

# ROAD

**NEW BIKER FRIENDLY**



✦ **HONDA CBR125R 85%**

# Less cash

Honda tries to get teens back on bikes with bargain CBR

**T**HE CBR125R is arguably the most important bike Honda will launch this year – possibly this decade.

With fewer and fewer youngsters getting into bikes, the world's number one bike manufacturer has launched the CBR as a cool, entry-level sports learner bike at a competitive price – the CBR125 costs just £2349.

The styling is typical Honda: modern, flash and very corporate with the Honda Wing logo incorporated into the design. And with good reason. This may be a 124.7cc tiddler, but apart from the can it could be mistaken for a CBR600RR or FireBlade. The 125 would pull off the big

bike look, too, if it wasn't so physically small in the first place.

While other 125s are often full sized machines cradling tiny little engines, the CBR makes no bones about its diminutive capacity. With an ultra-low seat height of 765mm, an anorexic 100/80 x 17 rear tyre (which is skinnier than most modern sportsbike front hoops) and spindly forks, the new Honda looks almost under-engineered. And its slight overall

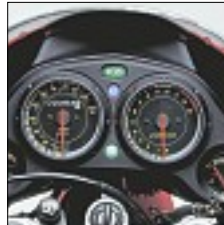
dimensions will be, to some, the biggest factor counting against it: the Honda badge and CBR tag alone might not be enough when it comes to chip shop posing.

Of course, if you are on the small side, say around 5ft 4in, you'll look fine. Women, in particular, will be enamoured by the CBR125's unthreatening size. But, if you've the build of the Jolly Green Giant, frankly you'll look ridiculous.

But size isn't everything and those teeny proportions also mean that the CBR is light. At 115kg the new machine is 19kg less than the old NSR125 learner



**BRAKES** are stylish enough and novice-friendly, too



**FROM** this angle you'd never guess it was a £2000 125...

BY MATT WILDEE PICTURES JASON CRITCHELL



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# for starters...

bike and that's a big attraction to potential novice buyers.

The lack of bulk means that you always feel in control of the CBR – and its low seat height means that there will be none of the low speed drops that happen to all of us in the first few months of riding. You'd struggle to do your CBT or a full test on an Aprilia RS125 because of its large turning circle and tall seat, but you should absolutely breeze through it on a CBR.

Low weight also means that the CBR's performance is, if not exactly impressive, it is at least decent for first timers. Odd though it sounds, that four-stroke motor is a

screamer. Initial throttle openings may give the same slow, gentle pull-away as a regular commuter 125, but dial up 8000rpm on the rev counter and it finds a near two-stroke style powerband that lasts all the way to the 12,000rpm limiter.

Keep the little Honda in this sweet spot and the CBR is easily quick enough to out-drag traffic. The best we saw on the speedo was 81mph in fifth gear. (Sixth gear is all but redundant, unless downhill racing with your mates).

On the downside, the gearbox ratios are a little oddly spaced and the change is very notchy – although in its defence our test bike

was barely run-in.

Handling is good. The CBR is sufficiently nimble to flick in and out of traffic with ease and nor does it have the bouncy, pogo-stick suspension so typical of cheap learner sports bikes.

Outright corner speed is down to which tyres you have fitted. Half the bikes on the launch were equipped with grip-laden Bridgestone BT395S, the rest with budget Far Eastern equivalents. Haggle with your dealer to fit the Bridgestones to your bike – designed for production racing, they offer excellent levels of grip and are good in both the wet and dry.

It is also well equipped. The dash has all the dials you need, including fuel gauge; there is decent underseat storage; build quality is respectable (although castings on the handlebars and footrest hangers are crude).

But for a racer-replica with decent equipment which is over £1000 cheaper than the opposition (see right), I'm not complaining and those are also the main reasons why Honda could be on to a winner. The icing on the cake is that the CBR also has decent performance and is very learner-friendly.

Just make sure you are the right size for it...

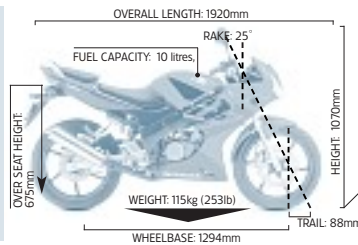


**TOP styling belies the CBR's target first-bike market**

## HONDA CBR125R £2349

**Available:** Now. 12 months manufacturer's warranty, 12 months AA breakdown recovery.

**Colours:** Red, blue, black  
**New for 2004:** New model  
**Insurance group:** 6  
**Info:** Honda UK  
0845-2008000



### SPECIFICATION:

**Engine:** Liquid-cooled, 1247cc (58 x 47mm) 2v SOHC 4-stroke. 28mm carb. Six gears  
**Chassis:** Steel twin spar  
**Front suspension:** 31mm telescopic fork, unadjustable  
**Rear suspension:** Single shock with rising-rate linkage, unadjustable  
**Tyres:** 80/90 x 17 front, 100/80 x 17 rear  
**Brakes:** Nissin, 276mm front disc with twin-piston sliding caliper, 220mm rear disc with single-piston caliper

**PROS** ● Easy to ride ● Excellent performance for a restricted bike ● Practical for a tiny race rep ● Good value for money  
**CONS** ● Too small for larger riders ● Build quality could be better ● Looks aren't as stunning as opposition

**85%**

## WORTH A GRAND MORE?

THE CBR makes a lot of sense. The four-stroke engine should prove to be reliable – and it's cheap, too. If all that's not enough for you, check out these flash-styled learner bikes...



### APRILIA RS125R

**Price:** £3672 **Top Speed:** 93mph **Insurance group:** 7  
THE ultimate 125 race-rep is capable of over 90mph in de-restricted form. A two-stroke needs careful maintenance, is expensive to run and insure and the razor-sharp handling can be intimidating for new riders.



### SACHS XT125S

**Price:** £3799 **Top Speed:** 80mph **Insurance group:** 7  
ONE of the best-looking 125s about, with its trellis frame, underseat exhaust and racy styling. Has a Yamaha 125cc four-stroke motor which is reliable but lacks Aprilia performance. Handles and brakes well.

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<b>Followed by 24 monthly payments of:</b>	£125
<b>Total amount payable:</b>	£4,995
<b>APR:</b>	0%

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