

Dealers say big cars, not mopeds, still selling

By Bill Graf

Rising energy costs and the recession, of course, have changed the way people get around, but only to a point. Big cars are still selling and mopeds aren't.

"Mopeds don't sell. People aren't buying the big bikes or the small ones. It's that way industry-wide. I just returned from the national Yamaha meeting and it's that way everywhere," said Tom Dormer, owner and operator of Dormer's Suzuki Center, 1750 West O St.

Dormer added that the 250 and 650cc motorcycles are in the highest demand.

"Guys have always wanted motorcycles. The gas shortage is just a good excuse, a way to get it past the wife," he said.

He estimated that the mid-sized motorcycles get about 65 miles per gallon. Mopeds average 100 miles per gallon.

However, even if motorcycles are the stingiest on gas of all motor vehicles, Dormer said people aren't beating a path to his door any more than usual.

In the auto industry, big car sales are still alive, especially since gas supplies have become constant and the price has leveled off in the last few months, according to John Dean, assistant sales manager at Dean Brothers Lincoln-Mercury, Inc.

"The trend is toward the small cars, definitely. But the Lincoln is still selling," he said.

Dean said the new automobiles are 1000 pounds lighter and have a wheel base 10 inches shorter than the older Lincolns.

Also, he said, the largest engine available in the Lincoln next year will be a 302 cubic inch V8 engine, while a few years ago the car could be ordered with a 460 cubic inch engine.

One of Dean's duties is ordering cars for general stock. At this point, he said, they

don't have any full-sized cars on the lot because of a sudden surge of big car sales at their lot.

"This was a hard year to predict. Sales will be going fine, then drop off suddenly," he said.

"As long as gas is available people will buy big cars. But if there's a shortage or the media comes out and says a shortage is coming or prices are going up, sales will drop. Media has a lot to do with it," he said.

Despite the fluctuating new car market, Dean said used cars are selling like hot cakes.

"Used cars are selling real well, especially the 77 or newer models. I can't show you a 78 or newer used car because I just don't have one. We'll take one in on trade

and sell it right away. People are just trying to get out from under the first year depreciation," he said.

Dean added that midwestern car dealers did far better than dealers in the large cities, probably because the wealth of this area is agricultural rather than industrial.

TWO FORMS of transportation in Lincoln that have experienced dramatic expansion in the last few years are buses and bicycles.

"People are buying more and better bicycles," said John Wayne, manager of the downtown Freewheelin' Bike Shop.

It used to be, he said, that the \$69 department store bikes were big sellers. But now the bicycling public wants better,

more expensive bikes because they're more fun and people are becoming more careful with their money, Wayne said.

"The bike-in-a-box days aren't over yet, but just about," he said.

The average bike buyer that comes into his shop, he said, is looking in the \$200 and \$300 range.

When a customer comes in to purchase a bike, the salesman asks how he plans to use the bike. About 40 percent will say they plan to use it for regular transportation during the warmer months, Wayne said.

Bicycle touring also is becoming more popular, he said.

Bike packs and racks are selling better than ever.

AS FOR the bus business, the Lincoln Transportation System has experienced an increase in ridership of more than 20 percent during the last year and an increase of 27 to 30 percent during the last six months, according to LTS General Manager Jerry Olson.

Olson said he expects the trend to continue. However he added that LTS must continue to upgrade and modernize the operation to keep Lincolnites on the buses.

In the short term, Olson said, LTS constantly checks ridership on the routes at certain times of the day to see if the route may need reinforcement during the peak hours.

They also keep track of where riders come from, so routes can be adjusted and the placement of shelters and benches will be most effective, he said.

For the long range, Olson said, street lanes exclusively for buses may become necessary, park-and-ride routes may be set up when Lincoln grows, and the number of street cutouts for bus stops will have to be increased as traffic increases.



Photo by Mark Billingsley

An energy-conscious student speeds across the UNL campus on a gas-stingy moped.

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