

BUYING A FAR EAST IMPORT?

I have had the privilege of providing dating certificates for the VVC and VCB since the beginning of 2006 and so far have issued 290 certificates. The majority of machines requiring 'validation' are now coming from Bali, Vietnam and Indonesia. All these machines have one thing in common - they claim to be original Italian machines.

The purpose of writing this message is to encourage anyone tempted to buy a machine from these sources to obtain advice from someone with experience of genuine Italian machines before parting with their money.

When buying one of these machines there are a few key points to be considered: -

Most of the machines (about 85% in my experience) have had the VIN number (whole or in part) re-stamped, over-stamped or replaced with the VIN from another machine. This is achieved by cutting the VIN from one body and inserting it in another - sometimes a totally inappropriate model.

If these machines are original and Italian why is it necessary to re-stamp or re-create a number?

Some of the re-stamping is very sophisticated and includes the stars and Piaggio Logos.

Much of the bodywork can have welded seams in the most unlikely places and 'cut and shut' techniques are regularly employed to the degree that it is

impossible to determine how much of the chassis is original. The craftsmanship, on the surface, is good but large amounts of filler can be found.

Most of the scooters that have a seam or joint running longitudinally have a flat number plate area at the rear of the machine. This includes models that should have a rounded number plate area. Ask yourself and the vendor WHY?

Many machines are modified to a degree that would require an Engineers Certificate or Single Vehicle Approval from the DVLA if it had 3 or 4 wheels.

Few people have had a good mechanical experience with these machines but you hear very little of peoples traumas. Perhaps because the victims are too embarrassed to admit to them.

Many of the machine are converted from 8 inch to 10-inch wheels. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but careful examination of this modification is recommended.

Another question worth asking is whether the Dealer has Product Liability Insurance. This

is mandatory when selling a product purchased from outside the EEC.

If the answer is 'No' or 'What is that?' you are probably better advised to go to a dealer that has.

There are of course many individuals buying one or two machines at time for resale and they will never admit to being dealers.

Buying direct from the Far East seems to hold the most pitfalls. Some vendors offer the sight of the chassis number but few include the prefix. Ask yourself and the seller WHY? Unless there is a prefix the machine cannot be dated.

Once you have taken delivery from a UK port it is difficult or impossible to get your money back.

Careful perusal of the terms and conditions can be rewarding. One eBay dealer insists that if you are unhappy with your purchase, in order to obtain a refund, you must return the machine to Vietnam within 7 days. The same Dealer requires 2-4 week to deliver to a UK Port. I doubt that complaints to EBay about unfair terms will get you very far.

Advertisements for 'Replica' machines have uncovered the fact that Vespa frames are being manufactured in Vietnam, which may explain why so many do not have original VIN stamping. These should be avoided because they cannot be dated and if the Import Documents state the year of manufacture as 2007, the machine is liable to Import Duty and VAT. If they state an earlier date and this is discovered by the Customs & Excise, the penalties are severe.

If buying a Far East Import from a UK dealer, insist that they obtain a Dating certificate and an MOT before taking delivery. If they agree to this ask them to have the machine registered. This will cost a little more but is worth it for the peace of mind.

Many of the dealers selling machines imported from the Far East have backgrounds in Double Glazing or Mobile Phones and simply move from business to business that offer easy pickings.

It is possible to get a bargain from these imported machines - but the odds are against it.

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