

THE VESPA 50N 1963-71 IN DETAIL

50N V5A1T 1001 – 283299 = 282299 Units

The Vespa 50N was the basic 50cc model introduced in 1963, intended primarily to be sold in large quantities to Italian youths who could ride such a vehicle from the age of fourteen upwards with no licence or vehicle registration.

Introduced alongside a slightly better equipped 90cc version, the 50N was a complete revision of the existing Vespa design featuring side panels that were integral with the monocoque. This involved fewer pressings, meaning less cost and less weight. The piston was inclined allowing for a shorter wheelbase, while the front suspension was a miniaturised version of the GS160 layout with combined spring and damper. The bodywork – with pronounced ridges in the sides and on the mudguard – defined Vespa style for years to come.

The 50N was an immediate success, an entire extended family of Vespas evolving from its basic design. In fact the “N” moniker does not seem to have been always applied until 1965. Presumably its adoption was to distinguish this model from a proliferation of other 50cc Vespas. With such a long production run, naturally there were a few changes along the way. The wheels changed from body colour to silver in 1964, followed by the steering column and flywheel cover in early 1965. At the same time the rear light – which rather resembled a scaled-down Vespa 90 item - was replaced with a much simpler plastic version. In common with larger engined models, the size of the engine hatch was increased later in 1965 while the new Piaggio front badge dates from October 1967. The legshield “Vespa” script was given a black finish at the same time. From this same date a slight increase in the frame length has been recorded, though it is not quite clear in which part of the frame this was effected. The original colour was a kind of pea green, but over the next eight years this Vespa was finished in a wide variety of colours.

Other than the original 98cc model, the Vespa 50N has a fair claim to be considered the most important Vespa ever made. If utilitarianism is defined as function predominating over decoration – but without sacrificing good design or quality – then this is possibly Pontadera’s best effort. As much as everybody loves a GS, the fact remains that the original intention behind the Vespa was that of mass transportation. By the end of 1971 the 50N and its derivatives (50L, 50R, 50S and 50 Special) had sold more than 600,000 units. This compares to around 140,000 Lambretta 50cc models sold in the same time frame. In a battle for survival in which there could be only one winner this was surely a knockout blow. The 50N simply had to be the best. D’Ascanio, with his final design, ensured that it was.



1963 spec with small hatch and body-coloured flywheel cover and wheels



By early 1965 there was a simpler rear light and the wheels and flywheel cover were silver



The larger engine hatch was fitted from late 1965 onwards