

NORMANDY TANK MUSEUM SALE SETS RECORD HIGHS

From small artifacts to Shermans, the Normandy auction offered collectors the world over the opportunity to own a piece of wartime history. At a price, of course, as Nigel Hay explains...



Above: Thanks to the Nerrant family for unprecedented access to the collection and to Artcurial for kind permission to reproduce their photographs. Left: Exceptional M4A4 Sherman went for the hammer price of €280,000.

The Nerrant family can be justifiably very proud of what they achieved. Their museum was clean and bright and had been meticulously planned to enthuse its visitors. Vehicles were cleverly displayed, with mannequins and artefacts, including tank engines, complementing the dioramas. Some very innovative signage using contemporary black and white images added to the ambience and it was impossible to come away anything less than impressed.

With a large workshop to undertake full restorations, like the recently finished 88mm artillery piece, the museum employed local Englishman Graham Pipe, who has been restoring German vehicles for many years, to keep everything in first class condition.

Sadly, it wasn't to be and their decision to engage Artcurial, a high end Paris auction house, to sell off all their exhibits under the auspices of Sophie Peyrache and her team proved a shrewd move. Artcurial produced a very high quality colour catalogue, with superb photographs and very detailed descriptions of each

vehicle and item, aided by their technical expert 'Mr Sherman', Matthieu Dumias, who runs Military Classic Vehicles on the same business park as the museum.

Once Artcurial's professional marketing machine had swung into action, the sale soon gained the attention of its regular high net worth buyers who would never normally consider anything military. In less than a day Artcurial transformed the museum's workshop into an impressive *salle de ventes* with seating for 350 registered bidders, and around another 500 or so watchers who stood for the four hour duration.

RECORD PRICES

After the initial shock of the Jeep, we saw a Dodge WC52 fall for €26,000, followed by a Bantam Jeep trailer for €3700. If we thought a pattern was emerging in this non reserve auction, the immaculate BMW R75 motorcycle combination sold for an amazing €130,000. That was over three times the estimate and the normal market price. The IF8 Infantry trailer, which carried an estimate of €1500 fetched €16,000!

The first armoured vehicle was the ex-Brazilian M3A1 Stuart – one of the few non-runners in the collection which went to a new owner for a record €160,000. Interspersed between the vehicle lots were display items, nearly all widely exceeding their estimates.

A short wheelbase GMC at €33,000 didn't surprise us at all, but the bargain of the day had to be the immaculate DUKW which sold to a young Russian buyer for a mere €45,000.

Another shock result was the 1944



€33,000 bought this GMC CCKW 352.



Cushman scooter was a shock at €115,000.



Flak 88mm artillery piece sold for €100,000.



International M5 half-track made a realistic €34,000.



The hammer fell at €200,000 for this M7 Priest, while the DUKW sold for €44,000.



Citroën Traction went for €37,000 – about double the market value.



LVT 4 sold for €84,000.

Cushman Scooter which soared to an unbelievable €115,000. That went to a buyer from the Middle East. Nice as it was, that really was madness – selling at over eight times the current market price.

The M8 Greyhound armoured car got tongues wagging when it reached €100,000 – certainly the most expensive M8 in history.

It was a Czech buyer who finally won the M7 Priest at a staggering €200,000 and a Norton WD16H got a healthy €13,000. Then the 1943 Harley Davidson WLA soared to €54,000 but the second Willys MB Jeep in the sale struggled its way up to a mere €60,000 despite the efforts of Maitre Poulain the auctioneer, who seemed to expect it to surpass the record price set earlier in the afternoon.

Then suddenly it was my own turn to bid – for a genuine German beach anti-landing obstacle – a Tetrahedra. I had always wanted one of these and reckoned it might be worth up to €800. No sooner had I raised my hand at €500 it had bounced to €1500. But it didn't stop until it got to €8000 – five times the guide price.

SHERMAN ATTACK

Many of us had expected the two Sherman tanks to get up around the €400,000 mark so we were slightly surprised to see the 105mm M4 Sherman go for a modest, by



Very nice White M3A1 Scout car fetched €53,320.



The lot I missed – a Tetrahedra beach obstacle which eventually made €8000.

this sale's standards, €239,000 to, we believe, the family of Jeepster's Nicolas Georges. The Chrysler built M4A4 sold to a motivated American buyer for €280,000. The Chaffee M24, which was Patrick Nerrant's first tank also went to an American buyer for €230,000, as did the M5A1 Stuart for the same price – despite having the wrong engine (a single 5.9-litre V8 rather

But Normandy has just lost a major and absolutely unique museum that needed to be positively supported as part of its tourist mix. The Nerrant collection has now been broken up and dispersed, which is frankly a pity – but as Patrick pointed out, storing such a vast collection back home in Paris would have been a very expensive and prohibitive exercise.

“The M8 Greyhound armoured car got tongues wagging when it reached €100,000.”

For the Nerrants it is, perhaps for now, the end of a dream that went way beyond a flirtation with museums. They raised the bar for military vehicle museums and certainly made their mark.

than twin Cadillac V8s – the tank with the two car engines!).

At the very end of the sale the two rather tired FV432s raised €20,000 each – sold unseen to a Middle Eastern buyer.

A total purse of €3,551,700 including the buyers fees had been spent in an afternoon and people left the saleroom totally bemused at the high prices achieved.

But a philosophical Patrick said they still had ideas for another project sometime in the future, perhaps nearer their Paris homes. As he put it: “We are not finished with military vehicles yet.” And I really hope they do build another museum somewhere else. One thing is for sure, this is a father and sons team who really know how to do it and they deserve our applause for their efforts. And whatever Patrick, Olivier and Stefan do next, you can be sure it will be something special. *Chapeau Nerrant et fils*



Above: Stefan, Patrick and Olivier Nerrant the museum founders. Right: 2nd Armoured display mannequins sold for €3900.



Below: This BMW R75 reached €130,000.

