

whole spare wheel as an extra, but also a rack on which to mount it. As ever there were more accessories available for each model than you could shake a chrome two foot mirror stem at, but you can't really count these since they were all extras, and there was nothing as interesting as items like the Innocenti approved radio available in the 50s to fit the LD.

COMFORT:

The seats on both scooters are narrow, sprung dual saddles which fall several miles short of what you might call comfort. Without ruining the lines of the bike with something wider, then there was really no practical way of reducing the numb bum syndrome on a long journey. The SX is actually quite smooth for a Lambretta - again thanks to the low revving engine - but it's lack of suspension travel compared to the Vespa means that the ride is far more jolting and uneven over a rough surface. The SS meanwhile was turbine-like with only an odd vibration traceable through the handlebars at certain speeds.

STORAGE SPACE:

All through the LI series, Innocenti never improved upon the small toolbox ahead of the rider's seat; and this same cubby hole was passed down to the SX. The SS fares better; being one of the first Vespas to incorporate a useful legshield toolbox after having the spare wheel migrate to under the left hand panel in a partially successful attempt to balance up the offset engine.

IN TOWN HANDLING:

Requirements for city riding are slightly different for flat out cornering. Some stability can be sacrificed to obtain a machine that is light to handle and steers quickly. Piaggio have always concentrated on keeping the Vespa a nimble machine, and the 180 SS retains that talent despite it's humungous girth.

The Lambretta is still excellent round town, but lack of suspension travel means the ride can be choppy, and the fixed mudguard gives the scooter a bigger turning circle than it's rival. Yet another point in favour of the Vespa.

OPEN ROAD HANDLING:

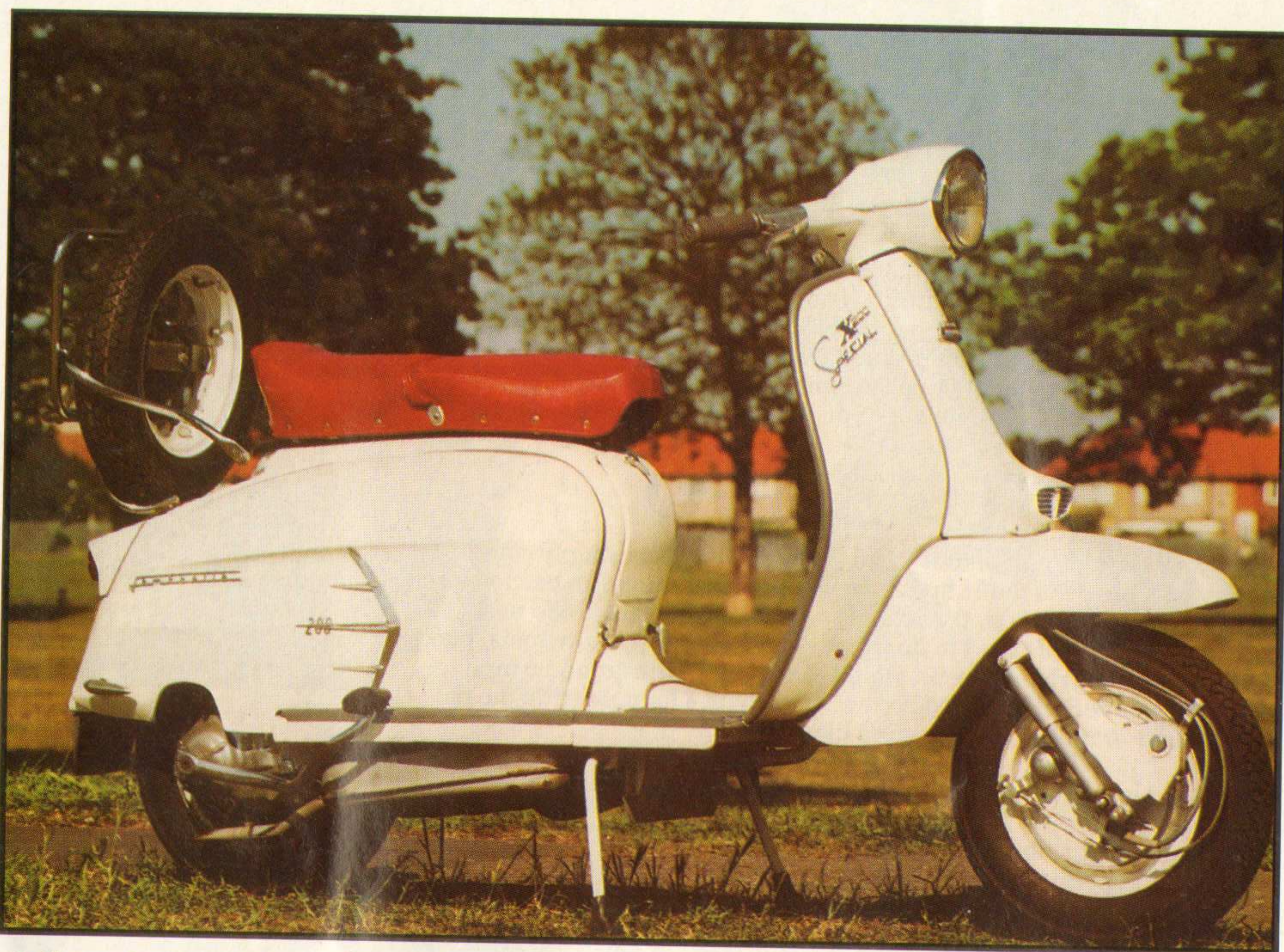
This is where Jim and I had our only disagreement. As an ardent Vespa fiend, he can't see anything wrong with the way the Vespa handles, and loves the way it can be chucked into corners as if by telepathy. The SS did actually handle well for a Vespa, but still this nimbleness translates into a lack of stability at high speed in a straight line when buffeted by wind or caught in a slipstream. I preferred the heavier, more planted feel of the Lambretta. Not only was it stable in a straight line, but also around smooth corners.

Neither machine handled bumpy corners well, but even when the fork links were hitting their stops on both machines I preferred the Lambretta's ability to plough on regardless without the wallowing that the Vespa was prone to.

MAINTENANCE & RELIABILITY:

This was a category that the Vespa was always going to win. The SS shares it's method of piston ported barrel induction with the SX, meaning it too requires lots of two stroke oil to run reliably. Vespa had long since converted their smaller capacity models to run with more reliable rotary disc valve induction, but the performance GS/SS family had always retained the piston controlled inlet.

Even so, a Vespa has so many fewer moving parts in it's engine and fork design, that there is simply less to go wrong than on a Lambretta. Cooling air-flow is more effective on a Vespa so the risk of seizures is reduced. Even the points ignition system seems more reliable despite the fact that the same manufacturer often supplied both companies.



Italian market specification SX 200s were mainly sold in this combination of white bodywork with an oxblood seat. This example has been restored by Dean Orton. Many Lambretta enthusiasts would rather push this, than ride the SS 180.

SPARES AVAILABILITY

This is a thoroughly modern question, as obtaining spares for either model would not have been a problem at the time they were produced.

Neither model was in production for more than a couple of years, but it is strange then, that it is a lot easier to find parts for the Lambretta, whose manufacturer ceased production in 1971. The benefit for Lambretta owners is the interchangeability of parts with all the other LI models, so that pattern parts are still being made, and there is enough stock to keep most machines on the road if not totally original.

For the SS 180 owner, the fact that Piaggio survived continuously through from the forties is of little consequence to spares supply. The SS 180 was the last of a peculiar line of sporting Vespa which featured many parts that were quite unique, and are now very hard to find

JE NE SAIS QUOI

Going back through the previous sections it is reasonably clear that the Vespa has fared better on points, but that is not the end of the story. Some of the main factors in anyone's choice of vehicle are it's looks and how much they will enjoy riding it. On both these points even a confirmed Vespa addict like Jim agreed that the SX 200 wins hands down. The SS 180 isn't an ugly looking scooter, but is it equal to one of the best looking Lambrettas ever made? Not a chance.

The SS 180 may be easier to start, more reliable, and generally better as an item of transport - which is probably why Scooter World recommended it at the time - but despite trying to act the hard man, it is still a Vespa. Sanitised and friendly.

The SX 200 will require a bit more looking after, but it's got soul. Like anything worthwhile in life, it requires something from you, but in return you get more back. It's the real thing. Even a diehard Vespa man has to agree.

Sticky



The Vespa family tree may have constantly evolved since 1946, but the SS 180 was on the end of a branch that never grew any further. While externally very similar to it's replacement - the Rally 180 - this model had a fork and engine layout that was at the end of it's lifecycle, and was never used again.