



THE VE SPA VNA IN DETAIL

by Ashley Lenton

The appearance of the 125cc VNA is very close to that of a clutch of other Vespas (VNB, VBA, VBB) that in Britain are collectively (but incorrectly) referred to as "Sportiques."

But it is the 125cc VNA that was the first of these to be introduced in 1958, which must therefore be credited with heralding a new era for Vespa. After twelve years of gentle evolution, the Piaggio design team had gone through every element of the Vespa design with a fine tooth comb. The result was a scooter that was lighter, slimmer, less complicated and cheaper to make than its predecessor. It was also much easier to work on and maintain.

Although the front of the frame was broadly similar to what had gone before, the rear was made in two halves with a flattened top that was clearly designed to have a dual seat fitted to it as standard. Ironically such a seat was normally fitted to this model only for some export markets. All large-size Vespa frames up to and including the Rally 200 can be considered developments of this one.

Changes in the engine unit were equally extensive. Most noticeable was that the

crankcase and engine bearer were now a single unit, thus saving weight, space, and expense. The carburetor was now located directly above the cylinder, thus rendering the characteristic access hatch between the rider's legs obsolete. The bolt-on gear selector was completely redesigned and for the first time completely enclosed. Finally there was a two-piece streamlined headset made out of pressed steel incorporating both the speedometer and the headlight. The latter finally moved from the fender on the Piaggio built 125cc models, though of course those made in Britain and France had them on the handlebars for years.

Despite the practicality of the headset (changing cables suddenly became a pleasure) this was the one feature that did not endure on subsequent Vespas until being revived on the P range in 1977. Speedometers were still not compulsory in Italy, so it was possible to buy this model with a headset that did not incorporate one.

The 152L2 Douglas VNA

Douglas Vespas built prior to introduction of the 152L2 can be considered to have been

genuinely manufactured in Britain. Many of the body pressings were made by Pressed Steel in Birmingham, all manner of castings including all major items such as the engine bearer were cast in the Douglas foundry. Lucas provided the electrics, Amal the carburetor and so on. The introduction of the 152L2 changed all of this since Douglas had no money to re-tool, despite having been bought by Westinghouse and thus taken out of receivership. The new model (and the subsequent Sportique) was consequently more assembled than manufactured, and used a Dell'Orto carburetor and Siemens electrics just like the Italian original. The only real differences were the option of a German-made dual seat and a wider range of colors. Initially these comprised Regal Red, August Blue, Coral Cream, and Minerva Grey. Later on Lilac and a very dark blue were added.

The 152L2 was introduced in April, 1958, a whole year after the VNA came out in Italy. During the summer of 1958 demand for scooters in Britain reached an all time peak causing Douglas to supplement stocks of the 152L2 with VNAs from Pontedera. The closeness of the specifications of the two models allowed the Italian version to also be sold as a "142L2."

The VNA/142L2 is a textbook example of a successful redesign of an already successful product. It was lighter, cheaper to make, and easier to work on. The current PX 125/PX 150 motor is a direct descendent of this engine (the PX 200 engine is based on the larger block of the GS 160 via the SS and the Rally).

Paradoxically, it is not the most fashionable Vespa to restore at the moment, people tending to want either the "Roman Holiday" look of the earlier 125cc models or the performance and styling of the GS, SS, etc. But none of this can detract from the fact that the VNA (and its VNB successor) was hugely successful in its own time, both in terms of sales and as a design exercise.

VNA Production

VNA1 01001 - VNA1 068031
(67,031 units)

VNA2 68032 - VNA2 116431
(48,400 units)

Total 115,431 units

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