



THE VESPA SPORTIQUE IN DETAIL

The Sportique was the last model produced by Douglas. Having built (almost) exclusively 125 cc Vespas up to this point, the decision was made to build a version of the latest standard 150 cc Piaggio model – the VBB (see Journal 7). The Sportique was sold against the background of a declining commuter market, which eventually diminished to the point where the maintenance of manufacturing facilities could not be justified.

This perhaps explains why so much marketing effort was made - the name “Sportique” being applied to make it stand out from the crowd. Previously Douglas had marked their machines simply as “Vespa 125s”. Other marketing ploys were to create “special editions” which had metallic paint finishes and accessories as standard. These were partly aimed at the healthy Mod market, which was buying up considerable numbers of the GS – a model that was, however, imported from Piaggio. The Sportique, by the way, was available in more colours than possibly any other contemporary scooter.

Actually, it is rather a moot point as to how much actual Vespa manufacturing – as opposed to assembling – was being carried out by the sixties. The original Douglas Vespa was very much a British made product. Many of the pressings were made by Pressed Steel in Birmingham, Douglas’ own foundry provided a number of the castings, Amal provided the carbs, Smiths the speedo and Lucas the electrics. Over a period of time –and especially following the introduction of the 152L2 in 1959 – the level of local content sharply declined. The Sportique has electrics, carb etc that are the same as its Italian made counterpart. It doesn’t appear that the Douglas foundry was kept very busy by production of this model either.

As a consequence the Sportique differed only in detail from the VBB. Tyres, paint colours, silver painted wheels, badges and a dual seat made by the same German company that had supplied Messerschmitt with theirs. The Sportique, despite being in production for over four years, underwent very few changes (other than colours) and looked much the same from start to finish. The major change was a revised rear pressing (from the GL, introduced by Piaggio the previous year) in 1963 that incorporated the rear number plate holder. Early models sometimes turn up with mudguards with no indentations in them, and even with old-style black horns. However, this was probably just a case of Douglas using up items left over from 152L2 production. Minor mechanical changes included a new choke mechanism and rectifier. Douglas at one point went through a two-tone seat phase on red, blue and green versions, and also briefly tried grey floor rubbers.

The Sportique has a relatively modest power output for its capacity, but this has the consequence that the engine is almost unburstable. The manoeuvrability afforded by small eight-inch wheels, combined with exceptional reliability, made the Sportique the ideal commuter vehicle of its day in much the same way that the ET4 is today.

During its final phase of production, Douglas had trouble shifting Sportiques – obliging them to stockpile completed examples on the company sports ground. Generally speaking, the Sportique has tended to live in the shadow of the GS. However, then current mania for importing has rather drawn attention to the fact that there are no actual Sportiques to import, and consequently it is fairly rare. Almost all the “Sportiques” that you see advertised turn out to be imported VBBs or VNBs. Unlike these models, the Sportique was never fitted with GS160 style panel trims. This model represents the final manifestation of the Douglas-Vespa, and when it ceased production many a dream died with it.

Colour Schemes

British Racing Green
Wessex Red (The most popular colour)
Portland White
Lavender (1961–2 only)
Alpine Blue (the only colour available during the whole production run)
Cornflower Blue
Lime Yellow
Magenta Violet (1964-5 only)
Polychromatic Silver (Grand Lux and Supreme only)
Polychromatic Bahama Gold (Grand Lux only)
Polychromatic maroon (Grand Tourer only)

Grand Lux

Spec included rear crash bars, double legshield trim and front bumper.

Supreme

Spec included chrome panels and mudguard, and chrome horn cover.

Grand Tourer

Spec included front and rear carriers, foot rests, double legshield trim and a flyscreen

Note: It is not possible to identify any of the special editions by chassis number

Sportique Trivia

- Princess Margaret owned a Sportique
- A Sportique featured in “Carry On Cabby”
- Steed and Mrs Peel rode a Sportique at the end of a 1965 edition of “The Avengers”
- The Sportique is the only Douglas Vespa to be featured in the 1965 Piaggio Calender.