

61 Vespa VBB Restoration Project (Part 5 of 6)

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Front End Work

Still catching up on work already done...

Removing and Rebuilding the Front End

Okay, now on to removing and rebuilding the front end. I'm still waffling on the decision to do the body work now, or reassemble and ride first, but the front end and headset work will need to be done regardless.

Removing the Headset

First step was to remove the headset. Remove the two screws underneath, attaching the headlight. Oops, one broke off -- but I should be able to drill it out later. Then pull off the headlight. As you can see from the pic, the glass lens broke a few decades ago, sitting out in the rain the reflector rusted pretty badly, and the chrome ring is pretty bent and pitted. It will all need to be replaced. I found some plastic lenses, but I would rather have the glass for more authenticity so I'll keep searching.



Looking inside the headset was amazing -- talk about cobwebs and dirt! How did that all get in there? Oh well. Time to remove the headset, by unscrewing the center screw on bottom, allowing the speedometer to be pushed up. Undo the "gland nut" (What the?) and remove the speedometer. Then unattach the brake cable.

To get off the headset, gotta get all those cables out. Remove bolt inside the throttle tube, remove the switch box (remember the connections!), then unhook all the cables from the levers and remove them, and slide the unattached headset off of the front fork tube. Finally, just slide out the clutch and throttle tubes from the cast aluminum headset. Ummm.... wait, it's stuck! After applying liberal doses of PB Blaster (I love that stuff) to the throttle tube, I'm able to remove it (in fact it just falls out), but the clutch tube is totally stuck. I finally resort to propping the headset up on blocks of wood and hammering at the flange where the shift lever attaches, and it turns. But it's just the aluminum flange turning on the throttle tube -- the tube will NOT budge in the headset! This is where I'm stuck. We tried heating it with a blowtorch, dousing it with WD40 and PB Blaster, but it just doesn't budge. And I haven't seen any headsets for sale for an affordable price. DARN. But don't panic, we'll get it eventually. Just not now...

Removing the Front Fork

I don't know why it's called a fork, since it is an offset tail-dragger design and not a fork. But that's what everyone else calls it. Anyway, the first thing to do is remove the front wheel, to give room to pull out the fork and to reduce the weight. Four screws do it -- I love my air-hammer, just zips them off!

Next we undo the lock nut on top of the tube -- placing a screw-driver in the notch and tapping the screwdriver gently with a hammer. The nut unscrewed pretty easily. The manual said to watch out for the loose ball-bearings to fall out of the top, but to my surprise there were NO BALL BEARINGS! And no lower race either, it seems. From the gouge marks on the inner tube, I'm guessing the last guy to take it apart just didn't bother to replace them. Grrrr. Something else I'll have to locate and replace. (I've heard that you can substitute in a captured-ball-bearing race from a P-series, I'll look into that). Now gently drop the front fork out of the body, watching out for the 19 ball-bearings floating in the lower race. Yep, there were 19, and they look in good shape.

Removing the Fender

Next step is to remove the poor beat-up front fender. The bolts were pretty rusted on, but some squirts of PB Blaster and some sweat got them off. Three bolts on top, and two screws on the side. Then remove the lower bearing race by tapping on the dust cover with a cold chisel, round and round. Got it off, no problem. Then the fender slips off.

The fender is really beat up -- from running into things, I presume. I will probably replace it with a newly manufactured one, although I've heard that ScooterWorks doesn't have any in stock anymore...



Now that the front fork is totally off, I can rebuild it. Which will have to wait for a future weekend. But here's a picture so I remember where all the cables go so I can get it back together again... Note that the brake cable goes up inside the end of the tube, while the speedometer cable comes up alongside the spring and into a hole in the tube further up (but before the bend).

Final Notes

Finally one more thing and I'm up to date. I went to "Moto Italiano", the Vespa rally held by the Los Gatos Vespa Club, right after removing the front end. And I saw an immaculately restored 1960 VBA (I think). It was gorgeous, and the same (original) color that I want mine to be. Some pics are below. The guy who restored it worked in an auto body shop, and so he mixed up the paint color himself. But like a numnut, I didn't ask him if I could buy the paint from him! Bummer!!!!!!!!!! If you're out there and reading this, send me a note please!!!!!!



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Next Post

Now we're up to date. I hope to rebuild the front fork this next weekend, then pull the gas tank and clean that up, then on to the rest of the body