



### **THE VESPA P RANGE 1977-1982 IN DETAIL**

P200E	1977 –1981
PX200E	1981-1982
P150X	1978-1981
PX150E	1981-1982
P125X	1977-1981
PX125E	1981-1982

The introduction of the “P Range” (as all these models almost immediately became generically known) was the most major update of the “Big Frame” Vespa since 1958. As it turned out, it was the last. The engines were carried over unchanged from the preceding models. The P200E used the big block motor – originally designed for the GS160 of 1961 – in its late-Rally 200 guise with Ducati electronic ignition. The 125 cc and 150cc both used variations of the small block engine (which could trace its roots right back to the VNA of 1958) as most recently seen in the TS125 and Sprint Veloce respectively – meaning ignition points were still the order of the day.

The frame (identical for all three engine sizes) was almost entirely new, only the pressings between the rider’s feet remaining the same. The most obvious differences were the detachable horn casting (making cable changing almost a pleasure) and a rather angular rear end.

Just about everything attached to the frame (the engine aside) had been changed in some way. After years of faffing about, Piaggio decided to standardise a combined front spring and damper once and for all. Only this time it was firmly anchored to the back plate. This feature –combined with an extra 20 mm of suspension travel- finally eliminated the notorious Vespa front-end dive under breaking. The headset now had a detachable top (first seen on the VNA and VNB but discarded in 1961) to facilitate access while the panels were cut higher leading to the elimination of the characteristic cooling slats on the engine side. The seat was bigger, the break pedal pivoted underneath the frame (a la small frame) awhile the tool box was larger and mounted lower. Indicators (with 12 volt electrics to run them) were initially only an option, but became standardised fairly early on. Another old idea – auto lube – made reappearance, though initially as an option on the 200cc model only.

All this tells you the “what”, but does not explain why. Piaggio claimed with justification that the new models were a significant advance in handling, ride and ease of maintenance over the old ones. But all this new tooling was taking place against a background of severe cost inflation, so these new Vespas had to continue the trend seen since the late fifties of new design features incorporating reduced costs. Thus while the separate headset cover and horn casting did indeed improve access, their design also enabled these parts to be made in plastic....

Although some standardisation of parts between different models had been creeping in for years, there were still differences in the panel work and frame between a Sprint and a Rally for example. Now all these differences were eliminated in the interests of economies of scale, meaning that there was now effectively one Big Frame Vespa with three engine options. If you looked carefully, other bits of cost cutting could be detected. The chromed headlight rim had gone, and items such as the switchgear cover, fork link cover, and the cylinder cowling were all now plastic.

In 1981 the 150cc and 125 cc models received (at last!) electronic ignition, and all versions had more secure side panels with the release mechanisms under the seat. The model designations were harmonised to PX200E, PX150E and PX125E at this point. To the punters they were still the “P Range”, however. In 1982 there were further modifications to be dealt with at a later time. Piaggio also produced a few 80cc versions for certain export markets –mostly Germany.

Although there were inevitably rumblings of dissent at certain changes that continue to this day, overall the P Range has to be considered a great success. Built in very large numbers, it has formed the basis of scootering in Britain from its introduction to the present day. Although its very familiarity mitigates against it in some quarters, if you want to be certain of getting somewhere on a geared scooter then a P Range is easily your best bet. This Vespa could be said to have represented the soul of scootering for the last thirty years,