

# Buyers and sellers and gossip for free

## East Texas town is a haven for the pursuit of doodad happiness.

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For Worth Star-Telegram

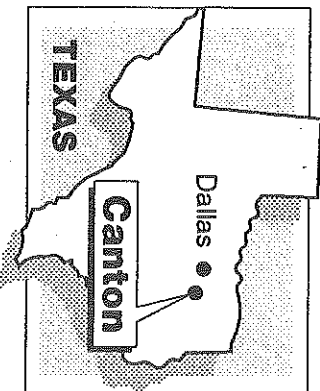
CANTON, Texas — By 9 a.m. the dealers already have their wares displayed. One man has the usual assortment of this and that spread over three card tables. And a ventriloquist's dummy tied to the trunk of a pine tree. The dummy — wearing a little tuxedo, a knotty smile and a \$65 price tag — is tied high on the trunk to make it visible to shoppers.

The scene looks like some weird hostage situation. But it's also the sort of sight to be seen here at First Monday Trade Days — the Common Market of Texas.

If this town — about 50 miles east of Dallas on Interstate 20 — had an official song, it would be "Second-Hand Rows." First Monday to sit in on court, to socialize, to trade livestock and other necessities.

Nowadays there are no livestock. And First Monday has expanded to take in the preceding weekend, cover 110 acres and accommodate 5,000 dealers. Nowadays as many as 150,000 people come to buy and sell.

Dealers arrive in cars, pickups, RVs, converted school buses. They stake out their territory and display their wares in buckets and boxes, on card tables, tailgates, hoods, on tarps, on the ground.



J.D. Dorsey of Azle sells antique pedal cars and the parts to restore them. Walter and Ruth Bruce of Shreveport, La., display the treasures they have found using their metal detectors.

A couple who call themselves simply George and Bea rent a space the size of a city lot. It is filled to overflowing with tables piled high with tangles of tools and appliances and building materials. Odds and ends of every race, creed and color of rust.

George and Bea are retired. He a preacher, she a social worker. "We're people people," she says, putting around her kingdom of clutter. "We had to do something to be around people."

A detailed examination of their inventory would indicate they have everything but the kitchen sink. Literally. "I had a kitchen sink last month," George says, "but I sold it. I can get you one here next month."

Not all of the First Monday miscellany is used, of course. Some is new. Some even is produced on the spot. One man is

making rubber-band pistols, another is using a chain saw to carve a wooden Indian from a log, a third is converting car tires into horse swings for steel-belted buckaroos.

New or used, the atmosphere between buyer and seller is informal, down-home. "How much will you take for this?" and "Look around and find you something you can't live without" and "No, I don't know what that is, but I'll take \$5 for it."

Sales are concluded with a "Have a good evening" or a "I thank you and do come back" or a "Well, Bill, you take it easy. Hope your wife gets to feeling better."

While waiting for a customer, dealers sit in the shade of a tree or canopy. They read romances, play dominoes, listen to the radio, even take a nap. One dealer sits in the doorway of his trailer and softly picks a mandolin.

For many here — seller and buyer alike — the money and merchandise that change hands

are secondary to the social interaction — the stories told and heard, the gossip caught up on, the friends made and snapshots of grandkids exchanged.

Late in the afternoon on the final day of this particular First Monday weekend, the dealers — these nomads of capitalism — break camp and prepare to leave. They take down their canopies, fold their tables, somehow pack their wares into bins and boxes, somehow stack the bins and boxes into pickups, campers and cars.

The ventriloquist's dummy is still tied to the tree, unsold. It has not gotten even any serious inquiries. Its owner unties it, stuffs it into his car with the other unsold items. Maybe next First Monday a ventriloquist will come along, in the market for a partner with only minor rope burns.

For more information, contact First Monday Trade Days, Box 245, Canton, Texas 75103; (903) 567-6556.