

Retail Spotlight

The Spokesman Bucks Value Trend

BY RAY KEENER

If one had to summarize the 2009 season in 10 words or less, it would be:

“Single-digit down, no high-end, could be worse.”

However, one glaring exception is Wade Hall of The Spokesman in Santa Cruz, California. I ran into him in a buffet line at Interbike. “I sold more high-end bikes this summer than any year in the past 15,” he said.

Hall said he sold twice as many \$6,000-and-up bikes and three times as many \$10,000-and-up bikes than last year. The Spokesman grosses about \$2.5 million, and carries Specialized, Cervelo, Look, Colnago, Seven, Moots and Ibis. In the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range, sales were down 15 to 20 percent, he said.

So what does Hall attribute the banner year to? “Years of slowly building our reputation,” Hall said. “Just our

continuing strategy of high-paid, mature, adult salespeople, mechanical and fitting excellence, word of mouth and referrals.”



The Santa Cruz shop more than doubled high-end bike sales.

Hall sees high-end bicycles as socially conscious purchases. “The customer can’t afford a new Mercedes, so she buys a \$10,000 bike and puts it on her 2007 Benz. It’s OK to buy a \$10,000 bike, but not a \$60,000 Harley or a boat because bikes are healthy and fit, so it’s easier to justify the purchase,” Hall said.

And the Spokesman doesn’t depend on its surrounding Santa Cruz area for sales. “It’s the Central Valley, Palo Alto, San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and a huge women’s business,” Hall said. “Over half of our \$3,000-and-up business is to women. We get incredibly strong referrals from women who are tired of being treated like shit in bike shops.”