

Hooked by Old Fishing Tackle

ERNEST HEMINGWAY and Zane Grey are two of the more well-known names in big-game fishing. But serious collectors at the Florida International Tackle Show in Daytona Beach in early March are likely to be more interested in the names Billinghamurst and Kovalovsky.

Arthur Kovalovsky was a Hollywood auto mechanic who died in 1958 and whose custom-made fishing reels are highly sought after. In 2007, Lang's Auction of Waterville, N.Y., sold an 1859 side-mount fly reel made by gun maker William Billinghamurst for \$40,000, believed to be the highest price ever for a fishing reel at auction.

Lang's, about 100 miles west of Albany, is a leader in the tackle field. In 2003, it sold an 1859 copper Giant Haskell Minnow lure with a revolving tail for \$101,200. "It's the only lure of that size and style known to exist," said Jim Schottenham of Lang's, which holds two big tackle sales a year and has a database of more than 30,000 customers in 44 countries. "It's the Holy Grail of fishing lures."


Tackle collectors tend to gravitate toward a particular era or artist. For instance, fly rods

made by Lyle Dickerson have skyrocketed recently, with originals going for upward of \$10,000. A reel made by the vom Hofes, German immigrants who set up shop in New York in the 1850s, can bring \$25,000 or more.

The International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST), which bills itself as the largest tackle show, runs in July in Orlando, Fla. The Daytona Beach show will include more than 300 tables of antique lures, reels, rods, creels and fish decoys.

As with other collectibles, celebrity links sell. Adventure novelist Grey ("Riders of the Purple Sage") was a pioneer of the sport, working with Kovalovsky and others to develop better gear. Collector Ed Pritchard owns three Grey reels. Lang's sold a flag from his boat for more than \$24,000.

Hemingway was an eccentric sportsman: He often used a Thompson machine gun to shoot sharks that were feeding on his catch. Tackle that once belonged to him is very rare, because most of his personal items were stolen from a trunk Hemingway shipped from Havana, Cuba, to his home in Idaho shortly before he killed himself in 1961. But interest in his sports gear is high, given that one of the author's leather game bags inscribed "From Ernest and Mary Hemingway, Bag of Tricks, Best Always, Papa"—sold last fall at a Bonhams auction for \$12,500. —Mark Yost



THIS 1859 copper Giant Haskell Minnow lure with a revolving tail sold in 2003 for \$101,200.