



THE VESPA SS180 IN DETAIL

VSC1T 1001 – VSCIT 36700 =35700 Units

Introduced in Italy in October 1964 (but not on sale in the UK till May 1965), the SS180 was the replacement for the GS160. The GS in both 150 and 160 forms had achieved iconic status, and being aware of this Piaggio determined that the new model would keep the GS name. The change of mind came very late in the day, too late in fact to prevent the spare parts book describing it as the “GS Super sports 180”.

The SS180 (as the name was abbreviated to) was essentially an amalgam of the existing GL and GS160 models. From the former came the front half of the frame, headset, rear light and saddle. The latter donated the rear half of the frame, complete engine and transmission unit, and the front suspension. The only really new parts specific to this model were the panels, toolbox and mudguard.

Of course there were detail differences in the engine. Apart from being bored out to 180cc, the small end was now a bearing instead of a bush and the flywheel had five retaining bolts instead of three. To everybody’s relief the ignition was not now dependant on the battery.

The SS180 was available in red or white, and later on in blue as well. This in itself was something of a departure by Piaggio who had not previously offered more than a single colour on the home market. Models such as the VB1 and the VBA were made in alternative colours, but for export only. The only significant changes came in October 1967 when the horn casting was altered to accommodate the new type Piaggio badge. At the same time there were a couple of minor alteration to the inner frame pressings.

When compared to the preceding GS160 there was rather more standardisation of parts (e.g. leg shield pressings and seat) and a certain reduction in quality (less metal in the frame, thinner floor trim rails etc). Continued refinement of the mechanical details, on the other hand, led to a scooter that was better to ride and even more reliable. These twin characteristics of continued cost-cutting in the frames but ever improving mechanics were, in fact, part of a trend that had started with the GS160 and continued via the Rally 180 and 200 right up to the P range. The production figures were considerably less than for the GS 160, but this is more a reflection of declining market conditions than any particular deficiency in the scooter.

So how should we view the SS180 now? The styling changes were rather forced upon Piaggio who had to respond to the squared-off edges on the Lambretta Slim style which corresponded to trends in industrial design generally, and which were perceived to look more modern than the classic curves of the GS. Consequently the SS styling always looks like the compromise it is – the upward curve of the frame under the seat being in conflict with the squared off panels and headset. The SS rapidly found favour with the Mods, but on their demise it rather descended into obscurity. With the dawn of the Mod revival in 1979, the SS was perceived as being less desirable than a GS160 and values were correspondingly lower. This situation remained unchanged until around five years ago, but now the SS has caught up again as it has been recognised as the good scooter it is, and one with a legitimate Mod history to boot.