

# Q&A

## Mike Fallon

Mike Fallon bought Copake Auction in 1985 and has developed a reputation for selling antiques, especially Americana forms like weathervanes. It is the bicycle auctions he launched in 1991, however, that have a cultlike following and are near to his heart. The yearly April sales have grown into two-day affairs with swap meets, and a scenic bicycle ride and the camaraderie draw collectors and bicycle enthusiasts from all over the world.

### *What made you start selling bicycles?*

Our bicycle interest started humbly with a consignment of high wheel bicycles from collector-Wheelman Jesse Sarafin. An extraordinary response generated by our "Bee" ad prompted me to pursue the possibility of initiating a specialty sale featuring antique and vintage bicycles and related material. The Sarafin bicycles were offered as the last items in our sale that night. I invited the bidders to discuss these old machines and their feedback was passionate and very positive, especially from David Metz, proprietor of the Metz Museum.

### *David Metz was pretty well known in the bicycle world. How did he help you get started?*

I refer to David Metz as the godfather of the annual Copake Bicycle Auction; with his mentoring and expertise the sale flourished, he introduced me to The Wheelmen, an organization dedicated to the preservation of bicycling. Auctiongoers fill up all the local motels, bed and breakfasts and restaurants, which is a plus to our local economy. Our family and community really love this event. Thinking back, our customers have watched my children grow from toddlers to adults.

### *You had your 25th annual bicycle auction last year. These sales seem to be as much about the people as what is for sale. Tell us about the camaraderie of this collecting community.*

Like all auctioneers I have lots of sto-

ries; one of my favorites involves the late Dave Metz. Dave grew up in Freehold, N.J., home of Arthur Zimmerman (1869–1936) one of America's first world bicycle champions. Dave advertised for many years to find a "Jimmy" bicycle. One day Morgan MacWhinnie, the legendary Americana dealer, dropped off an old bike and my son Seth looked at the head badge and identified it as a Jimmy. We immediately crated it and shipped the treasure to Metz without even calling him. It was the pride of his collection. At the Metz sale it brought \$15,210 and his son, Larry Metz, presented me with the original check his dad paid us for the bike, including \$300 for shipping. It was one of the best thank yous I could have ever received from a guy who helped us from the beginning.

### *What was your bicycle when you were a kid and where did you like to ride it?*

On my 6th birthday my parents gave me a 1952

Schwinn. I rode it down the street and ran into my dad's car, I guess all this was meant to be.

### *Where do your bicycle buyers come from?*

We have sold bicycles to museums and collectors all over the United States and Canada, and helped build a collection in Qatar, The Velorama Museum in Nijmegen, the Netherlands and the Bicycle Museum of America in Ohio to name a few. We always have a group of customers from England, Germany and Italy. The most exotic place a customer has come from that I can think of is that a couple came from Australia for the bicycle sale. They said it was on their "bucket list."

### *What's the craziest bicycle collecting or picking story you've heard?*

We call it the "plumber's collection." I went to Rhode Island to look at a few high wheels; when I got there two brothers showed me some nice bicycles in their parents' cellar. They made it very clear that a major cash offer of an undisclosed amount had been offered and nothing was going out the door until I valued auction prices on the collection in that room. Starting at the first bike in the line I hip shot auction estimates. Halfway through they stopped me and admitted that the major cash offer was \$25,000 and we had not seen the two other rooms yet and we were already up to \$40,000. We ended up getting about \$175,000 for that collection. Plus, they had a cigar store Indian which we got \$18,000 for. That was a long time ago.

—Andrea Valluzzo



Mike Fallon poses with a land speed record bicycle, ridden by John Howard, and published in the Guinness Book of World Records in 1989 for going 152.284 miles per hour on July 20, 1985. The bike will be offered in this year's bicycle auction on April 2



Mike Fallon believes this rare, circa 1896 "Jimmy" pneumatic safety, by Zimmerman Mfg Co., Freehold, N.J., is the only Jimmy to appear at auction. It sold here in 2014 for \$15,210 from Dave Metz's collection. Company founder Arthur Augustus Zimmerman won the first world sprint championship in 1893 and won more than 1,000 races.



Wheelmen pose for a photo before the 10-mile ride at Copake's 20th annual auction in 2011.