

Proto-cycle: 1902 Marsh heads to auction as part of the Preston Evans motorcycle collection

[Kurt Ernst](#) at 8:59 am | Hemmings Daily



1902 Marsh. Images courtesy Auctions America.

Motorcycles, in the early days of American manufacturers, were little more than bicycles powered by internal combustion engines. The Marsh Motor Bicycle, built in 1899 by W.T and A.R. Marsh in Brockton, Massachusetts, fell into this category, but by 1900, the company had shifted its focus to building motorcycles. Next month, as part of Auctions America's Auburn Spring sale, a [restored 1902 Marsh](#), part of the 30-bike-strong Preston Evans Collection, will cross the auction stage in Indiana.



One of the innovations adopted by the Marsh brothers was the use of the engine as a stressed frame member. The single-cylinder engine itself formed part of the motorcycle's seat tube, and when the firm later switched to manufacturing a V-twin motorcycle, the cylinders formed part of both the down tube and the seat tube. Unlike many other early motorcycle manufacturers (such as Indian, which in its early days used engines provided by The Aurora Machine and Tool Company), Marsh used engines of its own design and manufacture.



The 1902 Marsh pictured here carries a 510-cc single-cylinder intake-over-exhaust (IOE) engine, rated at 3.5 horsepower and capable of powering the motorcycle to a top speed of 40 MPH (which, given what appears to be a rear coaster brake, is more than fast enough). The engine breathes through an atmospheric intake valve, opened by the suction of the piston, and exhales through an exhaust valve located in a pocket off the cylinder. Note how the exhaust is routed away from the rider's leg, exiting beneath the bottom bracket.



In 1905, the Marsh brothers would join forces with Charles Metz to form the American Motorcycle Company, which would produce bikes under the Marsh-Metz name until 1913. It isn't clear how many pre-merger single-cylinder Marsh motorcycles were made, but very few remain. If the auction company is correct, this may be the sole example remaining, which is why the pre-sale estimate for the Marsh is between \$80,000 and \$85,000.



1920 Ace Four with Watsonia sidecar.

Other motorcycles of note in the Preston Evans collection include a [1920 Ace Four with a Watsonia Sidecar](#), said to be one of three Aces remaining; a 1925 Henderson deluxe with a Goulding sidecar; a [1915 Indian Model G Big Twin](#); a [1918 Indian Model N Powerplus](#); a [1922 Humber](#) and a [1922 Edmund](#). For fans of more contemporary British motorcycles, the sale will include six BSAs, ranging in vintage from 1939 to 1967, and 13 Triumphs, ranging in vintage from 1946 to 1969.

The Auburn spring auction takes place May 7-9 at Auburn Auction Park in Auburn, Indiana. For complete details on the Preston Evans motorcycle collection, visit AuctionsAmerica.com.