

Milestone Auctions sets house record for an antique toy sale at \$1.3M New Year's Extravaganza

Robots, space toys and pre-WWII Japanese toy motorcycles grabbed lion's share of the top 10

WILLOUGHBY, OHIO, USA, January 22, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For more than 12 solid hours, bidders across the globe ignored the clock and stayed the course to bid in Milestone's January 13, 2024 auction, the Ohio company's first-ever toy sale to cross the million-dollar threshold. Finishing near \$1.3 million, the 723-lot offering kept antique toy fans competitively engaged as they vied for extreme rarities and prototypes. In so doing, the current hot market for antique and vintage toys continued its unabated run, revealing which types of toys currently hold most-favored status and which are enjoying a revival of interest.

Categories that grabbed the spotlight and brought consistently high prices included robots, space toys, motorcycles, and the ingenious, sometimes humorous, tin toys of pre-WWII Japan that, in decades past, had been underappreciated and thought of as "niche" collectibles.

The auction's top lot was something of a dark horse: an all-original and complete Exelo (Japan) battery-operated 'Mars' Explorer space car that had been estimated at a very respectable \$12,000-\$15,000 but ended up blazing a Red Planet trail to \$42,120. Looking a bit like a 1950s/'60s "car of the future" and manned by two astronaut passengers, the two-tone green tin vehicle was emblazoned with MARS on its sides and came with its complete and colorful pictorial box depicting a Martian landscape. Both the exotically-styled toy and its super-graphic box



The auction's top lot was an all-original and complete Exelo (Japan) battery-operated 'Mars' Explorer space car with original box. Sold for \$42,120

manifest a world of space travel as originally visualized by 20th-century Japanese artists. The amusing, sometimes bizarre, fantasies incorporated into the designs from that period in Japan are what make post-WWII Japanese space toys so irresistible to collectors.

“So much imagination went into the design of mid-20th-century Japanese toys. They're in a league of their own,” said Miles King, co-owner of Milestone Auctions. “You can get lost studying the box art. On the Mars Explorer box

alone, you might wonder who's inside the flying saucer that landed in the clearing, who fired the primitive rocket that's whizzing past in the sky, how many robots it took to pave the road on which the space car is traveling, and how much a gallon of gas costs on Mars. There's a lot going on, and that's what makes it such a great toy.”

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*Miles King - Co-Owner,
Milestone Auctions*

As predicted, the top-selling robot in the sale was a fantastic 10-inch Yonezawa (Japan) windup Diamond Planet Robot, a very rare variation of the largest tin robot ever made, with a silvery-blue body and red arms and ears. All original and complete with its distinctive googly eyes, an “oxygen meter” [on chest], and large windup key, it sold for \$34,440 against an estimate of \$20,000-\$30,000. “Only a few Diamond Planets in this color variation have ever

come to market. We knew there would be competition,” King said.

The all-original 38-inch prototype for Marx's Big Loo Giant Moon Robot also created a stir. The unpainted silver Big Loo had been acquired directly from the toy's designer, Harry Evanoff, in 1963. It had its production numbers on its back and retained a Marx sample tag reading: “7650, Big Loo, Erie, Return to Harry E.” The auction lot also included archival letters from Louis Marx about production issues and returns, and other unique documents such as a test-sample letter and a timesheet showing hours spent in development. It landed within its estimate range, at \$17,550.

International competitors were keen on other types of space-theme pieces as well, like a [Marx Flash Gordon Signal Pistol](#) in a rare baby-blue color. All original and appearing as though it had never been played with, the early iteration of what a space explorer's weapon might look like was also accompanied by its vibrant original box which bore the tagline “The Screaming Flashing



Rare pre-war Japan lithographed tin windup 'Gun-Yo' military trike motorcycle. Sold for \$14,040

Signal Gun." It sold for \$8,775 against an estimate of \$3,000-\$4,000.

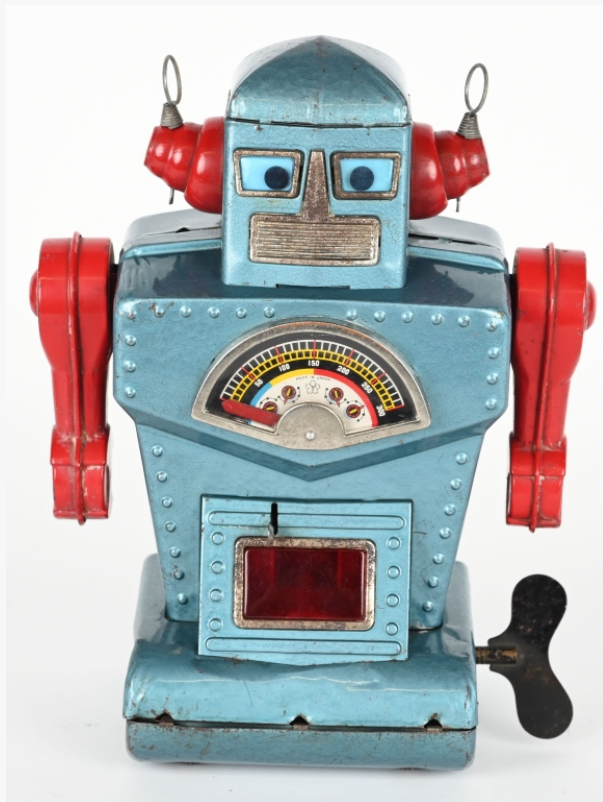
The formidable parade of toy motorcycles was led by a 12-inch red version of I Y Japan's tin bike known by the name "[Friendly](#)." A beautiful presentation with a male driver and female passenger, it was complete and in correct working order, including its ability to emit a motor noise. Three months earlier, Milestone had sold a different example of the same design, also in very nice condition, for \$10,000. For the bike entered in in the January 13 sale, Milestone assigned a conservative estimate of \$3,000-\$5,000. Rarity and condition once again attracted collectors, and it rose to \$19,305.

There was tremendous overseas interest in pre-war Japanese toys, especially the rare lithographed-tin windup motorcycles. Two of the top entries were cataloged with individual estimates of \$2,000-\$3,000, but as time would tell, there was much more upside yet to achieve. One of the bikes was a "Gun-Yo" military trike motorcycle, 10½ inches long, fastidiously detailed and with a Japanese soldier driver kitted out with a gun and dagger. The other bike, a "Welby" trike motorcycle, exhibited a beautiful color palette and fine detailing, even down to the speckled pattern on the civilian rider's shirt. Each of the bikes sold for nearly five times the high estimate, settling at \$14,040.

Early German toys were in demand, as well. A rare German tin single-cylinder



Rare and very desirable Lehmann (Germany) 'Walking Down Broadway' flywheel toy with original box. Sold for \$16,380



The top-selling robot was this Yonezawa (Japan) 10in windup Diamond Planet Robot, a very rare variation with blue body and red arms and ears. Sold for \$34,440

[flywheel motorcycle](#), 9 inches long with spoked wheels and a nicely-dressed rider figure, was in working order in spite of being well over 100 years old. Like the previously mentioned Japanese bikes, it sold for \$14,040, more than twice its high estimate.

From the revered German toy firm founded by Ernst Paul Lehmann, a rare and very desirable flywheel toy known as “Walking Down Broadway” or, in the vernacular, “Mr and Mrs Lehmann,” was complete with the essential dog-on-leash figure and accessory walking cane. In excellent condition and accompanied by its original box, it was described in the auction catalog as “one of the best examples” Milestone’s specialists had ever seen. It ended its bidding run at \$16,380 against an estimate of \$6,000-\$8,000.

Although approximately 90 years old, a rare Gendron (USA) “Skippy” shark-nose Graham pedal car still had plenty of spark under its hood and retained all of its original parts, including its Art Deco hood ornament and hubcaps. The zippy little roadster in original coffee-and-cream paint sped to the upper end of its estimate range, closing at \$11,115.

After the auction wrapped, Milestone’s co-owner Miles King commented: “In our ten-year history we’ve had other million-dollar-plus auctions, but this was our first auction solely devoted to toys that crossed into the seven-figure zone. It was a 12-hour marathon due to the number of Internet and phone bidders, and ended up being a very satisfying achievement for us. Both my business partner, Chris Sammet, and I have collected antique and vintage toys throughout our adult lives. We enjoy selling many types of collectibles – antique and vintage firearms, classic cars and automobilia, petroliana and other types of antique advertising – but we get a special kick out of the toys.”

To discuss consigning a collection or individual item to Milestone’s next toy auction, please call Miles King at +1 440-527-8060 or email info@milestoneauctions.com. All enquiries are kept strictly confidential and there is never any obligation to consign. Visit Milestone online at www.milestoneauctions.com



Important original 38in prototype Marx Big Loo Giant Moon Robot, acquired in 1963 from the toy's designer, Harry Evanoff. Sold for \$17,550

Prices quoted in this report are inclusive of 20% buyer's premium.

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