Honda Motor Co., the world’s leading motorcycle manufacturer, is developing a gas-electric motorcycle that would use a hybrid drivetrain much like the one in the [forthcoming Honda Insight](http://blog.wired.com/cars/2008/09/hondas-got-priu.html), and it could be in showrooms within two years.

Startups like [Zero Motorycles](NULL) and Brammo already offer electric motorcycles, but the major manufacturers have been slow to join the party because they’ve considered the engineering challenges too great for mass-market bikes. But [according to Japan’s Mainichi Times](http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20080927p2a00m0na020000c.html), Honda says it’s figured out how to make the drivetrains work without breaking the bank.

Not only does the company think it can make an electric engine small enough to fit in the narrow confines of a motorcycle frame, but it plans to offer full electric bikes as early as 2011.

The Times didn’t offer a lot of detail but says Honda will offer the hybrids in displacements ranging from 50 cc to 1,000 cc, and the gas-electric drivetrain will offer a 50 percent improvement in fuel economy. Sharing components with Honda’s hybrid cars will cut down on production costs.

The idea isn’t as crazy as it might sound. Both Honda and Yamaha are [working on electric motorcycles](http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssConsumerGoodsAndRetailNews/idUST33472320080911). Honda plans to use lithium-ion batteries that will provide a range of about 60 miles. Although that’s not nearly enough for a day of touring or canyon carving, it’s more than enough for commuting around town. Yanking the gasoline engine out of something like the Cub — the [best-selling vehicle ever](http://blog.wired.com/cars/2008/05/honda-sells-its.html) — and replacing it with an electric motor seems like a no-brainer. Yamaha plans to have its e-bikes on the market by 2010.

It’ll be interesting to see what direction Honda takes with hybrid motorcycles. Will it go for maximum efficiency like the Insight, or will it use the torque provided by an electric motor to boost acceleration like Mercedes-Benz and BMW are doing with the [S 400 BlueHybrid](http://blog.wired.com/cars/2008/09/mercedes-big-hy.html) and [7-Series Active Hybrid](http://blog.wired.com/cars/2008/09/bmw-builds-a-ti.html) luxo-barges? And will we see a gas-electric version of the venerable Interceptor (pictured)?

Photo by Honda.