

THE VESPA VNA 125cc IN DETAIL



VNA1	VNA1 01001 – VNA1 068031	67031
VNA2	VNA2 68032 - VNA2 116431	48400

TOTAL 115431 UNITS

The appearance of the 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 is the 125 cc VNA that was the first of these to be introduced in 1958, and which must therefore be credited with heralding in 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 toothcomb. The result was a scooter that was lighter, quicker, 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 to be developments of this one.

Changes to 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 expence. The carb 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 incorporation both the speedo and the headlight. The latter thereby finally moving from the mudguard on Piaggio-built 125 CC models, though of course those made in Britain and France had had it 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. Speedos 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 the introduction of the 152L2 can be considered to have been genuinely manufactured in this country. Many of the body pressings were made by Pressed Steel in Birmingham, all manner of castings including major items such as the engine bearer were cast in the Douglas foundry, Lucas provided the electrics, Amal the carb and so on. The introduction of the 152L2 changed all 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 Dellorto carb and Siem electrics just like the Italian original. The only real differences were the option of a German-made dual seat and a wider range of colours. Initially these comprised of Regal Red, August Blue, Coral Cream and Minerva Grey. Later on lilac and a very dark blue were added.

The 152 L2 was introduced in April 1958, a whole year after the VNA came out in Italy. During the summer of 1959 demand for scooters in the UK reached an all-time peak causing Douglas to top up 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 "152L2"

The VNA /152 L2 is a textbook example of a successful redesign of an already successful product. It was lighter, faster, cheaper to make and easier to work on. The current PX125/150 motor is a direct descendent of this engine (the P200 engine is based on the larger block of the GS160 via the SS and the Rally).

Paradoxically, it is possibly not the most fashionable Vespa to restore at the moment, people tending to want either "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 -see Journal 5) were hugely successful in its own time both in terms of sales and as a design exercise.

(152) Early 152L2s seem to have been finished off with anything lying around at Kingswood. Note GL2 rear light and number plate holder and 92L2 dual seat.