service? What about the cost of a typical repair, for example to change a punctured rear tyre, or a new brake disk and pads? How much will the scooter's value depreciate? What's the fuel economy? For the most part, and one of the true joys of motor-scooters, is that the big cost is the initial outlay, and thereafter it's a massively economical and fun way to get around.

Ask lots of questions, and remember there is no such thing as a stupid one. Most scooter purchasers have never bought one before, so get advice from as many people as you can. If you write down your criteria as a list, then it will be much easier to compare models.

Step 5 – Try 'Em For Size

Ok. So you've checked out the scooters that meet your requirements, are within your current and ongoing price range, and can be bought from a dealer that you trust, or that you can find second-hand.

So with your much reduced list, get out there and start trying them out. Make sure that you can get the scooter up on the full-stand by yourself, and you can get at least one foot on the ground when you stop. When you are riding, check that you can steer easily without bumping your knees, particularly for taller riders! Ensure that pick up is good and that top speeds are what you have been told, and that the brakes stop you effectively. Finally check that if you do want to take a pillion that they will be able to fit on the scooter with you, as some may be a squeeze.

I can't stress enough the importance of the test-ride, as scooters do handle very differently due to a number of factors including wheel size and frame length, and finding one that you feel comfortable riding is extremely important. You'll quickly know what you prefer to ride, and don't feel intimidated about asking for a second or even third test ride. A good dealer wants you to make the right decision too.

Step 6 – Make your Mind Up Time!

Ok. By now we are nearly done, its getting close to decision time. Weigh up all the criteria, and by a process of elimination determine the scooter that meets them.

Alternatively, do what many customers do – which is skip directly to the final stage. Choose the scooter that you like the look of, pick the colour that matches your personality, sign the contract, pay the money and off you go!

Happy hunting!

Published in early 2006, this article seems just as relevant today as it was then. There is a lot of information, but also misinformation circulated about scooters, but if you follow the steps you should manage to select something that's appropriate for your needs. But don't read this article in isolation – read [Picking the Right Scooter Revisited](#) too!

Our over-riding mission at Ace Scooters is to get more people onto scooters – sure, preferably from us – but most importantly just getting bums on seats! The more people riding scooters, the better it is for everyone, but to keep people on scooters, it really makes a difference if their first one is the right first one!