



# “Did you like that?”

## Fred's Aveling hits quarter of a million



Jack Dibnah expertly guides his late father's Aveling tractor back onto Alan Atkinson's low-loader. It was heading north and everyone wanted to know where it was going.

UNDERBIDDER knows he's been part of auctioneering history when the applause that follows the gavel falling is still reverberating through the air even when everyone has moved to the next lot. Adding to the drama of the whole event was the fact that the winning bid came from a phone bidder. If *Underbidder* had taken a pound from all those who asked, "Come on, tell us who's bought it ... you must know!", then this report would be filed from the deck of a mega-yacht in the Maldives.

For the benefit of folk not in attendance, some scene-setting is required. This was the Cheffins mid-summer vintage sale, an event that is traditionally a little shy on lots and being in the middle of the rally season, there is usually room to move in the crowd. This was about to change! The inclusion of Aveling & Porter steam tractor No 7838, which was famously restored by the late Fred Dibnah MBE, and the unique Fowler/Wilder ploughing engine No 1109/1 was reason enough to be there. Add in a very rare 1917 Samson 6-12 Sieve Grip tractor and surprise, surprise, it was the largest crowd ever at a July sale. With the sun beating down, there was a

palpable air of anticipation as sale No 5 got under way a little later than usual at 11am. Everyone knew we were only 11 lots away from seeing our Fred's engine have a dance with the gavel. The steam grapevine had been in overdrive for weeks with speculation about who was going to buy it. Everyone had an opinion. As for the price – everyone had a view on that too. Even the Cheffins staff ran a sweepstake on where the gavel would fall. For your amusement, *Underbidder* can inform you that Bill King's guess was well short! Getting us under way was a fully restored 1965 Ford Cortina Mk1 GT complete with MoT, V5 and duty-free road tax until April 2011.



Immortalised by the TV series *Made in Britain*, Fred Dibnah's Aveling tractor No 7838 looked superb in the July sun as it awaited the man with the gavel.

Straight in at £3000 and quickly sold at £6000 – we were off and running. Actually, no we weren't. A 1962 Austin FGK flatbed lorry, followed by a 1941 AEC Matador fuel tanker in RAF livery both failed to sell. However, just up the line stood a Richard Garrett saw bench. This was a rare item and represented a fantastic restoration opportunity. Every Garrett steam tractor owner in the land should have bid on it. The hammer fell at £2000. Too late now – you should have bought it! A blast on the whistle announced that we had arrived at the

Fowler/Wilder ploughing engine. If you wanted to buy a unique piece of history, then this was it. Built by Wilders of Wallingford, Oxon, in 1926 using Fowler No 1109 (originally built in 1869) as a starting point, they effectively created a new engine. In recent years it has undergone extensive restoration including a new boiler barrel. Bidding opened at £60,000 and slowly crept to £72,000 and there it stopped. Surely not – come on, just a few more bids and we would be there. It didn't happen. If you are in the market for a ploughing engine, stop

reading this and pick up the phone. Hold the front page. The moment has arrived. Fred's son Jack had occupied a low profile all morning and those of us who had chatted with him knew that at this point in time he must have been wrestling with a tidal wave of emotion. Fred's last journey behind Aveling No 7838 had been witnessed by thousands and viewed by millions on TV and here it was in all its magnificence about to be sold. Volumes have been written about its 27-year restoration and the TV series *Made in Britain* following its travels around the UK has put it up there with *Flying Scotsman* in the general public's awareness of steam. Following a brief introduction, Bill King took an opening bid of £100,000. We passed the £150,000 mark on full regulator and notched back to hit £200,000. The chap standing by the front wheel kept on bidding and so did the mystery phone bidder. The crowd knew they were witnessing a piece of auction history. The hammer came down at £240,000 (£254,100 including premiums) followed swiftly by resounding applause. The phone bidder had got it. *Underbidder* was in the back office a short while later with Bill King as a press statement was agreed with the buyer.



Fred Dibnah's engine is engulfed by people as Bill King takes a bid from the crowd and two more potential purchasers hang on the phones. Some folk predicted it would make £150,000 – little did they know!

# OLIVER NAMED AS NEW OWNER OF DIBNAH'S AVELING TRACTOR



If ever a tractor demanded close inspection, this was it. Very few people have seen a Samson 6-12 Sieve Grip and even fewer could afford it!

His name is Michael Oliver (steam folk will be confounded by the name) and he is founder and chairman of Knutsford, Cheshire-based manufacturer Oliver Valves – who are a major supplier to the world's largest oil and gas companies, Mr Oliver stated: "Fred Dibnah is a cult figure and a national institution – it is vital that his engineering genius and his priceless contribution to our cultural heritage continues to be celebrated for years to come."

He also added: "We are already planning outings to steam shows, so the thousands of steam enthusiasts and Fred Dibnah fans and their children can continue to enjoy this iconic machine." He would also like Jack Dibnah to have the opportunity to drive the engine.

Bill King added: "While the price achieved far exceeded our pre-sale expectations, it is testament to Fred, his skill and knowledge of traditional engineering methods and of course his big personality that we received so much interest."

In case you're pondering what Fred would have thought about it all – Underbidders can tell you. He would have said: "By'eck that was a good price – now let's go and buy a Fowler road-loco!"

In recovery mode we moved to a 9in scale Mann compound steam wagon that was road registered and was complete with current boiler certificates. It had been closely inspected by many people while topping up their sun tan and interest appeared to be very high.

A top bid of £32,000 fell short of the reserve and

surprisingly it remained unsold.

The excitement however wasn't over. On view was a tractor that demanded close inspection. This was a 1917 Samson 6-12 Sieve Grip produced by the Samson Iron Works of Stockton, California. It is one of only two Sieve Grips known in the UK and one of only eleven 6-12s to remain in the world. It is powered by a single-cylinder petrol engine with a 7in bore and 9in stroke, producing 6hp at the drawbar. Once again a phone delivered the opening bid at £20,000, at £32,000 a new bidder joined in and to spice things up another new bidder entered at £51,000. It took a whopping £67,500 to bring down the hammer. Now the tractor boys had something to tell their grandchildren!

A superb 1920 International Titan 10/20 was next in line and kept bidding on the boil by securing £17,250 and a Field Marshall Series III throbbed all the way to £8200.

A 1970 Ford County 1124 with Boughton winch, nine-foot heavy-duty spades and oversized tyres looked a fearsome machine and easily pulled a winning bid of £8700.

Good business continued to be done in all sections throughout the afternoon and the sun continued to shine into the evening. Once again Cheffins had delivered an excellent sale.

On reflection, it's a good job that Fred Dibnah didn't restore a Burrell Scenic Showman's road locomotive – otherwise we could have had our first one-million-pound engine. On the other hand...

■ Full sale prices listed at [www.cheffins.co.uk](http://www.cheffins.co.uk)



This 9in scale Mann compound steam wagon was a late entry. Despite being road registered and having brand new boiler certificates, it failed to sell.



Bet you've not seen one before. This Richard Garrett saw bench will make a fantastic exhibit. Please can the buyer let OG know when the restoration is complete!



From the former Grantham works of Aveling-Barford, this 1.5in scale A&P ploughing engine Field Marshall Haig sold for a sensational £13,000.



No tractor collection is complete without a Field Marshall. If you wanted this Series III you needed to be the person who bid £8200.



This 1941 AEC Matador fuel tanker was offered with the original manual and driver's instruction book.



John Fowler/Wilder ploughing engine No 1109/1 originally dating from 1869 really deserved to sell but failed to reach its reserve.