



THE PIAGGIO BUILT GS 160

VSB 1 Series 1 (1961)	VSB1T 001001 – VSB1T 0029970	28970
VSB 1 Series 2 (1963)	VSB1T 0029971 – VSB1T 0061000	31030

TOTAL 60000 UNITS

The GS 160 was developed from the new 125cc VNA model of 1958, in much the same way that the GS 150 evolved from earlier 125 models. Consequently, there are almost no common parts between the old and new GS other than the headset and the horn.

Whilst the engine design was clearly derived from that of the 1958 model 125, with the bearer and crankcase cast as one unit, it was stronger and larger. The new engine was designed with future capacity increases in mind, and was the basis for the power unit for the P200E. Having said that, it was not a rotary valve unit in its GS application – a little surprising since the 150cc VBA model (introduced two years earlier) had a rotary valve engine.

Although the power output was the same as for the GS 150, it was achieved for 1000 rpm less. This greatly reduced stress on the mechanical components and helped reliability.

The rear part of the frame was dimensionally similar to the 125, but the front leg shield pressings were more curved. The headset was identical to that of the GS150 VS5. A novel approach was taken towards the sighting of the spare wheel. The side panel that formerly housed the toolbox was made detachable, allowing the spare wheel to be housed inside it. This idea was a great success, and top-model Vespas have had their spare wheels situated there ever since.

As a consequence of this, the toolbox needed a new home. It was placed underneath the rear of the frame, with an opening just above the back light. This arrangement worked less well, the toolbox having to be shaped rather awkwardly around the rear wheel. The front suspension was completely new, the spring and damper now being combined in one large unit. When the Vespa 90 was introduced the following year, it featured a miniaturised version of this unit. It seemed for a moment that this type front suspension would be standardised on all Vespas, but, as it turned out, this was not to be the case.

Another change was that for the first time on a Vespa the wheel rims were symmetrical. At the time it was speculated that offset rims were not needed to counterbalance the engine installation, since the side-mounted spare wheel now did the job. This was never stated to be the case by Piaggio, and when the Rally was introduced in 1968 the offset rims [and the old suspension] returned with it despite retaining the side-mounted spare. Both the mudguard and the side panels were increased in size, and both featured alloy trim.

During 1963 a significantly revised version was introduced. Logically this should have been called the VSB2, but for some unaccountable reason it was designated the VSB1 Series 2. The frame and engine were still stamped "VSB1". The rear toolbox was too small, and the complicated pressings it required must have been costly to manufacture. A solution was found by relocating the toolbox to a position just in front of the rider's knees. Similar items had been available for some time from the accessory manufacturer Ulma, but its appearance on the GS160 established it as a standard fitting on the biggest Vespa models. The series 2 also featured a different air filter.

Although the Series 2 was only in production for eighteen months or so, there were a surprising amount of alterations made to it. A new steering lock was fitted, and this necessitated not only a new pressing dividing the legshields, but also a modified steering column. The toolbox lock was also changed, so the pressing of the toolbox lid had to be altered to accommodate it. The tubes running through the frame that carried the cables were deleted (to the relief of many), and the pressing for the battery tray was also changed. A batch of 500 models late in the production run had A.C. ignition.

The GS160 represents a high point in the story of the Vespa. The styling was at least as good as the preceding GS150, and it incorporated many design improvements which made it a much more practical machine to use. The GS160 was not as dominant in its market as its predecessor was since there was now some effective competition in the shape of the Lambretta TV series three. It remains, however, the supreme scootering symbol of its period. Piaggio made just under 60000. In addition, about 2500 were assembled in Germany, and a few kits sent out to New Zealand.

The GS 160 in Britain

The GS160 is possibly the scooter most closely associated with the mod era, and this has certain implications. For a start it means that the average condition (under a mountain of filler and a glossy paint) of surviving examples of those imported new to these shores is worse than just about any scooter. Battered legshields, dozens of holes drilled and rusted-out floors. And that's the good ones. Many of the better original mod 160s went out to Japan in the nineties, where they still reside. Fortunately, a good supply of original machines in reasonable condition existed in Italy. As most people are aware, a significant number (far outnumbering remaining original UK reg examples) have been brought over in the last few years. The word is that this supply is now almost exhausted.

Body spares have always been a problem, since the 160 is a bespoke scooter. Items such as the panels, mudguard and tool box were produced exclusively for it. Even the front suspension and wheel rims are shared only with the SS180. However, the influx of restorable machines from Italy has created a bigger demand for parts which has in turn improved the supply situation in many areas. Previously unobtainable things such as horns, legshield trim, seats, and wheel rims have been re-made and are freely available once again. However, new panel work has not so don't buy one without side panels.

Engines have never been a problem, the under-stressed 160 lump not being prone to shedding woodruff keys in the way the GS 150 does. The only weak area is the battery-start system. Unfortunately it is not possible to have sixties Italian style without sixties Italian electrics.