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## Bicycle shops shift into high gear to meet demand

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With gas costing more than \$4 a gallon, local bicycle shops are busier than they've been in decades.

"I can tell you business has been brisk. We hired more people than usual and we still can't keep up with the demand," said Mike Brandstadter, manager of D&D Bicycle & Fitness in Berkley.

Mark Hardy, manager of Bill Freund's Olympic Schwinn and Fitness Center in neighboring Oak Park, said \$4 a gallon seemed to be the breaking point.

"It doesn't matter who you are. Everybody feels it," he said of \$70-\$80 fill ups.

But, because gasoline is taking such a large portion of people's weekly budgets, not everyone can afford to buy a new bike. So many customers are fixing up their old bikes - and purchasing accessories such as wire baskets.

"Bikes that haven't seen the light of day in 20-30 years are seeing the light of day," Brandstadter said.

Bike prices have risen right along with oil prices, he said, adding 2009 models will be 7 percent to 20 percent higher than this year's models. Many bicycle parts - including tires and lubricants - are made from oil, he said.

"It's a two-edged sword," Hardy said of the impact of rising gas prices on the bicycle business. New bicycle sales at his store have fallen off 15-20 percent while accessory sales have risen about 25 percent, he said.

Customers who can afford to buy a new bike can't always get one, Brandstadter said. Because Michigan's warm weather arrived later than usual this summer, customers in warmer states already bought out many 2008 models. "They're rushing to get '09 models out," Brandstadter said of manufacturers. "They had no idea there'd be such a huge demand."

He said larger stores that had a lot of inventory in stock fared better this spring than smaller mom-and-pop stores.

Customers looking for replacement parts and accessories for their old bike can't always find those either.

"It's like a 20- to 30-year-old car," Brandstadter said of older model bikes. Some parts are no longer available.

Wire baskets, once almost a "no-sale item," are in huge demand, and short supply, Brandstadter said. "Everyone wants to be able to carry that gallon of milk."

Bicycle riding hasn't surged in popularity like it has this year since the 1973 oil embargo, the managers said. And it's attracting people of all ages and income levels.

"It would be nice if people were doing it for pleasure and exercise and not out of necessity," Hardy said.

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