

## The Vespa GL150 IN DETAIL

VLA 1 (GL)

VLA1T 01001 - VLA1T 080855

Total 79855 units

In the course of Vespa of history every so often a new model comes along that can be seen as a break with what has gone before, and which sets the style for the immediate future. A well-known example is the VNB of 1958 (152L2 in Britain) which introduced us to the integral crankcase/engine bearer and the “two halves” rear body construction. Less well known – but almost as important – is the GL150 of 1962 which set the pattern for large-frame Vespas right up until the introduction of the P range fifteen years later. But first it is necessary to go back in time a little to see how this model came about.

By the end of the fifties it was becoming apparent that there was a market for a scooter of average performance combined with the better handling afforded by ten inch wheels. No doubt mindful that Lambretta were on the verge of standardising their range with the larger wheel size, Piaggio made plans to have a standard model built with ten-inch wheels. Before they did so, however, the French licensee - ACMA - introduced the first GL in 1958 which resemble the Piaggio-built 150cc VB1 with larger wheels.

These wheels, though, were of the unusual nine-inch size. Presumably the hope was to retain some of the manoeuvrability of the eight-inch size whilst gaining the handling benefits of ten-inch wheels. This experiment does not seem to have been very successful since very few were sold (even accounting for it being on sale only in the French market) and during 1959 a new GL- with ten inch wheels complete with GS150 style separate finned hubs - made its debut. This was made by Piaggio themselves, and was based on the recently introduced VBA model complete with GS style headset and rear light. Curiously, Piaggio tried nine-inch wheels again a few years later with some of the 50cc models.

The VBA based GL received VBB style modifications in 1961- including the larger chromed rear light and indented mudguard and a four-speed gearbox. These GL models seem also to have had a fairly low-key existence. They do not appear to have been sold on the home market, and exports seem to have been limited to the Low Countries - though the Germans assembled their own version. Since the small-wheeled Vespas were still comfortably outselling the Lambretta LI in Italy, one imagines Piaggio thought best to leave well alone.

Towards the end of 1962 a new GL model was introduced, known as the VLA1. This model was available in Italy. Its most significant feature was its extensively revised frame. Piaggio were always on the lookout for reductions in manufacturing costs, and in addition the rounded styling of Vespas was perceived as looking less modern than the very angular series three Lambretta that had been introduced earlier that year.

The rear of the frame was squared off just below the rear light, allowing the number plate to be bolted directly onto it. This gave a cleaner, more modern look to the rear; while at the same time removing the cost of a separate number plate holder. The legshield pressings were slightly slimmer than before, and there was a new horn casting which was both wider and squarer. A new steering lock was fitted, which could be replaced without removing the headset and steering column—a great improvement. The new GL frame had a slimmer look than before, though in part this was an optical illusion caused by the wider horn casting.

The frame styling paved the way for all subsequent models, while the other distinctive new feature was the headset. The most obvious difference was the rectangular headlight, and this was another feature that found its way onto future Vespas, but equally significant was the fact that the underside of the headset was now exposed. Although this was less neat than the previous arrangement, it did allow easier access to the control cables.

The side panels and mudguard had rather self-conscious styling ridges in their sides. These were the first sign of a new Vespa "House Style" evolving; one that resulted in the sharp edges of the new Vespa 90 introduced later in 1963. Alloy trim pieces (often confused with those fitted of the GS160 but not actually the same) appeared on the sides. There was a new design of rear light, and a new dual seat (slightly deeper and narrower than the GS one), though the GL was often seen in Italy with just a single seat.

The net result of all these changes was a machine that was lighter, cheaper to make and slightly more practical than existing Vespas. At the time the styling was considered more modern too.

Around 80,000 GLs were sold. Although this is a respectable enough total, it is not much more than half the VBB 150s sold in the same time frame – suggesting that Piaggio were right to be wary of committing themselves totally to ten inch wheels as Lambretta had done. But the new design features of the GL were soon incorporated into the rest of the range. The squared off rear end reached the VBA, VBB and GS160 in 1963, and the following year the front half of the GL frame was mated to the back half of the GS160 to produce the SS180. After the demise of the GL in 1965 the frame was used almost unaltered in the Sprint, Super and GT models. Most GLs were made in ivory, but they can be found in a kind of beige colour as well.

The history of the GL in Britain is a bit peculiar to say the least. For most of its life it was not imported, Douglas presumably considering that it might take sales away from the home-produced Sportique. When Douglas stopped production of the latter in mid 1965 one might have expected them to have imported the rather similar VBB 150 (produced at Pontadera until 1966), but the GL was brought over instead. Possibly Douglas thought that the good sales of the LI 150 in Britain might indicate a preference in this country for larger wheels. However only a matter of weeks later Piaggio stopped production of the GL in favour of a facelifted version known as the Sprint— which Douglas imported as well. This meant that Douglas started selling the GL at almost the same time as its replacement, a ludicrous situation that lasted well into 1966 when stocks of the GL finally ran out.

Originally a fairly rare sight in this country, the British population of GLs has been swelled considerably in recent years by private imports. The engine spec is much like that of the Sportique, which means a steady rather than earth shattering performance but great reliability. The panels and mudguard are almost unique to this model and can be difficult to find new, but just about everything else is available.

(captions)

(gl01)

The GL150. It was always sold in this country with a dual seat.

(gl02)

The rather radical headlight was adopted by many subsequent Vespa models.

(gl03)

The new steering lock was a great improvement.