

Sold - for charity at \$88,000

By GEOFF ROACH

DAVE Powell swallowed hard, hid his face in his hands and prepared for severe embarrassment.

The six-litre Imperial bottle of Torbreck "Les Amis" Grenache - which the Barossa Valley vintner had gifted to the Naples Winter Wine Festival charity auction in Florida, in the United States - would go on display in moments.

To Mr Powell's horror, the auctioneer was calling for an opening bid of more than \$12,000. A few days earlier, the same bottle had been examined by a U.S. Customs official anxious to impose a swag of duty on it.

His zeal waned when Mr Powell produced documents proving the Imperial was destined for the fifth staging of the renowned charity function, which deploys every dollar of the \$15 million it raises annually to the Naples Children and Education Foundation.

Even so, the Customs man asked Mr Powell to estimate how much he expected the gift to bring.

"I'll be delighted if it brings somewhere between five and 10 thousand dollars," Torbreck's chief winemaker/managing director replied.

Now he sat - the lone Australian invited to join



STANDOUT: The Torbreck "Les Amis" Grenache which drew a record price at auction in the U.S.

500 collectors who each had paid \$5000 merely to attend - convinced the auctioneer would have to lower his call to elicit a response.

The opening quote was swiftly accepted and instantly doubled. Others joined the fray. Twenty furious seconds later, the bottle was knocked down to an American buyer for an astonishing \$88,600.

Mr Powell has become equally chuffed to learn the amount paid for the trademark Torbreck product in the auction last month was an Australian record.

Andrew Caillard, of Sydney-based Langton's Wine Auctions, Australia's largest wine auction firm,



HEART OF GOLD: Winemaker David Powell will keep his special Imperial bottles of wine to raise money for charity.