1962 CHEVROLET BISCAYNE 409/409

A piece of quarter-mile history

Courtesy of Mecum Auctions

When it comes to all of the high points of what makes a car valuable, this one is firing on all eight

Chassis number: 21211F251699

by Tom Glatch

- Rare factory 409 race car with original build sheet, bill of sale, mortgage and period racing photos
- Driven by Dave Cates
- Sponsored by Ault & James Speed Shop
- 409/409 hp W-head engine
- 4-speed manual transmission
- Dual 4-barrel Carter AFB carbs
- Aluminum intake manifold
- High-lift performance cam
- New-for-1962 lightweight valve train
- Fully restored to as-raced condition
- Photo-documented restoration
- Thought to be the only car to win a race against the Jenkins-Strickler car in 1963

ACC Analysis *This original 409 Biscayne drag car, Lot F261, sold for $95,400, including buyer's premium, at Mecum's Dallas, TX, auction on September 7, 2012.*

Let's face it, race cars are throw-away commodities. In a sport where the latest technology is necessary to stay competitive, racers that aren't destroyed in competition are often sold to lesser teams, or cannibalized for parts and scrapped. And decades ago, when race cars were mostly modified passenger cars, many were returned to street configuration and sold. Either way, the majority of race cars that I grew up reading about or watching on fuzzy black-and-white TV were lost to unnamed two-lane blacktops or the scrap heap, never to return to the limelight.

A real fine 409

That makes the availability of a car like the Ault & James 409 Chevy an exceedingly rare opportunity. It's not an "accurate reproduction," a "heroic restoration" based on a donor car and a handful of original parts, a "tribute," or even an outright fraud. No, this is the real deal. A car that took on the best in Stock Eliminator match racing back in the day. A car that, along with its contemporaries in the national spotlight, helped inspire both the muscle-car era as well as '60s pop culture with every quarter mile pass and spin of the Beach Boys' "409" record.

And it looks the part, too. Finished in correct Ermine White, this Biscayne is all business — the interior and exterior are straight-up plain Jane. Even the engine compartment is basically as-raced in the early 1960s, with the proper paint finishes and all the right components. It looks as if it was lifted right off the strip in 1962.

Elapsed-time machine

The value of a vintage racer like this one is all about documentation, originality, and racing history. The documentation this car has is almost unheard of for a race car, which puts any potential buyer at ease knowing the car is exactly as claimed. Originality adds to value, because a mostly original vehicle is the closest thing we have to a time machine. When it comes to all of the high points of what makes a car valuable, I think this one is firing on all eight.

The Ault & James 409 was discovered by Phil Reed of Kansas City. He wrote on an online forum in 2007: "I found this car in west Texas about 19–20 years ago. A friend took me to look at it and he didn't want it. Just a body out behind a shop... So I asked one more question... what all came with the body. The owner said a 409 engine and transmission was inside! I walked up to the engine, took about one second to look at the data pad, and said SOLD!"

Yes, it was the original engine and T-10 4-speed transmission, and just 5,159.4 miles were on the odometer. He went on to describe the original equipment that either came with the car or was given to him by Dave Cates, the original owner. Reed then spent two years bringing the 409 to perfection in his restoration shop, even repainting it a number of times just to get the finish right.

Best of the best

There is literally only one other 1962 409 factory racer in the world that can top this one for originality — the Zintsmaster Chevrolet-sponsored car that was in the collection of Indiana Chevy dealer Sam Pierce for many years, and now is owned by Jon Been of Atlanta. The Zintsmaster car is not only amazingly preserved, but is one of 18 409s that were factory equipped with aluminum front sheet metal, of which only two are known to exist.

Then there is racing history. Many of the best Super Stock racers of the era piloted the '62 409s — "Dyno" Don Nicholson, Ronnie "Mr. 4-Speed" Sox, Dave Strickler driving for Bill "Grumpy" Jenkins, Hayden Proffitt driving for Bill Thomas, and others. Dave Cates was a fine racer, and even beat Dave Strickler in a match race, but he is hardly in the same category as these future legends. However, the 409s these legends drove are long lost, leaving the Ault & James car and the Zintsmaster Chevy as the best there is.

Mecum tried selling the Ault & James 409 in 2006, when bidding reached $150k but did not meet reserve. Mecum continued marketing the car, the last time in 2011, when bidding ended at $92,000 without selling.

Why interest in this car has waned is beyond me, but other Super Stock racers from that era, such as

Phil Bonner's 1962 406 Galaxie, have seen similar pricing indifference. It looks like the market hasn't really woken up to cars like these, and the seller finally settled for $90,000, plus commission. Will it be worth more? We'll have to see it sell again to know.

But for someone like me, who watched these cars battle it out on the dragstrips of America back in the day, there's a huge cool factor to owning a piece of American drag-racing history. Even at $150k, I would call this very well bought, but to buy one of the most genuine Super Stocks on the planet for under $100k — that's real fine!

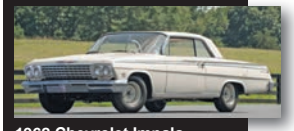
(Introductory description courtesy of Mecum Auctions.)

Detailing

Year produced: 1962
Number produced: 15,019
Original list price: $3,067
Current ACC Valuation: $50,000–$100,000
Tune-up/major service: $150
Distributor cap: $22.58
Chassis #: On plate attached to the left front door hinge pillar
Engine #: Pad on front of the block under the passenger's side head
Club: National Impala Association
More: www.nationalimpala.com
Alternatives: 1962 Pontiac Catalina Super Duty 421, 1962 Ford Fairlane 406 G-code, 1962 Dodge/Plymouth 413 Max Wedge
ACC Investment Grade: B (this car)

Comps

1962 Chevrolet Bel Air 409/409
Lot S50, VIN: 21637S294496
Condition: 1
Not sold at $90,000
Mecum Auctions, Dallas, TX, 10/6/2011
ACC# 189994



1962 Chevrolet Impala Lightweight SS
Lot 227, VIN: 21847F306159
Condition: 2+
Sold at $132,000
RM Auctions, Gainesville, GA, 11/13/2010
ACC# 168383

1964 Chevrolet Biscayne 409/409
Lot 1264, VIN: 41211F263310
Condition: 2+
Sold at $60,500
Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/18/2010
ACC# 155037