

Amphicars go to auction – Dual-purpose vehicle ahead of its time or sinking 60s relic?

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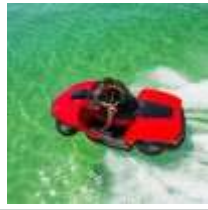


Four Amphicars (from top left clockwise - [Mecum](#), [Barrett-Jackson](#), [Fort Lauderdale, Russo & Steele](#)) go to auction in the first two weeks of 2015 with much discussion about what they will each fetch as one of the highly-prized German amphibious cars recently sold for \$123,400. Gizmag has analyzed all 54 Amphicar sales of the last decade and made some sense of the market.

[Image Gallery](#) (72 images)

There are four Amphicars heading to auction during the rare car silly season in January, the most that have gone to auction at the same time for at least a decade and possibly for much longer. The big question is how much they will fetch. They sold new for between US\$2800 and \$3300 between 1962 and 1967, and in 2011, one of the highly-

prized German amphibious cars sold for \$123,400. Gizmag has analyzed all 54 Amphicar sales of the last decade in order to make some sense of the market.



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Gizmag first wrote about the [Amphicar](#) a decade ago, the mass-produced German car of the sixties having come to our attention due to the spate of amphibious vehicle projects that were getting underway in the first years of the new millennium.

The Amphicar remains the only mass produced consumer amphibious car in history, but the enterprise failed, inviting the conclusion that the product was flawed, and at very least warning others against pursuing the amphibious vehicle concept.

Time magazine, once a champion of innovation, listed the Amphicar as one of its [50 worst cars of all-time](#). That so many Amphicars are still on American roads and deeply loved by their owners bears testimony to the contrary.

Simplistically, it's easy to understand why journalists hang the old "jack of all trades, master of none" line on a dual-purpose vehicle designed for a marketplace they are not

familiar with, but the secret to amphibious success is the utility of the dual-purpose design.

All of the new crop of amphibious vehicles were inspired by the difficulties of launching and retrieving a boat, and the most desirable benefit of an amphibious craft is the complete removal of the tedious launch ritual.



[Barrett-Jackson](#) sold this 1967 Amphicar for US\$93,500 at Scottsdale in 2007. It had just 600 miles on the clock after a complete "nut and bolt" restoration.

Being on the water is its own reward, and the greatest barrier to enjoying that reward is the launching process – getting any boat or PWC on the water is a right royal pain in the backside. Firstly, you need to trailer it to a slipway (a purpose-built launching spot), and they aren't all that commonplace and may indeed be a long way from where you wish to enjoy your time on the boat, meet the picnicking party on shore, ad infinitum.

Then you need to launch it, and that usually requires more than one person, then secure your own vehicle against marauders, then reverse the process at the end of the enjoyment. Being on the water is such a joy though, that millions of people endure that process every day, even if it is just to sample the humble joys of a dinghy with an outboard.



This 1964 Amphicar has a Fjord Green exterior, white convertible top and an Apricot interior. This Amphicar, to the best of the seller's knowledge, has clocked 6,000 original miles from new, and the seller believes that he is the fourth owner. The car will go to auction by [Russo & Steele](#) at Scottsdale during January 2015.

Having an amphibious vehicle means you simply drive it into the water, and that means you can launch and retrieve it with zero hassle anywhere – no slipway required.

It also means that you can cross a waterway and have mobility on the other side – something you can't easily do without a platoon of people and cars, if at all. It also facilitates easy ingress and egress for passengers.



The Amphicar is a celebrity magnet

Curiously, the eccentric nature of the Amphicar makes it a celebrity magnet with owners including former American Presidents Lyndon Bain "LBJ" Johnson (pictured) and Jimmy Carter, film director George Lucas, actor/singer Madonna, actor Dan Ackroyd, country singer Alan Jackson and spoon-bender (the hard way) Uri Geller. The Amphicar has also starred in a Pepsi "Come Alive" TV commercial, "The Simpsons" TV show, music video clips for Madonna ("Burning Up") and Alan Jackson ("As She's Walking Away"), and numbers [dozens of movie credits](#) including a role alongside Peter Sellers in "Inspector Clouseau".

So much has been written about the Amphicar that it is contradictory, it is difficult to sort the fact from the fiction. Whilst the Amphicar could not comply with America's tightening emission regulations after 1967, production appears to have ceased long prior to that point, and stockpiled inventory heavily discounted to move it. One source indicates that production ceased two weeks after the death of Harold Quandt (then owner of BMW and the person who financed the venture) in 1964 because the Quandt family was losing money on every car (believed to be \$700 at a \$3300 price in the US).

Another often quoted fact is that production volumes of 20,000 per annum were expected and the company had tooled accordingly, and quite obviously those sales never materialized as only 3,878 Amphicars were ever produced. Budgeting for 20,000 and achieving 500 a year sales is clearly a recipe for financial disaster.

The main problem appears to have been the price. When new, the Amphicar initially sold for US\$3300 at a time when an MGB Roadster cost \$2,659, a Triumph TR3 \$2,700, a Pontiac GTO went for \$3,225, [and an Austin Healey 3000 cost just \\$100 more at \\$3,400](#). In Germany, the Amphicar sold for DM10,500 putting it in a luxury vehicle category for the normally adventurous and outdoorsy German populace. As a sports car, the Amphicar's appeal in the V8-oriented American marketplace was distinctly limited by the anemic four cylinder 1147cc engine which it shared with the Triumph Herald.



This 1963 Amphicar, believed to be one of just eight in the United Kingdom, [went to auction in August 2013](#) with an estimate of GBP30,000 to 35,000 at Historic car auctions but failed to meet reserve.

When sales didn't materialize as hoped in the US, the price was progressively discounted to a low of \$2,800, but EPA regulations were the final hurdle that could not be overcome. Of the 3,878 Amphicars produced, 3,046 were exported to the United States, which means American sales accounted for 78.5 percent of the Amphicar's total production.

Since [that article](#) a decade ago, dozens of amphibious vehicle manufacturers have sprung up across the globe.

Water covers 71 percent of the earth's surface, and many areas are a mosaic of water and land. With 90 percent of humanity living on or near the water, it makes sense to

have a vehicle that is at home in both environments, and we can count more than two dozen makers of amphibious vehicles in 2015 and expect more to follow.

Two manufacturers which were getting underway when we first wrote about the Amphicar – Gibbs and Sealegs – have since developed international dealer networks and are manufacturing in quantity, both emanating from the water-challenged environment in New Zealand.



Putting it in perspective historically, before the Amphicar came along, there had been hundreds of different amphibious vehicle designs manufactured, and thousands of individual vehicles produced, but they had all been for military purposes.



Many old military amphibious vehicles are still in service in the tourism industry today, such as this Chinese Red Army amphibious bus (left) we spotted in Qingdao a few years back and a British Army Duck which now plies its trade on the River Thames. CAMI began its amphibious exploits by developing a United States LARC before developing a raft of its own proprietary designs.

The military could see the obvious need for being able to seamlessly transition from land to water and back again, but it took amphibious-obsessed German industrial designer [Hans Trippel](#) (1908-2001) to get the peacetime Amphicar afloat.



The [Wheatcroft Collection](#) includes two original Trippel SG-6 vehicles built for the German military prior to WWII, the one at left being a production model and the one at right being the closed cab prototype

Trippel built his first amphibious vehicle in 1932, building numerous prototypes through the 1930s, presenting his SG-6 prototype to Adolf Hitler in 1936 and receiving a significant grant for development and initial production. When Germany occupied France during WWII, Trippel was put in charge of the Bugatti factory at Molsheim, which was renamed Trippelwerke, and produced more than 200 vehicles for the German military.



A Volkswagen Type 166 Schwimmwagen amphibious vehicle. Though the Trippelwerke SG-6 was produced in the hundreds, Ferdinand Porsche's Volkswagen Schwimmenwagen was more functional, cheaper (by half) and was produced in much greater quantities. More Type 166 Schwimmwagens were produced than any other amphibious vehicle in history though they were all part of the German WWII war effort and very few survive today.

Trippel continued building amphibious vehicles until the beginning of this century, though none were ever produced in the quantities of the Amphicar. Numerous Trippel prototypes and some production vehicles are pictured on the [Amphibious Vehicle](#) and [Amphicars](#) site.

The Amphicar Auction Market

The following is a list of all of the documented sales of Amphicars at auction in the last decade. We've added links in all but one case, and if anyone can assist with links or references to any we have missed, please put details in the comments section and we'll add it to the collective knowledge of this article.

\$123,200 (1965 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2011](#)
\$93,500 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2007](#)
\$82,500 (1968 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2007](#)
\$82,000 (1965 model) [Mecum, Houston, 2014](#)
\$77,000 (1966 model) [RM Auctions, McMullen Collection, 2007](#)
\$74,800 (1963 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2010](#)
\$71,500 (1964 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2008](#)
\$70,000 (1967 model) [Mecum, Indianapolis, 2013](#)
\$68,200 (1967 model) [RM Auctions, Dingman Ford Collection, 2006](#)
\$68,000 (1967 model) [Mecum, Kissimmee, 2008](#)
\$67,100 (1966 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2007](#)
\$66,000 (1966 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2011](#)
\$66,000 (1964 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2008](#)
\$63,800 (1965 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2012](#)
\$63,250 (1965 model) [RM Auctions, Amelia Island, 2012](#)
\$61,600 (1964 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2008](#)
\$60,544 (1964 model) [Bonhams, Paris, 2012](#)
\$60,500 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Monterey 2007](#)
\$60,500 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Meadow Brook, 2007](#)

\$60,500 (1967 model) [Russo & Steele, Monterey, 2011](#)
\$60,000 (1966 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2014](#)
\$60,000 (1967 model) [Mecum, Kissimmee, 2014](#)
\$59,400 (1964 model) [Bonhams, Greenwich, 2013](#)
\$58,118 (1964 model) [Bonhams, Zoute, 2014](#)
\$57,750 (1962 model) [RM Auctions, Monterey, 2006](#)
\$57,200 (1967 model) [RM Auctions, Al Wiseman Collection 2007](#)
\$56,899 (1962 model) [Coys, Athens, Greece, 2013](#)
\$56,710 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Florida, 2006](#)
\$55,000 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2008](#)
\$54,000 (1964 model) [Mecum, Indianapolis, 2011](#)
\$50,600 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2007](#)
\$49,500 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2008](#)
\$49,500 (1965 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2012](#)
\$47,300 (1967 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2014](#)
\$46,200 (1966 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2014](#)
\$45,100 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2009](#)
\$45,100 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale 2010](#)
\$45,000 (1965 model) [Mecum, Des Moines, 2012](#)
\$44,000 (1962 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2011](#)
\$44,000 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Amelia Island, 2010](#)
\$44,000 (1963 model) [Gooding & Co, Pebble Beach, 2008](#)
\$44,000 (1966 model) [RM Auctions, Monterey 2008](#)
\$44,000 (1964 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2009](#)
\$44,000 (1965 model) [Russo & Steele, Monterey, 2012](#)
\$43,000 (1964 model) [Mecum, Dallas, 2011](#)
\$41,800 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Arizona, 2009](#)
\$41,000 (1967 model) [Mecum, Kissimmee, 2012](#)
\$40,000 (1965 model) [Auctions America, California, 2013](#)
\$33,000 (1967 model) [Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach 2008](#)
\$32,000 (1964 model) [Mecum, Dallas, 2012](#)
\$31,771 (1965 model) [Historics, Brooklands, 2012](#)
\$30,958 (1966 model) [Artcurial, Paris, 2009](#)
\$30,500 (1964 model) [Mecum, Chicago, 2014](#)
\$29,700 (1964 model) [RM Auctions, Arizona, 2004](#)
\$28,655 (1963 model) [Bonhams, Germany, 2003](#)
\$27,500 (1964 model) [Auctions America, Fort Lauderdale, 2009](#)

PLEASE NOTE: All prices have been converted to USD using [the exchange rate on the day of the sale](#) if the sale occurred outside the United States.

Our conclusions on the Amphicar market given these recent sales



Firstly, there has been a lot of uninformed information spread about the Amphicar on the internet. Only one Amphicar [has ever sold at auction for more than \\$100,000](#) and that was the car of country music superstar Alan Jackson (the Fjord Green car above), a provenance we believe influenced the stellar price at auction, which can be [seen here on video](#). The car also appeared in at least one of Jackson's music videos and regularly attended Amphicar get-togethers in its owner's care, as Jackson is an Amphicar enthusiast. The hammer fell at \$112,000 but with all fees included, the final cost to the buyer was \$123,200. All the above prices are calculated the same way (total buy price).



[Barrett-Jackson](#) sold this 1967 Amphicar for US\$93,500 at Scottsdale in 2007.

The second (above) and third (below) highest prices ever achieved for an Amphicar were both for near perfect restorations – cars which were effectively in "as new" and probably better than new condition.



[Barrett-Jackson](#) sold this 1968 Amphicar for US\$82,500 at Palm Beach in 2007.

Next, it doesn't matter what year an Amphicar is classified as, because they're pretty much all the same and the model year is really only the year it was sold.

Year	Number of Sales	Avg Price	High Price
2014	7	\$54,874	\$82,000
2013	4	\$56,575	\$70,000
2012	9	\$47,874	\$63,250
2011	6	\$65,117	\$123,200
2010	3	\$54,633	\$74,800
2009	5	\$37,872	\$45,100
2008	9	\$54,733	\$71,500
2007	8	\$68,613	\$93,500
2006	3	\$60,887	\$68,200
2005	0	\$0	\$0
2004	1	\$29,700	\$29,700
2003	1	\$28,655	\$28,655

Amphicar prices are not skyrocketing. Our analysis suggests they began to skyrocket prior to the Global Financial Crisis and unlike the overall rare car market, which recovered several years ago and is going on to unprecedented highs, the prices of Amphicars are only just recovering to pre-2008 levels. No, there's not a lot of data to work with but it's all we've got, and it suggests that apart from the provenance-enhanced Jackson sale in 2011, the market was at its peak just prior to the GFC.

So they're not skyrocketing, but they can be reasonably expected to appreciate consistently from here onwards if they follow the rest of the collectible car marketplace.

Finally, Barrett-Jackson clearly sells more Amphicars for higher prices than any other auction house. This might be because it specializes in them, and hence owners of better vehicles go to Barrett-Jackson, or it might be because Barrett-Jackson does an awesome job of creating hype around its auctions with the use of clever marketing and a huge television audience. Nearly all the cars at the top of the list were sold at televised auctions, which obviously means that if you're a seller, sell your car at a televised auction, and if you're a buyer, you may buy better at an auction which isn't televised.

Is the Amphicar the solution to your problem?

But wait, there's one more thing. One of the things you'll see written everywhere on the internet is that the Amphicar is the only mass-production amphibious vehicle ever made for the domestic market. That was true, but with the accelerating success of both Sealegs and Gibbs Technologies, it probably isn't true any longer, and there are many road registerable amphibious solutions out there these days. The question to be asked now, is whether you wish to have a vintage amphibian with a [thriving network of fellow enthusiasts](#) (primarily inside the United States) that gets together for amphibious adventure and friendship on a regular basis, or whether you want an amphibious vehicle for other reasons/needs.

If the latter is the case, then a whole range of possibilities open up. There are far more modern, reliable, time-, hassle- and cost-efficient solutions for amphibious needs than the Amphicar, which many people will argue is a slow and cantankerous antique.



The most obvious is the [Gibbs Quadski](#) which has been available for many years as a single seater, now offers a dual seat, and is fast developing a global dealer network.

I got my first good look at one of these at the recent Kings Cup, the world's richest race event for Personal Water Craft, and it impressed me considerably. With an MSRP of US\$42,800, the Quadski runs out a fair bit cheaper than the average Amphicar (average price at auction of the 54 listed above is US\$54,781) and can be expected to

be cheaper and easier to maintain. By the same nomenclature (the 770 designation of the Amphicar stands for 7 mph on water and 70 mph on land), the Quadski would be a 4545 as it will do 45 mph on water and on land. It will also be far more durable in sand, salt water, and over rough terrain.



If you have amphibious needs more inclined to the aquatic than terra firma, both [Sealegs](#) (above) and [Iguana](#) (below) offer a range of amphibious boats, both with a fast growing global networks.



The Iguana is a distinctly upmarket solution with prices starting at US\$250,000.

Beyond that, Gibbs now has [two Amphitruck models](#), [CAMI](#) offers a broad range of amphibious solutions, [Hydratek](#) and [ARGO](#) offer amphibious workhorses, and both Watercar and Aton-Impulse offer very cool amphibious SUVs in the form of the [Panther](#) and the [Viking](#).