

4 Relative values

– which model for you?



This chapter shows relative values of individual models, in good working order and cosmetic condition. Expressed as a percentage, the value is based on a combination of recent dealer prices and private sales. Changes in fashion, or increasing rarity, mean the models can – and do – move relative to one another, so check the internet, or magazine small ads for recent trends.

SS90

Top of the tree for value, thanks to a combination of its rarity and period sporting success. With cut-down legshields, narrow, dropped-bars and centrally mounted, vertical spare-wheel (topped with a fake tank, which is actually a tool box), it's a striking scooter. One to collect, rather than ride, as comparable performance is available in cheaper, more readily available models. Make sure the frame and engine numbers are correct for the model, as copies and fakes aren't uncommon. In Europe, there was a 50cc version, also highly prized.

100%



The SS90 is highly sought-after, with prices to match.

mounting; the four-bolt type (which sit towards the middle of the wheel), and the star-type (which has the mounting studs on small, cast projections on the edge), with four or five mounts, depending on type. Make sure that the studs are all present, on the latter style; they can snap-off if treated carelessly (ensure none have been replaced with nuts and bolts).



The early, four-bolt hub ...



... and later five-point.

Wheel bearings

4 3 2 1

While you're examining the wheels, you may as well check the bearings. Grab each rim in turn, and gently push and pull. There should be no play at the front, and just the smallest amount at the rear (due to the design of the drive you are actually checking the output shaft bearing) – but it should be very slight. Try turning the front wheel, very slowly, with a finger tip; it's often possible to feel roughness, indicating wear. Spin the wheel, too, and listen – although, if a bearing is so worn that you can hear it, you should have picked up the wear by wobbling. Shake the rim with more vigour, to try and detect play in the fork pivot; if you find any, it's expensive to rectify.

Check front wheel bearings by giving the wheel a good pull.
P series scooters always seem to have a little play in the front hub.

Lights

4 3 2 1

First, make sure they all work. This may take a little fiddling with the unmarked switch gear. Blown bulbs may simply be that, or it could indicate that the charging system is not functioning properly. On models without a battery, the engine must be running to get lights. Expect them to be dim at idle, but they should brighten, as revs increase.



Switchgear may have no markings, and take a little figuring out.



Check the reflector for rust, or silver flaking off.

11 Paperwork

– correct documentation is essential!

REGISTERED
VESPA
PX125E
1980

The paper trail

With two-stroke Vespa mostly in the classic arena now, the amount of paperwork that goes with any particular scooter is of increasing importance; whether as provenance, or simply a record of restoration or repair. If work has been carried out by recognised specialists (or main dealers, if a more recent vehicle), then their receipts will add value, or at the very least, make any future sale more attractive.



Is all the paperwork present?

Roadworthiness certificate

Virtually every country has a system to check the roadworthiness of vehicles, usually performed annually. Unless you're buying for a restoration project, a valid (preferably long) certificate is pretty much essential. Many owners keep old, expired MoT paperwork, which is very sensible; it provides extra history, plus an independent record of accumulated mileage.

Road fund licence

To use your scooter on the road, there's also usually some form of tax to be paid; evidence of which is normally a sticker, or disc, proving compliance and dates of validity. In the UK, if the vehicle is to avoid tax liability whilst under restoration or stored, a declaration must be made (Statutory Off Road Notification). If the Vespa is a 'barn find', and has been dormant for many years, it may no longer be on the system. If this is the case, try and use it to negotiate a discount, as it will cost money to sort out.



Customising splits opinion, and reduces the potential market if you want to sell later.

Less universally acceptable is tuning and customising. Buying a heavily modified Vespa is a risky option, as the desirability of any changes is subjective. This is particularly true for older machines, upgraded to modern specifications. To the dismay of purists, many VBBs have had 8 inch wheels replaced by 10 inch, and a PX 200cc engine bolted-in. Whether this is the correct way to treat one of, a now dwindling number, of original scooters is open to debate. Long-term (and solely concentrating on value) the market for these scooters will probably decline, as purity of form holds sway over function. A similar loss in later resale value may be experienced with restored, or rejuvenated machines (depending on the choice of colour).

These issues are not easily quantifiable, so once you've decided how much, or little, weight you give them, in choosing your purchase, the final consideration is; are you willing to haggle? Use some of the defects you'll have, undoubtedly, found during the examination process as leverage to get a price reduction. If the seller is stubborn, it may not work – but it costs nothing to try. Beware wading in with an unjustifiably low starting offer, or you could risk alienating the seller altogether; at least try to look reasonable. If the seller won't budge on price, ask if they have a workshop manual, or any service parts you can have. Dealers may be the most flexible on price, as they'll have inflated the price to begin with (to cover possible warranty work or rectify minor problems, pre-sale).

15 Problems due to lack of use

– just like their owners, scooters need exercise!



Engine problems

If left sitting for too long, piston rings can seize in the bore. A top end strip, and a new set of rings, is a wise precaution for anything that's been left for more than a couple of years – even if the motor isn't locked up. Bearings can corrode when not in use, and clutch plates stick, as the oil drains off. Crankcase seals stick to the crank, tearing slightly when turned, after a long period standing.

Hydraulic problems

Brake fluid is hygroscopic (it attracts water from the atmosphere), causing internal corrosion to brake components. Calipers, in particular, stick – although master cylinders are not immune. Bleed nipples can become stuck, so they snap off at the slightest provocation.



Calipers – and pads – seize, as hydraulic fluid absorbs moisture.

Electrical problems

Batteries die if left uncharged for any length of time, as particles held in suspension during use drop to the bottom, shorting out the plates (replacement being the only solution). Electrical connectors corrode, causing all sorts of problems. After long periods of inactivity, charging systems often develop faults, soon after being pressed into service.



All electrical components suffer when left, even solid-state ones.

Stale fuel

This is a real problem. Modern, unleaded fuel, deteriorates far more quickly than the older, leaded variety. This is compounded if the scooter is a pre-autolube model (where the oil is mixed-in), as it separates out, over time, forming a semi-liquid goo. Jets can gum-up, and even petrol tanks corrode, internally, above the fuel line. If the Vespa was stored for any length of time, the owner should have, first,