



THE VESPA PK50 AND PK50S 1982-86

PK 50 V5X1T 1101 – 17512 = 16,411 units

PK50S V5X2T 1102 – 221578 = 220,477 units

In 1982 Piaggio introduced a new “Small Frame” model supposedly to replace the original version that had served it so well since 1963, though in actual fact variants of the earlier design continued in production for selected export markets right until the end of the century. Initially there were only the two 50cc variants being discussed here plus a basic 125cc Primavera replacement. However, there soon followed 80 and 100cc models for export, an ET3 replacement plus automatic versions mainly for the home market. All of these will be covered later. The updating followed the format of the PX five years earlier. In other words the existing engines were inserted in a new frame featuring antidive front suspension and a detachable plastic headset top and horn casting.

Other notable features included a new “invisible” welding process for the frame, and a side mounted spare wheel- though the wheel itself was only an optional extra on the original 50cc models. The PK50S version had as standard indicators and a legshield mounted tool box.

By any objective criteria the PK range should be considered an improved version of its predecessor in terms of overall mechanical specification. The engines are the same, the front suspension better and access to cables and wiring much improved. And yet these models have somehow totally failed to capture the public imagination. Italian books tend to be especially scathing about the styling, despite the fact that the front is an almost perfect miniaturisation of the much lauded PX. The back panel, incorporating the rear light and number plate, is pretty much the same as the larger model too. This only leaves the shape of the integral side panels as being significantly different from the PX. Admittedly these are more angular, but are quite nicely integrated into the overall shape. Can this really be the difference between being a style icon and a bit of a dud?

Possibly the 1982 introduction date is significant. This was the very point at which organic styling was starting a comeback. The PX, with teardrop shaped side panels, reasonably easily met the new styling expectations. Its smaller brother, though, was out on a limb – and integral panels can’t be changed without expensively retooling the frame.

Of course, styling has now moved on again and the PK doesn't jar at all today. At least, not in its original form as seen here - Piaggio's later attempts to "improve" things now seem as desperate as they undoubtedly were.

It is true that later versions of the PK50 – and especially the automatic version - struggled to compete in terms of price/performance with the new emerging generation of "twist and go" automatics. But it's still hard to see why this last new conventionally engineered Vespa (if you discount the Cosa) doesn't have a better reputation than it does.