

My Experience at the Jim Street Collection Auction

Report & Photo's : Adam Gibb



Adam Gibb shares his experiences at the Jim Street Collection Auction



Adam purchased a Johnson PR-65 with Starnes racing gearfoot.



Adam also won this rare 1933 4 cyl Johnson V-65, only 226 built.

Mecum Auctions held their annual Indy auction at the Indianapolis State Fairgrounds on May 15-19. This year's auction included the mega collection of the late Jim Street of Ohio. The collection included more than 300 Antique Outboards, about two dozen boats ranging from a 12' Willis Comet to a 36' triple cockpit Greavette and a massive Belle Isle Bear Cat. A racing trailer complete with three early Neal hydroplanes that looked like a time capsule right out of the 1950's was parked beside a Hickman overnighiter. If you think the Hickman Sea Sleds were unusual, you should see what they look like with a cabin! For those with more European taste, the offerings included a Switzer hull powered by an Italian Soriano, complete with 4' long surface-drive lower unit. Of the 300 plus outboards, I would say that 75% of them were of the racing variety.

I only found out about the auction in mid April and quickly looked at the calendar to see what commitments I might have. The auction was scheduled for the week leading up to the Victoria Day long weekend...for which I already had plans for a short getaway with the Mrs. I had reasoned that I was going to have to sit this one out. Canceling a trip to attend the auction might not have been well received. The next few evenings were spent looking over the lot listings like a kid going through the new Eaton's Christmas Catalog. I had the listings printed out and within a few days that pages looked like my high school notebooks before a final. The pages were curled while highlighting and notes filled the margins. The boats were going to be sold on Thursday and Saturday and the outboards on Friday. Outboards on Friday.... there might be some hope. We had planned to leave on our holiday trip on Saturday morning and return on Monday night. Now all that stood between me and outboard Mecca was 1365km each way, and the new job that I was about 2 months into. Driving was out of the question. There was no way that I could leave early enough in the week to allow the time to required to drive there and be back for Saturday morning. After looking at some flights, it became clear that not many people have a need to travel between Montreal and Indianapolis. Both ways were going to have layovers and a travel time of about 8 hours. Only half convinced that I could pull this off, I went to work and plead my case to my boss. After some negotiation, I got the ok to leave work at lunchtime on Thursday.

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A small part of the more than 300 Antique Outboard on the Auction block.



An assortment of rare & exotic racing gearfoots at auction.

Jim Street Auction- cont'd

The pieces were starting to fall into place. Now all that was left was to figure out what to do if I bought any motors. I phoned the auction company to find out what their plans for the sale were. I was told that they were going to start selling the outboards at 9 am and that they should be done by 1pm. To make the last flight home, I needed to be back at the airport in Indianapolis by 5pm and the drive was about a ½ hour if everything went well. I reserved a storage locker near the auction sight in case I was unable to make any shipping arrangements before I had to leave to get to the airport. In the weeks leading up to the auction, I looked for anyone from the Northeast that was planning to attend but came up empty. With nervous anticipation, the auction date got closer.

The day had finally arrived. I left work and headed to the airport. I was scheduled to arrive in Indianapolis at 10pm. By the time I got the rental car and drove to my hotel near the auction site it was almost 11pm. The logistics of the trip seemed straightforward while planning, but now that I was sitting in the hotel, the anticipation of what the following day would bring made sleep elusive. Dozing on and off until about 5:30am, I gave up and headed out for coffee and then the fairgrounds.

The auction grounds were scheduled to open at 7:30 am and bidding to start at 9 am. That gave me 1 ½ hours to look at 300+ outboards that I had not yet seen in person and decide which ones to bid on. I wanted to look at them all, but with the short time available before the bidding started, I had to start with the ones that I might try to buy. Arriving so early got me a parking spot near the main building and I walked around to find the bidder entrance. I arrived at the check-in at 6:45am and found that there were already a few guys standing in line. I joined them and found out that they had been at the auction for most of the week. They told me that they arrived early to make sure that they got through security in time to be inside when the bidding on the cars started. This was starting to sound serious! Boy was I happy that I arrived early. By the time they opened the gates at 7:30 am, there were at least 500 people in the line behind us. Most of the crowd were car buyers, but it was a long line to get in. After getting through security, there was a mad dash for the seating in front of the auction block for the cars.

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**Motors...Motors...Motors
& More Motors!**



**Ultra rare 1928,
5cyl. Cross Radial**



**Mercury Twister 2 with
Speedmaster racing gearfoot.**



**Rare Italian Soriano
X Class racing motor.**



**1950's Neal Hydroplanes on
Racing Team trailer with motor box.**

Jim Street Auction- cont'd



Nice original Evinrude Fastwin with 1/2 hp Mate at it's side.



Eldridge X-Class 4 cyl racing engine.



4 cyl Mercury KG-9 with racing stacks.

As I leisurely walked through a hall filled with world class cars, people were literally running past me and telling me that I had better hurry up if I wanted a good seat. Little did they know that this crazy Canuck was here to look at all that "boat stuff" that was being sold in another building. It was hard to walk past so many outstanding cars without stopping to have a good look at each one. After locating the hall where the outboards were being displayed and sold, I walked into the quite building and saw over 300 of the best outboards that I have ever seen in one place. It was almost surreal. I was the only one in the hall and it was dead silent. The motors were displayed in two long rows down the center of the building. One wall was lined with inboard engines that included massive Kermath's, Packard PT boat engines and Liberty V12 Aero engines. The other wall was lined with 4'x4'x4' crates and many shelves of parts that Jim Street had collected over time. It was simply overwhelming. The size of a Packard PT boat engine becomes apparent when you see a NOS crankshaft and oil pan standing vertically in a crate and it tops the 6' mark. The collection included many excellent racing outboards. I am a Johnson enthusiast and it was interesting to see so many examples of SRs, PRs, VRs and even XRs all in one place. Many models were represented in both in factory original condition as well as with motors that had been modified with aftermarket parts. The number of KG-9's was incredible as well as MK20Hs in many variations. Evinrude's were well represented from Midget Racers all the way up to 460s and two X class racers. Other notable pieces included a Cross Radial, a few Italian Soriano's in various conditions, a pair of Indians, a twin prop Chris Craft racing lower unit and a couple of Mercury Twisters.

The auctioneers planned to be selling 2-3 motors per minute once the auction started. The expected pace was not going to allow any time to look over the motors in detail once the bidding began, so I had just over an hour to have a good look at the motors that I had spent the last few weeks ranking up and down on my wish list. I began to look the motors over and made notes of which ones to bid on and which ones I was less interested in. When I started to examine the motors, I was alone in the building. As the start of the auction approached, the crowd began to fill in with many familiar faces.

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Jim Street Auction- cont'd

The auction then began at 9:00 sharp and proceeded at a feverish pace. The parts lots sold first followed by the inboard engines. The first outboard to be sold was the 50th lot and was on the block just after 9:30. It was hard to stop watching the auction to go back and look at the motors. Every motor sold was interesting to watch. The exotic and rarest motors aside, some motors sold much higher than I expected and some much lower. It was interesting to watch the action and you could see the competition for certain motors among collectors with similar areas on interest. At various points during the sale, I did chat briefly with some AOMCI members as well as some of the ACBS members. At one point when things had calmed down a little, someone that had been there looking at the inboard engines came over and asked about some of the outboards. He pointed out that he had seen me running around earlier, carrying out my hurried inspection and making notes, and that he thought I must be on some sort of a mission. Reading between the lines, I guess I must have looked like a complete lunatic running from motor to motor, with a note pad, camera and flashlight, trying to document as much as possible before these motors were scattered all over the continent. I suppose that I was on a mission, and it certainly wasn't the first time that I looked like a bit of a nut around outboards.

Once the bidding came to an end, the buyers of the parts lots began to dig through their new treasures. It looked like a bunch of kids at Christmas. As everyone uncrated their newly found treasure trove, the trading began. The loose parts had been packed into crates and each box contained items that were only loosely related. Parts for specific motors were found scattered amount the various lots. The contents of each lot was not very well described in the listing, so they were bought based on what could be seen near the top of the crates. As the boxes were opened, the parts that came out were incredible. One buyer's crate contained two complete Mercury Speedmasters that had not been visible, another yielded a Soriano supercharger and boxes of twin prop lower gearcase parts. Filling the small voids between larger items were all sorts of parts from Vacturi carbs to Liberty V12 distributor caps.

Once the buzz in the air had subsided, reality was setting in. I was the proud owner of some new to me old iron. I managed to buy a 1933 PR-65 that was built up to race ready by famous engine builder Henry Fuller. I was also the winning bidder on a rare Johnson 4cyl, V-65. Only 226 of these rare motors were built. The reality was that my new iron was 1365 km from home and I had to be back at the airport in just under 2 hours. I don't think you can take a Johnson V-65 as carry-on.

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**1928 Johnson TR-40
"Giant Twin"**



**A rare 1929 "As Found"
Lockwood Racing Chief.**



**An Iconic Evinrude 460,
4 cyl, 60 cu. In.**

Jim Street Auction- cont'd

Then a small miracle happened. The gentleman that had introduced himself earlier in the day, mentioned that a friend of his had also bought a bunch of stuff and didn't know how he was going to get it home. He introduced us and we discussed logistics. He decided to rent a truck and haul his purchases back home. He agreed to take my motors back with him. This was a huge relief. He lives just under 4 hours drive from me and promised a tour of his collection and possibly a boat ride. Things were looking up.

I drove back to the airport, returned the rental car and checked in to my flight. Sitting at the gate, the adrenaline subsided. It felt like I had been away for a week even though it had been just over 24 hours at that point.

I spent the next few weeks looking back at my notes and photos of the auction and was still noticing things that I had overlooked during the excitement of the auction. Leading up to the auction, I was worried that any of the motors that I was interested in would be well out of reach of my budget. While some of the most rare and exotic motors did bring record setting prices, there were many very good deals to be had. There were at least 100 of the motors that sold for considerably less than the asking prices that I see at outboard Club meets. I would highly recommend any of the Mecum events to anyone, even if you just attend as a spectator. There is so much to see and do. They do a great job of making the auctions an entertaining event. Part of the fun is seeing some great collections all under one roof.