FREE GUIDE FROM THE COLLECTOR CAR MARKET BRIEF

The Collector Car Auction Cheat Sheet

What you actually pay, what an estimate really tells you, and the traps to check before you raise your paddle.

Compiled November 2026 from published fee schedules and sale terms. Sources are listed on the last page.

Buyer's premium at a glance

Auction house or platform	Buyer's fee	Good to know
Mecum	10% in person 12% phone and internet	$1,000 minimum on vehicles.
Barrett-Jackson	About 10% on site 12% absentee	Published figures vary by source. Confirm with the bidder office for your sale.
RM Sotheby's	12% up to $250,000 10% above that	Tiered on the hammer price.
Gooding Christie's	12% up to $250,000 10% on the remainder	Automobilia lots carry a 25% premium.
Broad Arrow	12% up to $250,000 10% above that	Tiered on the hammer price.
Bring a Trailer	5% of the winning bid	$250 minimum, $7,500 cap.
Cars & Bids	5% of the winning bid	$250 minimum, $7,500 cap (raised from 4.5% and $4,500 in Feb. 2025).

Premiums change by sale and by bidding method. Treat this table as a starting point and read the conditions of sale for the specific auction.

How a tiered premium works

At a house that charges 12% up to $250,000 and 10% on the rest, a car that hammers at **$400,000** is charged 12% on the first $250,000 and 10% on the remaining $150,000. The tier applies to slices of the price, not the whole amount.

Piece	Math	Amount
First $250,000 at 12%	$250,000 x 12%	$30,000
Remaining $150,000 at 10%	$150,000 x 10%	$15,000
Buyer's premium	**Effective rate 11.25%**	**$45,000**
Total before tax, fees and transport	**$400,000 + $45,000**	**$445,000**

The real cost of a $60,000 car

The hammer price is only the start. Here is the same $60,000 winning bid at a live auction (10% premium) and an online platform (5% premium), using a 7% sales tax that applies to the premium and enclosed transport. Your tax and shipping will differ.

Line item	Live auction (10%)	Online platform (5%)
Hammer price	$60,000	$60,000
Buyer's premium	$6,000	$3,000
Sales tax (7%, on price plus premium)	$4,620	$4,410
Bidder registration	$200	$0
Document, title and registration	$250	$250
Enclosed transport	$2,500	$2,500
Delivered cost	**$73,570**	**$70,160**
Over the hammer price	**22.6%**	**16.9%**

Rule of thumb: a 10% premium plus 7% sales tax puts a car about 18% over the hammer price before transport. Many owners also set aside roughly 10% of the price for first-year sorting, which this table does not include.

Fees that hide outside the premium

Bidder registration. Live auctions charge for it. One Mecum Kissimmee example was $100 online before the sale and $200 after.

Sales tax. It depends on the auction location, your home state and where the car is titled. The premium is often taxable. Live auctions usually collect on site unless you document an exemption, and online buyers typically pay when they title the car.

Transport. Cross-country open carrier shipping runs roughly $1,200 to $2,500. Enclosed transport typically costs 30% to 60% more.

Removal and storage. Houses set a pickup deadline. At Gooding Christie's Retromobile New York 2026 sale, removal was $600 per car, and uncollected cars were charged $1,500 a month for the first three months.

Payment rules. Some houses require proof of funds, such as a bank letter of guarantee, before you can bid, and cleared funds within days of the sale (Gooding Christie's: by 5 p.m. Eastern on the third business day). Wire fees, processing charges and card surcharges fall on the buyer.

Title and documents. Both the auction house and the state may charge for paperwork.

Overseas sales. Several European and UK houses charge premiums in the 15% to 16% range plus VAT, and a car from outside the local region can face import charges. Prices are quoted in euros, pounds or Swiss francs.

Estimate traps: what the number really means

An estimate is where the conversation starts, not where the car ends up. These are the mistakes that cost buyers the most.

1. An estimate is an opinion, not a price.

It is a range set by the auction house before any bidding. Cars with a strong story can sell far above it, and cars with problems can miss it. Do not anchor on the low estimate as if it were a bargain.

2. The hammer price is not the price you pay.

Add the premium, tax, registration, transport and storage. On a typical live sale that is about 18% over the hammer price before shipping.

3. Compare results like for like.

Some published results include the buyer's premium and some stop at the hammer. The same sale can look 10% to 12% apart depending on which you are reading. Check before comparing a result to a price guide or an earlier sale.

4. 'No reserve' does not mean 'cheap'.

It means the car sells to the final bid. It says nothing about value, which is set by who is in the room or online. No-reserve lots often draw extra marketing and attention.

5. A high bid on a no-sale is not a market price.

A bid that missed the reserve shows what one buyer would pay, not what the seller would accept. Deals made after the sale are often private.

6. How you bid changes the premium.

Phone, internet and absentee bids can cost more than bidding in the room. Mecum charges 12% instead of 10%, and Barrett-Jackson absentee bids are reported at 12% versus 10% on site.

7. Minimums and caps change the real percentage.

Mecum's $1,000 minimum means a car that hammers under $10,000 pays more than 10%. A $250 minimum at Bring a Trailer or Cars & Bids does the same below $5,000, while the $7,500 cap means the effective rate falls once a car passes $150,000.

8. Foreign sales add currency and tax.

Estimates in euros, pounds or francs move with exchange rates between the sale and your payment, and premiums often carry VAT.

9. The estimate assumes the car is as described.

Read the lot description for words such as recreated, recommissioned, offered on a bill of sale or title in transit, and ask for the documentation and the condition report.

Your pre-bid checklist

1	Read the conditions of sale for this specific auction: premium, tiers, minimums and bidding-method differences.
2	Set a maximum all-in number first, then work backward to a hammer price after premium, tax and fees.
3	Ask whether the comparable results you are using include the buyer's premium.
4	Register early. Find out what approval you need (ID, bank letter, deposit) and the deadlines.
5	Know the payment deadline and the accepted payment methods, including wire fees.
6	Get a transport quote before you bid, open or enclosed.
7	Check the tax rules for the sale location and for your home state.
8	Request the condition report and documentation, and consider an independent inspection.
9	Decide how you will bid, with the premium difference in mind.
10	Plan for removal and storage so you are not paying monthly fees on a car you have already bought.

Get the market, not the hype.

The Collector Car Market Brief is a free email from Modern Car Collector with auction results, the prices that moved, and what is crossing the block. Subscribe and keep this sheet in your toolkit.

Subscribe free at brief.moderncarcollector.com

Sources and notes

Gooding Christie's Retromobile New York 2026 sale terms (premium tiers, automobilia, removal, storage and payment). Classic.com, Auction Fees and Prices (live-auction and online platform schedules, undated). Motorious, 'From Hammer to Invoice' (Mecum and RM Sotheby's premiums, registration, tax, transport and the $60,000 budget example), Sept. 30, 2026. The Autopian, Feb. 24, 2025 (Cars & Bids fee change). Muscle Car Fan, Sept. 22, 2026 (Bring a Trailer fee).

Rates change from sale to sale and by bidding method. This guide is for general information and is not financial, tax or legal advice. Always confirm fees in the conditions of sale for the auction you plan to bid in.