



THE 50 SPECIAL IN DETAIL

V5A2	V5A2T 1001 – V5A2T 96013	95013
V5B1	V5B1T 1001 – V5B1T 95671	94671
V5B3	V5B3T 1001 - V5B3T 565056	564056

Electric Start Versions

V5A3	V5A3T 1001 – V5A3T 5704	4704
V5B2	V5B2T 1001 - V5B2T 3667	2667
V5B4	V5B4T 1001 - V5B4T 1533	533

Total Production 761644 Units

As the sixties progressed, and the average age of a new scooter owner went down and down, so it became imperative to milk the 50cc market for all it was worth. Vespa and Lambretta were still competitors. Sales of larger scooters were dropping all the time. It was clear that whoever had the better small-frame range would be the survivor. The standard Vespa 50- complete with nine-inch wheels - had been a huge sales success. But there was clearly room for something slightly up market to snare the fashion conscious sixteen year old.

So, as 1969 dawned, enter the 50 Special. Ten-inch wheels, a flashy horn casting and headset, separate finned hubs just like the bigger models, and a wide range of colours. Did they go for it? Of course they did! By the time production finished in 1982 more than three quarters of a million had passed through Pontadera's production lines. And this was in addition to the regular 50cc model that continued in production.

There were a few developments along the way. The original V5A2 of '69 kept the nine-inch wheels of the basic model. In 1972 it was replaced with the V5B1, which

had the ten-inch wheels and hubs of the Primavera. The badging was updated at this point. In 1975 this was in turn replaced by the V5B3 which had a four-speed gearbox.

For much of the time there was an electric start option. The “Elestart” variant had a modified chassis with an access hatch on the left that housed two 6v batteries to drive the Bosch starter motor. In all other respects, though, the Elestart was the same as the normal 50 Special – even down to being made in the same colours. Developments of the two versions were concurrent, so the V5A3 is the original Elestart from 1969 with nine-inch wheels; the V5B2 from '72 has ten-inch wheels, and the V5B4 from 1975 has the four-speed gearbox. In fact, very few Elestarts were actually sold despite being available until the late seventies.

The 50 Special, though, must be considered one of Vespa’s greatest sales successes. Those tempted to turn their noses up at it should remember that it played a major part in keeping the Vespa Marque going in the seventies. When you consider that the combined sales of the Rally 180 and 200 in the period 1968 to 1977 were only seventy thousand or so, you can see just how important all those 50 Special sales must have been for Piaggio.

(CAPTIONS)

(special 1) The original V5A2 of 1969 with nine-inch wheels and old-style badge.

(special 2) The new “Vespa” badge introduced for the V5B1 in 1972

(special 3) The unique headset for this model. No speedo was fitted for the Italian market

(special 4) Elestart battery arrangement.

(special 5) Rear view of the Elestart showing the battery access hatch.