

# Lambretta

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The Lambretta was a line of motor scooters originally manufactured in Milan, Italy, by Innocenti but also manufactured, under license by Société Industrielle de Troyes" (S.I.T.) in France, NSU in Germany, Serveta in Spain, API in India, Pasco in Brazil, Auteca in Colombia, and Siambretta in Argentina. In 1972, the Indian government bought the Milanese factory and the rights to the Lambretta name, creating Scooters India Limited, or SIL. Today, the Innocenti brand name rights are owned by Fiat, whereas the Lambretta, and Lambro, brand names are owned by SIL and are licensed to many companies who want association with the iconic brand, including: Taiwanese manufactured scooters; Indian light vehicle engines; British fashion clothing; and Chinese produced watches. In 1922, Ferdinando Innocenti of Pescia built a steel tubing factory in Rome. In 1931, he took the business to Milan where he built a larger factory producing seamless steel tubing and employing about 6,000. During the Second World War the factory was heavily bombed and destroyed. It is said that surveying the ruins, Innocenti saw the future of cheap, private transport and decided to produce a motor scooter &ndash; competing on cost and weather protection against the ubiquitous motorcycle.

## Concept

The main stimulus for the design style of the Lambretta and Vespa dates back to Pre-WWII Cushman scooters made in Nebraska, USA. These olive green scooters were in Italy in large numbers, ordered originally by Washington as field transport for the Paratroops and Marines. The US military had used them to get around Nazi defence tactics of destroying roads and bridges in the Dolomites (a section of the Alps) and the Austrian border areas.

Aeronautical engineer General Corradino D'Ascanio, responsible for the design and construction of the first modern helicopter by Agusta, was given the job of designing a simple, robust and affordable vehicle for Ferdinando Innocenti. The vehicle had to be easy to drive for both men and women, be able to carry a passenger, and not get its driver's clothes dirty.

## The design

D'Ascanio, who hated motorbikes, designed a revolutionary vehicle. It was built on a spar-frame with a handlebar gear change, and the engine mounted directly on to the rear wheel. The front protection "shield" kept the rider dry and clean in comparison to the open front end on motorcycles. The pass-through leg area design was geared towards all user groups, including women, as wearing dresses or skirts made riding a motorcycle a challenge. The front fork, like an aircraft's landing gear, allowed for easy wheel changing. The internal mesh transmission eliminated the standard motorcycle chain, a source of oil, dirt, and aesthetic misery. This basic design allowed a series of features to be deployed on the frame, which would later allow quick development of new models.

However, General D'Ascanio fell out with Innocenti, who rather than a moulded and beaten spar frame wanted to produce his frame from rolled tubing, there by allowing him to revive both parts of his pre-War company. General D'Ascanio disassociated himself with Innocenti, and took his design to Enrico Piaggio who produced the spar framed Vespa from 1946.

## Into production

Taking one year longer to produce, the 1947 Lambretta featured a rear pillion seat for a passenger, or optionally a storage compartment. The original front protection "shield" was a flat piece of aero metal; later this developed in to a twin skin to allow additional storage on the 'back of'/behind the front shield, similar to the glove compartment in a car. The fuel cap was located underneath the (hinged) seat, which saved the cost of an additional lock on the fuel cap or need for additional metal work on the smooth skin.

Deriving the name Lambretta from the small river Lambro in Milan, which ran near to the factory; Innocenti started production of Lambretta scooters in 1947 - the year after Piaggio started production of its Vespa models. Lambrettas were manufactured under licence in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India and Spain, sometimes under other names but always to a recognizable design (e.g. Siambretta in South America and Serveta in Spain).