



### **THE VESPA RALLY 180 IN DETAIL**

VSD1 1968-72

VSD1T 001001 – 0027495 = 26495 Units

The Rally 180 replaced the SS180 as the top-of-the range Vespa in October 1968. Whereas the SS had essentially been all the mechanical elements of the preceding GS160 hung onto a restyled shell, this time around all the mechanics were changed whilst the overall appearance remained similar to that of the SS.

The principal change was to the engine, which at last came into line with the rest of the range by utilising a rotary valve induction system. This had been a big success ever since its first appearance on the VBA way back in 1959, and it's a bit of a mystery as to why it took so long to be fitted to the biggest model Vespa. Although still 180cc, the internals were redesigned with a shorter stroke and larger bore than previously.

The other major mechanical change was a reversion to GS150-style front suspension with a separate spring and damper – in fact the mid range VBB/Sprint etc had always kept this system. This also meant a return to asymmetric wheel rims. There seems to be no particular technical reason for this reversion (certainly, none was given at the time), and one wonders if cost cutting via standardisation of parts was the unstated motive. Subtle cost cutting was certainly evident elsewhere with the SS mudguard being replaced by the smaller Sprint item, the panel and mudguard trims being deleted and the spare wheel cover being made of plastic rather than metal.

The frame itself was almost the same as the SS save for the fact that the area around the carb bellows was moulded to allow the deletion of the separate alloy “elbow” – again replicating VBB/Sprint etc practice. There was also a new seat, which was larger and more comfortable than its predecessor – albeit rather looking like an afterthought as opposed to an integrated part of the design.

Finally, and most obviously, there was a completely new headset. This incorporated another reversion – this time to a round headlight. The old SS/GL/Sprint rectangular light headset hung around for years on various models, so presumably the change was principally a styling one. Although this round light headset was not as elegant as the old GS one, you could at least see where you were going at night! Finally, the silencer was a curious (but quite effective) transversely mounted effort unique to this model,

while the only significant production change occurred quite early on when the SS-style back light was replaced by a nasty plastic one.

The official colours were yellow ochre (very trendy in '68) and orange, but white and red are also known on export models.

In some respects the Rally 180 is a forgotten Vespa. The GS 160 has always had secure 'sixties connections, and these are now recognised for the SS180 as well. The Rally 200 has long been appreciated for its high-speed cruising capabilities and transistorised ignition. The Rally 180, on the other hand, just seems to fall into a hole between these models. The trouble is, you can't rehabilitate something that was never really habilitated in the first place.

Partly this is a consequence of small production due to collapsing demand. Consider that the GS160 sold over 60,000 units in three years. The SS only managed 35000 in the same amount of time. But the Rally 180 took a year longer to struggle to 26000. It's just as well that Piaggio had all those Vespa 50 home sales and CKD Sprints to send to the Far East, or it might not have been here today. Innocenti, with no satisfactory small-frame and insufficient overseas sales to rely on, disappeared altogether during this period.

In Britain, the Rally 180 was officially on sale from early 1969, but in fact many dealers were trying to clear unsold SS180s for a long time after this, which naturally had an effect on sales of the newer model. By the time some sort of equilibrium between supply and demand had been reached, it was nearly time for the Rally 200.

The Rally 180 is generally assumed to be a Rally 200 with twenty less cc and therefore somehow inferior. But this is doing it something of an injustice. Although there is some evidence of cost cutting, it is not to the extent of that in the succeeding Rally 200. There is more metal in the frame and it retains a degree of style missing in the later model as evidenced by the traditional scroll badges front and rear and the polished alloy mudguard crest. And it doesn't have those tacky panel and mudguard stripes!

Taking an objective view of the Rally 180 as a rider's machine, one would have to say that is as least as good as the preceding SS180, and has possibly better lighting, a shade more power and uses less oil. The styling is still in essence 1965. All it lacks really is image.