

Italian job, Indian zing

QUICK FACTS

Price Rs 60,000 (est.)
On sale May 2012

Vespa's legendary scooters have been around forever. Can the Baramati-built LX125 successfully recreate the Italian spirit in India?

FIRST VERDICT

Chic LX125 tops on style, is high on character.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

SO GOOD

- Timeless, evergreen styling.
- First-rate ride quality.

NO GOOD

- Inadequate front brake.
- Lack of brake lock clamp.

THINK VESPA, AND your mind's eye instantly pictures a scooter. That scooter has a typical shape, and that typical shape has been around for well over half a century, universally accepted as the 'original scooter'. Just the fact that it's survived largely unchanged for so long tells you there's something pretty special about the brand.

Vespa scooters have an undiluted Italian flavour to them, which just got an Indian touch. The brand is no newcomer to India – Vespa played this market years ago with LML. The LML venture culminated in 1999, after which parent

Vespa's new Indian scooter indulges retro fans.



company Piaggio has built three-wheelers here for some time, while simultaneously eyeing the tempting two-wheeler boom. The decision to jump back in with Vespa came with the opening of a new factory at Baramati, Maharashtra in 2007, from where the company's first manufactured-in-India scooter, the LX125, is now all-set to make a big splash.

The compact LX125 looks as scooter-like as they come, with

timeless, classic styling that is just as seductive today as it was when first seen back in the 1940s. It's a scooter with unisex appeal, showing off smooth, curvaceous lines and a rounded front mudguard. Three-spoke alloy wheels are standard. The front apron has a smart lining that runs along its edges, and it rises smoothly back into a circular, clear-lens, halogen bulb-equipped headlight. The handlebar shroud flows smoothly into high-quality

palm grips that are nice to touch, and the LX employs a rounded instrument cluster that includes a speedometer, odometer, fuel gauge and digital clock. There are meaty-feeling buffed alloy levers that are always a bonus, while smart-looking switches work well on this Vespa and include the premium feature of push-to-cancel indicators that isn't common on Indian scooters. Large, round and chrome-backed mirrors are superbly styled,

but are a nuisance for offering limited adjustment. Another disappointment is the lack of a rear brake locking clamp, which is more a necessity than luxury on an un-gear-ed scooter such as this. You do, however, receive a larger than expected front storage bay, which opens neatly with a push of the ignition key into its slot. Below, we found the ridged floorboard impractical and nowhere as accommodating as most modern →



LX125 front drum brake lacks power.



Classic look instruments fit well.





LX125 a design masterpiece, fits the present just as easily as it did the past.



Push-cancelled indicators are a boon.



Neat and spacious front storage bay.



125cc engine deploys three-valve head.



Clear-lens indicators sit flush with body.

← scooters' flat units, but let's overlook this as a sacrifice made to preserve the Vespa's undiluted retro theme.

You'll love the way the bag hook sits neatly recessed in the comfortable seat, which itself offers ample padding and a smart, textured finish. Likewise, another plus for the LX125 is the ease with which you can prop it onto its main stand, apart from which the convenience of a side stand is also available. Rear-end styling is in keeping with the classic theme – simple and in good taste, with a nicely turned-out grab bar. There is also a voluminous, lockable

under-seat storage bay.

Good paint quality, decent overall quality and adequate fit and finish were all apparent during our brief stint on the LX125, all of which we will be in a better position to judge after spending more time with the new scooter.

The Indian-built Vespa LX125

comes with a 125cc, four-stroke, single-cylinder, carburetted and air-cooled engine. It uses three valves for enhanced intake capability and relies on inputs from an air-intake pressure sensor to help control a variable ignition system that strives for efficient combustion. The valve rocker arms are

'The LX125 suspension provides excellent ride quality even riding two-up over poor roads.'

supported by roller bearings to minimise friction, and peak power output is 10.06bhp at 7500rpm, with 1.08kgm of torque coming through at 6000rpm.

The button-started LX125 uses a scooter-typical CVT automatic transmission system, which worked flawlessly throughout the duration of this first ride. This engine has a smooth, refined and built-to-last feel about it and feels tuned in the interests of good fuel-efficiency, rather than sprightly performance.

The Indo-Italian LX125 uses a monocoque-type steel chassis, its front suspension a single-sided hydraulic shock absorber

with trailing linkage, and there is an Indian-scooter-conventional hydraulic monoshock at the rear. The engine pitches in as a swingarm at the back, and braking is courtesy a 150mm drum up front, and 140mm drum at the back.

The riding position feels spot

on; comfortable and upright, and certain to make regular inter-city commuting a breeze. We were surprised at how good the LX125's suspension felt, providing excellent ride quality even riding two-up over the worst possible roads we could locate.

Light handling and acceptable cornering manners proved as good as can be expected from a scooter, and Vespa has excelled in providing grippy MRF tyres at both ends. The front brake proved to be the LX125's Achilles' heel although. A spongy and feeble feel makes its way through the right lever with woefully inadequate stopping power, posing a major problem that we hope Vespa steps in quickly to address. We faced no such trouble with the rear brake, however, which boasts ample bite and affords strong stops.

Pricing for the LX125 remains a question mark at the time of

going to print, and will be crucial to its India innings. Indications point at premium positioning, and we could see the snazzy LX125 costing a slight bit more than its competition, but anything above a slim premium, and Vespa will find the going tough. Indian scooter buyers could question a premium scooter that commands a higher price solely for making a bold lifestyle statement, and more so because retro scooters like the Bajaj Chetak only just ended their colossal production life cycles here, still being available dime-a-dozen for a pittance in the used market.

RISHAD COOPER

Vespa LX125	
Price	Rs 60,000 (estimated)
On sale	May 2012
L/W/H	1770/690/1140mm
Wheelbase	1290mm
Ground clearance	155mm
Fuel tank capacity	8 litres
Kerb weight	114kg
Engine layout	Single-cylinder, 3-valve, air-cooled, four-stroke
Displacement	125cc
Power	10.06bhp at 7500rpm
Torque	1.08kgm at 6000rpm
Specific output	80.5bhp per litre
Power to weight	88.2bhp per tonne
Gearbox	CVT
Front suspension	Single-side shock, trailing arm
Rear suspension	Monoshock, stressed engine
Front brake	150mm drum
Rear brake	140mm drum
Wheels	3-spoke alloy
Rim size (f-r)	10 inches
Tyre size (f-r)	90/100 x 10 inches



Good suspension ensures this Vespa soaks in the rough with the smooth.