The British team scooters lined up in Chianciano Terme.

END AND NEW BEGINNING

When did you drop out of the scooter scene?
By the end of '68 I'd sold my last Lambretta and got married and moved to Guildford with a new job. I did build a Vega for my wife in the early 70s, but after that I had no involvement with scooters for 25 years.

How did you get back into scooters?
I relocated to the United States in '92 for work and while I was there I was looking for something to do. I bought a 1970 Jet 200 in 1995 and started restoring that, but it still hasn't resulted in a running bike.

While I was messing around with the Jet I realised I didn't actually have anything to ride so I bought a restored SX200 from ScootRS in Vietnam. They'd just come on the scene and were offering SX200s for $2200 at the time, so I took a gamble. Three months later it arrived so I had something to ride.

It was a kosher '66 SX200 and for the money I thought they'd done a pretty good job. I had to replace a few parts – like the front brake had some sort of home-made disc in it and didn't work. But it looked immaculate from the outside and I won best scooter with it at a local Italian bike festival.

As it turned out it wasn't quite as good as I thought. The side panels were LI ones that had been beaten by hand to look like SX ones. That is very talented work, but there was a lot of filler involved and basically after a while the paint stopped sticking to the bike. When I went to get it repainted by a local specialist it was with the guy two years and never progressed. Eventually I retrieved it and managed to get it painted by a local Harley painter, along with a Model B that I found which had been used for display in a San Francisco area Italian restaurant.

While in the US I got my first Vespas too. I won a Bajaj 150 in a raffle at the following year's Italian bike festival in West Virginia, and I later bought a Vespa GT200 which I really enjoyed.

When did the idea of revisiting the Moto Giro crop up?
That was in 2006. Ken Herlingshaw and I have remained in contact and we talked about doing the revived Moto Giro for 2007 – thinking mistakenly that it was the 40th anniversary of our first entry. Ken wanted to do it on a modern Vespa GT200 but I wanted to use a Lambretta. We ended up missing it that year anyway, because I broke my arm.

Ken and I had been studying the rules of the modern Moto Giro and we couldn't figure out a few things. Firstly we didn't understand why there wasn't a scooter class, and secondly if we did enter on a scooter we couldn't figure out which other class we could fit in. For some reason the current organisers act as if the Moto Giro never existed between 1957 – when the last official road race occurred – and 2001 when their version first took place. They've ignored a whole era including 1969 when the event was won outright by Italian legend Tullio Masserini on a Lambretta GP200.

I looked into shipping the SX200 from the USA and trying to enter it for the 2008 edition, but it would have cost too much. I ended up entering the non-competing class in 2008 on a rented modern Ducati Multistrada. I wasn't entirely comfortable on the bike, but despite the weather being awful I had a good time. Afterwards I visited Rimini Lambretta Centre. I'd been in contact with Paolo Catani about his Racing Lambrettas website for a long time and we'd talked about recreating my SX150 used on the '68 Moto Giro.

RLC actually had an SX150 in the shop but it had been sold, so I thought no more about it. Later the sale fell through for some reason, so I ended up buying it and commissioning it to be restored as a replica of my old scooter. I said I'd like it to be ready for the 2009 Moto Giro, but they said that there was no chance of that. In the end there were some changes of plan and they offered to rush it through for me.

So did that secure your entry?
No – according to the rules and even with people from Ducati USA asking the organisers on my behalf – there was no way for me to enter on a 150cc scooter. One competing category specifies machines up to 175cc but manufactured in the Moto Giro race era: i.e. before 1957. The other competing categories allow later machines but only over 250cc. In the end I just thought 'screw it' and entered in the class that the SX was closest to being eligible for. That was the Touring Super Sport Class which is for 250-400cc machines produced pre-1968.

I got on the plane from America to Italy without hearing the scooter run or even knowing if I'd actually be allowed to compete on it.

Above: Moto Giro '68: Tony tapes the route book to the front of his seat.

Right: The Moto Giro also contained special stages run on circuits; like this one at Vallelunga near Rome.

What features of the original did you want included and which did you ask RLC to leave off?
Firstly I wanted it to be based around a real SX 150 with the right engine. Dean tried to get me to put a 200 engine in it, but I wanted to stick with a small-block and to keep all the original numbers. He did persuade me to have TV forks with dampers and a disc brake though. I knew from experience that was probably a good idea and didn't detract too much from the originality.

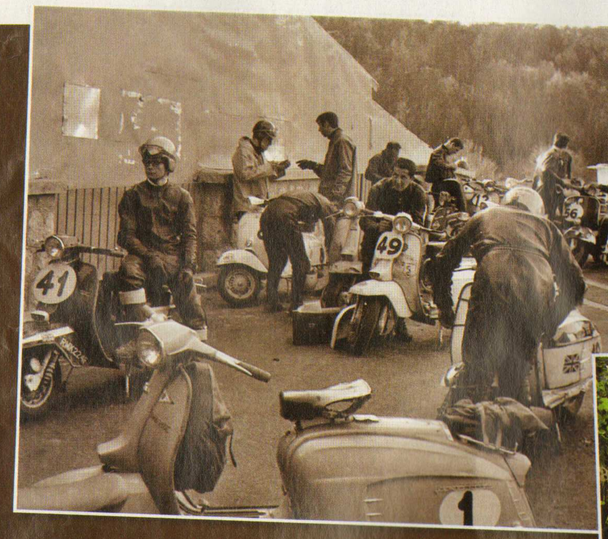
I sent them pictures of the original bike with instructions to replicate it as much as possible, but I asked them not to fit number plates to the mudguard or cut the front horncasting for access to the spare cable outers. In hindsight cutting the horncasting was overkill because I never had to use that feature and it detracts from the styling.

Was the engine standard on the machine you used in '68?
As far as I was concerned it was totally standard except for any tuning done at Arthur Francis as a result of it being an S-Type. Personally I don't think the engine had been apart since it left the factory.

On the reproduction one I got RLC to fit a Casa Lambretta 185 kit and Clubman exhaust because it still looks standard and means I can always put the engine back to SX150 spec if I want to.

Did you get a chance to test the scooter before the event?
No, Paolo brought it up for me to the hotel in Bologna where the Moto Giro was starting from. I was amazed when I first saw it. I expected it to be good quality but they've done things that I never imagined they would – like replicating my name on the panels in the same typeface, and even making up the plug holder and spare cable storage tin on the rear mudguard.

How did the other competitors react to the Lambretta?
To be honest they were a lot more discerning than the organisers: a lot of them realised that it didn't actually fit into any of the classes, but in the end it wasn't an issue with anyone. The yellow Lambretta really stuck out like a fart in church among all the old and predominantly red motorbikes.



Above: A mixed field of Vespas and Lambrettas take a break on the Moto Giro.

Top right: Tony Tessier's SX150 as used for the '68 Moto Giro. Note the repositioned seat and SX200 panel badges with the numbers removed.

Right: Tony's RLC recreation of his old SX150 prior to the 2009 Moto Giro.

What is involved in the modern Moto Giro d'Italia?
It is a regularity trial with an average speed set for the whole event. Each day has three stages. The target speed is set quite low so it is easy for all but the slowest bikes to manage.

Between the stages are timed agility tests, sometimes with multiple sections which had to be completed in a set number of seconds. The reality is that the whole competition rests on the results of those tests because it is so easy to keep to the regularity on the main stages unless something goes badly wrong. You just arrive early and wait before you go through to get your ticket stamped. Any time that you arrive late or early results in a time penalty.

Timing over short durations in the agility tests is very tricky because there are really no aids you can use, but the Italians are very good at it because they've had loads of practise. I think my total penalties over the five days added up to about 10 minutes. The guy who won had penalties over the five days that totalled just over 4 seconds! His prize was a new Alfa Romeo.

So how did the scooter fare?
The Lambretta performed really brilliantly. I told RLC in advance that I'm a fat bastard and that they would probably want to gear it a bit low. The Smiths speedo was set up exactly right and it would do a real 60mph, but for the practical riding in the hills it was good. I could actually get up some of the mountain passes better than the 250 bikes. Apart from one adjustment of the cables I didn't have to get my tools out at all during the event. I finished second in my class by only a few seconds.

Would you do it again on a Lambretta?
Absolutely – it's one of the reasons why I've left the scooter with RLC. I'm moving to France soon and my intention is to do the Moto Giro again next year and then maybe ride the bike back to France. It'll only be another 800km or so on top of the 1800 of the Moto Giro…