Phoney eBay bidders fined
Michael Gormley in Albany
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EIGHT eBay sellers were ordered to pay nearly $US90,000 ($118,000) in restitution and fines after admitting they had bid on products to inflate the prices. New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said more than 120 people would receive restitution in the settlement of the three cases, which wrapped up last week in state courts.

Spokesman Darren Dopp said the cases stemmed from specific complaints, but that the office had not conducted a broad investigation of the online auction industry and did not know how widespread the practice of phoney bidding was.

One buyer, Brad Clarke, 48, of Peachtree City, Georgia, had already received a cheque for $US3,089 after overpaying for a 1999 Jeep Cherokee he bought on eBay from a New York seller in 2002.

"I'd always been suspicious because it seems like an easy thing to do, to just keep bidding up," Mr Clarke said. "But I was still just completely shocked and very surprised."

Three sellers were accused of making 610 bids on 106 of their car auctions under the user name "Mother's Custom Automotive NY Dealer." They are paying more than $US28,000 in penalties and restitution, Mr Spitzer said. Their lawyers declined to comment.

In another case, the operator of an art auction house and two former employees were accused of bidding on more than 1,100 of each others' eBay items for more than five years to drive up the prices. Some paintings sold for thousands more than they were worth.

Mr Spitzer said one of the sellers pleaded guilty to a felony charge, the other two to misdemeanours. They were ordered to pay more than $US50,000 in restitution and fines.

The other two defendants were accused of making 170 phoney bids on their sports memorabilia items. They agreed to pay $US10,000 in penalties and restitution.

The Associated Press

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