

CLASSIC DRIVER

2004 Barrett-Jackson at Scottsdale, Arizona - A First-Timer's View

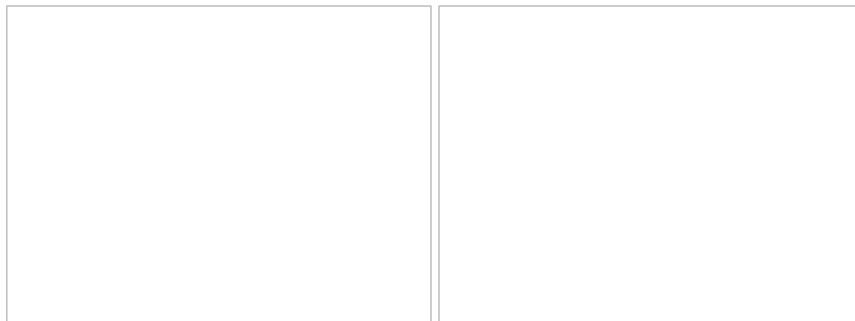


First of all, the metrics: 727 cars sold over 4 days, 98% sale rate (most lots offered at No Reserve), totaling over \$37M; nearly 200,000 admissions, and thousands of registered bidders, spanning across dozens of acres of Arizona desert, with countless thousands of hot dogs sold.

In summary, B-J is the largest classic car auction event on the planet.

As a newcomer one is struck first by the circus atmosphere – the festival environment and the sheer hucksterism of the podium sales approach.

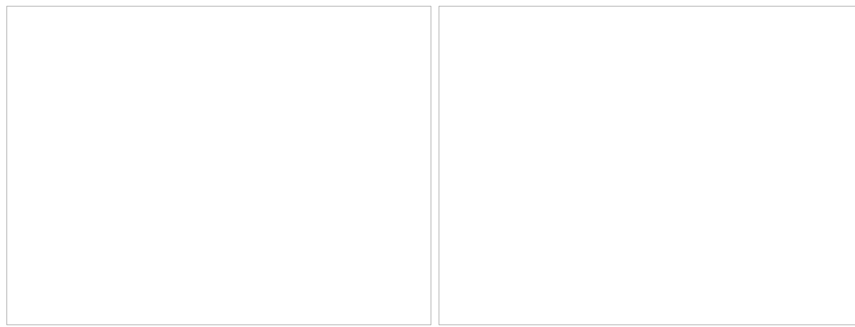
Part desert high-roller heaven, part NASCAR-dad corndog jamboree, B-J encapsulates the American collector car auction ritual at both its most glamorous and its most truly appalling.



B-J was heavy with American muscle machinery, particularly it seems with more **Corvettes** and **Camaros** that most humans have ever seen together in one place. Fifties finmobiles bring up the next division, then a smattering of prewar 'full classics' (many quite significant) and a jumble of 'foreign' cars. (**Jaguar XKEs** easily outnumber any other overseas model, and immaculately-restored examples of Series I 4.2 roadsters bring 'all the money'.)

It must be said that B-J is a Seller's auction. The quality of the stock is all over the map (from the ridiculous to the exquisite) but the prices realized are uniformly high. I would expect that the majority of lots are won by end-users, many of which I imagine are not very market-involved during the rest of the year, between each January event. Drinks flow freely at the bidder's bar and the scent of competition is sprayed around the floor like aerosol by the organizers. It must also be said that the B-J auctioneers really work for the high bid – and that the pressurized atmosphere produces results here.

A curious phenomenon observed there was the ascendance of the outrageous 'resto-rod' – the street-rodding culture gone rampant.



In fact, the highest sale price realized was for a resto-rod, an occurrence unthinkable just a few years ago. A **Lincoln Zephyr V-12 coupe**, remanufactured as a custom scraper with an insane level of detailed workmanship (but retaining its original engine, seriously hot-rodded) realized a total of \$432,000. A Cord Westchester coupe, modified as redneck fantasy with exaggerated proportions, brought nearly \$100,000.

However despite the cartoonish appearance of these examples, the underlying trend evident here is that people want cars they can use, with modern performance and comfortable seating – often at the expense of authenticity - matching numbers be damned! This development was evident at many other levels of the field and strikes me as a real shift in the market. The reasons for its appeal are actually rooted in the practical, the oddball aesthetics notwithstanding.

Back on Earth, there were 2 **Mercedes-Benz 300SLs** offered: Both **Gullwings**, each were hammered at well over \$350,000 (\$367K and \$387K). These were both excellent cars, with Rudge wheels and fitted luggage, but not extraordinary or alloy-bodied examples. Once again, ‘all the money.’

In the end, it was loads of fun (and thankfully, I didn’t buy anything but hot dogs!). I expect the sellers are well-pleased, and hopefully the buyers were, too – once their hangovers wore off.

Story and Photos - Don Rose

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