

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Scottsdale 2011: Scene and Heard

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The Barrett-Jackson auction arena

**A Goodwood event, it certainly ain't. No sir. Perhaps it's more 'Revivalist' than 'Revival' and, when Tom 'Spanky' Assiter is selling cars in the Barrett-Jackson arena, you better be prepared to testify... or at the very least bid on that 'No Reserve' Pontiac GTO.**

Geographically, Barrett-Jackson's massive tented enclosure is just a few miles north-east of the more gentrified Biltmore Hotel & Spa ([RM](#)) and Scottsdale Fashion Center ([Gooding & Co.](#)) locations but, metaphorically, it's in a different world.

Pay your few bucks to cross the threshold to the aircraft-hangar-sized facility, and you enter a land of outside hot tubs, elk-hunting holidays and 'Texas Size' turkey legs. Where else would you find suspiciously plasticky 'real wood' log cabins and life-size metal water features of doe-eyed, bib-and-brace-wearing little girls giving a horse a drink ("Because you always look after a friend")?

It's outrageously, uproariously tacky; yet strangely attractive. Wander through the first mall, slack-jawed at such truly execrable merchandise, and soon a droning, bee-like noise intrudes. "I-habba-twenny-will-you-bid-me-twenny-five?... I-habba-twenny-will-you-bid-me-twenny-five?..." I'm about to enter the main auction arena, a cathedral to solid, Detroit iron, and one of the redoubtable team from Assiter Auctioneers, Canyon TX, is preaching to a full house.

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Custom Chevy looking for a new owner

The mesmerising wordplay (an auction 'chant') is spellbinding. Running at full steam, sentences disappear into a blur and it's impossible to hear individual phrases. The "twennys", "twenny-fives" and "thirties" do rise above the maelstrom of mumble, and the red-tied, black-suited 'spotters' on a raised dais cry out with gusto, pointing out bidders willing to raise a hand amongst the hubbub.

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Some of the cars at Russo and Steele

Don't knock it, though: it clearly works. Assiters sold cars to the value of some \$60million for Barrett-Jackson at Scottsdale this year. Whether it's farm sales, Kentucky bloodstock auctions, or one-after-another muscle cars across the block in the big B-J tent in Arizona, their slick presentation, and the sheer excitement it generates, makes for a blockbusting sale.

It's a combination of theatre and a gigantic bazaar that seals the success of the Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale sale. The actual auction is almost a sideline now to the main 'event' - the 'E' of which is most definitely Texas-sized.

Another man who likes to put on a show is Drew Alcazar, CEO and co-owner of Russo and Steele, situated a 10-minute drive from B-J. I'd met up with him on the morning of the company's opening day, at its new, Losberger (German-manufactured, high quality temporary buildings) structure on its traditional site: the intersection of the Loop 101 Freeway and Scottsdale Road, in North Scottsdale.

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Now, did you mention 'elk hunting', I said 'elk hunting', boy?

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I'd like to see the rest of the bird

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Russo and Steele's Drew Alcazar

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Can I see your pass, please, sir?

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Information overload

Mention of the site is important, as freak stormy weather in January 2010 devastated the Russo and Steele tented compound. Alcazar's not the sort of man to take that lying down and, after successful court action resolved any issues outstanding from the drama of 2010, was raring to go this year.

The original, storm-ravaged Russo and Steel banner was proudly displayed above the sales arena, where 'drive-through' replaces 'over-the-block' selling. "Excitement" - and a healthy profit, no doubt - is Alcazar's driving force. "Bidding on eBay can never match the raw excitement of a live auction," he said. Fair point.

No Reserve cars were brought back. The general public was now admitted to the sale. And the results spoke for themselves: it grossed over \$21million with individual entries such as the 1970 Plymouth Hemi Cuda Convertible (\$1,705,000), the 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL 'Gullwing' (\$704,000) and a 1970 Plymouth 'Cuda

440/6 4-speed (\$236,500) being stand-out cars.

□ 1971 Dodge Charger 'Super Bee'...  
□ ... sold for \$35,200 at Barrett-Jackson

□ Magnum force  
□ Sh-sh-sh-shaker hood  
□ Being part of the action - branded B-J merchandise

Add the \$80+million of B-J and Russo and Steele to Gooding's and RM's combined \$66million, and the total figure for just five days' selling is nigh-on \$150million. A massive figure by anyone's standards. And that's during a week with no concours, club meetings or significant manufacturer-sponsored events.

It's not Goodwood and it's certainly not Pebble – Scottsdale has a flavour all of its own: a 'special recipe' that only Mom knows.

□ 1968 Pontiac Firebird Custom Coupe - sold for \$15,950 at Barrett-Jackson  
□ Some of the interesting comp cars at Russo and Steele

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