

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The collector car auction year 2020 in review - Part 1](#)

Lead

There are still some who say that laying out cash on an old motor without taking a long, hard look at it in the metal is a mug's game. But 2020 might go down in classic car history as the year in which buying 'sight unseen' became the new normal. Part one of our 2020 auction round-up.

Back in January, who knew that the world of classic auctions was set to be involuntarily revolutionised by Coronavirus, with the familiar scenes of packed salerooms from Goodwood to Pebble Beach and from Villa d'Este to Amelia Island disappearing as buyers were forced to stay home and bid by mouse?

Buying without being there is nothing new, of course - auction houses have worked with written and commission bids almost since the first gavel fell, and the words 'sold to the telephone bidder' have been uttered from rostrums around the world for the best part of a century. But never before has remote bidding been (or had to be) so universally adopted. And not 'being there' seems to have made little difference to buyers' enthusiasm. True, overall figures are down on what they were a few years ago, but they were heading that way anyway - and considerably more than half-a-billion dollars was spent on classic cars this year at sales staged by the four major specialist houses alone (Artcurial, Bonhams, Gooding and Co and R.M Sotheby's).

Here, we highlight some of the cars that successfully crossed the block around the world during the past 12, tumultuous months - and recall how swiftly auction houses adapted to the changing times.

January



All seemed normal as 2020 dawned, with bidders flocking to the annual season openers in the U.S. Mecum kicked-off with the sale of one of the most famous cars in movie history - the fabulously original Highland Green fastback Mustang from Bullitt, which broke cover after decades in single family ownership to sell for \$3.7m. Meanwhile, at the major annual Scottsdale sales, Gooding & Co. grossed \$35.5m from a full spectrum of classics that were topped by a 1995 Ferrari F50 at \$3.2m and a 1932 Hispano-Suiza J12 with Binder bodywork.

February



Things don't feel right. At the Peninsular 'Best of the Best' awards dinner in Paris during Retromobile week, Sir Michael Kadoorie told guests how a new Coronavirus has hit Hong Kong to such an extent that Kowloon's 300-room Peninsular hotel was catering to just 20 residents. In Europe, we carry on regardless and the usual throngs attend Artcurial's official Retromobile sale, where a 1965 Ferrari 275GTB race car topped the lots at Euros 2.5m, while Bonhams drew Euros 690,000 for the first Ferrari F430-based MAT New Stratos.

March



Suddenly, as with everything else, the world of classic car auctions turns upside-down. Events everywhere are cancelled or postponed, notably Gooding & Co's 'Passion of a Lifetime' mega sale that was due to happen in London on, er, April Fool's day. Over in the U.S., however, people continued to bid 'live' at the big Amelia Island sales, with R.M Sotheby's achieving a 94 per cent sell-through led by a Ferrari Enzo at \$2.7m and a 1938 Bugatti Type 57 with a unique cabriolet body. It fetched \$1.6m, while Gooding & Co. shifted a 1914 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost for \$2.2m and set a record for a Porsche RUF Turbo R at \$676,000. Bonhams, however, sold the most expensive car of the week - a Bugatti Type 55 Super Sport at \$7.1m - and also drew \$456,000 for the Myers Manx beach buggy from The Thomas Crown affair.

April



By now, almost no one is going anywhere. Widespread lockdowns prevail, most people are stuck at home - and many have more time than ever to browse sale catalogues on the 'net. Auction houses are bolting turbochargers to existing online bidding systems, and thousands of buyers who have only ever bought a car by raising a hand are being forced to take to the web. RM Sotheby's Palm Beach event in late March was the first major sale to go exclusively online, making a fair fist of the situation with a \$13.6m sale total. The house also topped the decidedly subdued April sales chart by raising \$550,000 for the final 991 Speedster on behalf of Porsche, which gave it all to the United Way Covid-19 Fund. Bonhams, meanwhile raised cash for Britain's National Health Service with a charity auction that included a Lewis Hamilton race suit from 2019 at £12,000.

May



Instead of preparing themselves for a long weekend quaffing Prosecco and looking at exquisite cars lined-up beside Lake Como in the grounds of the Villa d'Este and Villa Erbe hotels, classic enthusiasts were by now fully entrenched in lockdown life. In the UK, Silverstone Auctions held the first fully online auction in its decade-long history, although would-be buyers were able to make appointments for Covid-compliant pre-sale viewings. The result was a £4.6m turnover and near 90 per cent sell-through, with the house demonstrating its particular talent for selling 'youngtimer' competition cars by achieving £336,600 for a 1984 Peugeot 205 T16.



Bonhams, meanwhile, discovered that basing its entry-level MPH sales at Bicester Heritage had been a smart move virus-wise: the vast site enabled socially-distanced viewings and the type of cars for which MPH was designed sold nicely. Typical examples included a Lynx Eventer Jaguar XJS at £60,750 and a Land Rover Series I at £14,625. But it was R.M Sotheby's 'Driving into Summer' sale that really proved how willing buyers are to bid online - it grossed an impressive \$16.3m and set a record for a car sold on the 'net by hammering a 2003 Ferrari Enzo for \$2.6m.

Read part two of our 2020 auction round-up on December 31st.

Gallery

