

Packaging frills cut

By LOUISE COOK
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More businesses are trying to boost sales by cutting out the extras and lowering prices, but Americans can't seem to make up their minds about the no-frills packages.

Some builders say consumers are enthusiastic about houses without conveniences like carpools; others report business is slow despite efforts to push simpler, cheaper homes.

Spokesmen for the auto industry in Detroit report car buyers are choosing economy models, then piling on the options. But individual dealers say the situation varies from place to place.

The most-publicized of the bare-bones packages is the no-frills airline fare, but the trend has spread.

Contractors in some areas are offering lower-priced, smaller houses with few extras; factory outlets selling products in warehouse-style buildings at below-retail prices report business is booming.

Nick Demai, vice president of the North Carolina Home Builders Association, said contractors are re-

ducing square footage and leaving out garbage disposals, sun decks and other items. But he said buyers don't seem to be responding, and added: "Business is very slow."

The Deltona Corp. of Miami, Fla., found just the opposite. The company started building "back-to-basics" houses designed to sell between \$17,800 and \$30,900. Deltona sold 175 of the houses in the first three months of the year — compared to 37 homes in the fourth quarter of 1974.

The automobile picture is mixed. Joe Lazare, president of Westgate Lincoln-Mercury in Albany, N.Y., said customers who are buying smaller cars are "looking for the four-cylinder, standard transmission where they used to get the six-cylinder automatic."

In Schenectady, N.Y., however, Dan Prior, general manager of the State Toyota Corp., said people are buying just as many items like air-conditioning and radios as they were in the past.

John Carello, sales manager of Frank Sanders Oldsmobile in Los Angeles said he was "selling a pretty good mix of cars," but a spokesman

for Felix Chevrolet said customers are "going for the fully loaded cars and I can't tell you why."

A Ford spokesman in Detroit said 94 per cent of all Chevrolet Novas sold this year were ordered with an optional automatic transmission, compared to 92 per cent last year.

The no-frills airline fare, initially proposed by National Airlines and now offered by five carriers, took effect April 14 and airline spokesmen said the initial reaction was encouraging.

"Bookings are heavy," said a spokesman for National.

The no-frills fare is being offered on routes connecting Florida with the East Coast and selected major cities in the South and West. Passengers must buy tickets seven days in advance and travel Monday through Thursday.

The plan started out as a strictly bare-bones operation: no food or drink, for example. But some of the airlines have started putting back the extras, providing free soft drinks and selling low-priced sandwiches and, in some cases, alcoholic beverages.

Grocery prices fall

Wholesale costs down

WASHINGTON (AP) — A sharp drop in grocery prices held the cost of living last month to its smallest increase in nearly two years, the government reported Tuesday.

Retail prices rose three-tenths of 1 per cent in March, half the rate of both January and February and the least in any month since a two-tenths of 1 per cent increase in July 1973, when price controls were in effect.

Wholesale prices have fallen for four consecutive months, and thus the slowdown at the retail level had been anticipated.

The turnaround in the nation's inflationary rate from last year's peak levels provided further evidence of the recession's impact on the economy.

Over the past three months, retail prices were reported rising at a seasonally adjusted rate of 6.6 per cent compared with a 10.1 per cent

rate in the previous three-month period and a 14.2 per cent rate in the quarter ended last September.

The Ford administration has forecast an inflation rate of about 6 or 7 per cent this year, or about half the 12.2 per cent increase recorded in all of 1974.

Despite the moderating inflation rate, the purchasing power of the average worker's paycheck fell in March for the eighth time in the last nine months, the department said. Real earnings — take-home pay after adjustments for taxes and inflation — were listed as down four-tenths of a per cent over the month and down 4.8 per cent over the past year.

sugar also dropped in price, while pork, fresh fruits and bakery products increased.

Nonfood commodities rose six-tenths of a per cent, about the same as the average increase for the past five months but well below monthly increases earlier in 1974. Prices were higher for automobiles, houses, furniture, appliances and gasoline.

The cost of services in March rose four-tenths of a per cent, compared with monthly increases of twice that amount in the preceding five months.

Retail prices in March were listed as 10.3 per cent higher than a year ago with the Consumer Price Index at 157.8. That meant it cost \$157.80 to buy a variety of goods and services that cost \$100 in the 1967 base period.


Food was up 7.7 per cent over the past 12 months while nonfood commodities rose 11.4 per cent and services increased 11 per cent.

In detailing its March price report, the Labor Department said food prices, including restaurant meals, declined five-tenths of a per cent. Grocery prices — the major portion of the food index — dropped nine-tenths of a per cent in March, following a decline of one-tenth in February.

Beef, poultry, fish and fresh vegetables declined last month instead of rising as they usually do this time of year. Milk, flour, bread, eggs and

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Atomic power plant hearing held

BAY CITY, Tex. (AP) — Government and economic officials in Matagorda County rolled out the welcome mat for a proposed South Texas nuclear power plant at hearings Tuesday of the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

A parade of local officials, interrupted only occasionally by individual and unorganized opponents, strongly endorsed the plans of four South Texas utility systems to build a large two-unit atomic power plant along the Colorado River near here.

From among the few opponents, however, came the charge that Houston and other large Texas cities are attempting to "bring their pollution to Matagorda County."

The proposed plant, called the South Texas Nuclear Project, would be jointly owned by Houston Lighting & Power Co., Central Power & Light of Corpus Christi, the city of Austin, and the City Public Service Board, the municipal utility of San Antonio.

The 2,500-megawatt plant would cost \$1 billion and is scheduled to begin operation in 1980. It would cover 12,300 acres of choice rice lands along the Colorado River and be connected in the Texas electrical grid to serve approximately the southern one-third of the state.

Officials from area school boards, city council and chambers of commerce strongly endorsed the plant as being a stabilizing influence on the local economy. They said they believed the plant would not pose any health hazards or create any pollution problems for area residents.

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Several said they had toured existing nuclear plants elsewhere in the country and had consulted with experts before forming their opinions of the plant.

James Hughes, an opponent who identified himself only as a member of Friends of the Earth, said he is against the plant because it would "open Texas to nuclear power" and discourage research in alternate energy sources.

James Morgan Scott Jr., a Matagorda resident, said the plant should not be built at its planned site because this would encourage development in an area susceptible to flooding.

A Matagorda County rice farmer, Harley S. Savage, said that the plant would take from production valuable rice farmland at a time when world supply of food is already short.

Savage said that rice farmers do not oppose construction of the plant but believe its site selection was poor because it is using choice agricultural land instead of the marginal acreage which he said is available elsewhere in the county.

He said it would cause a loss of 490,000 hundredweights of rice per year, which would be enough to feed 187 million persons for one day.

A University of Texas student, Randy Daley, objected to the plant because it would use "immense amounts" of water from the Colorado River and because of the environmental record of Houston Lighting & Power.

"HLT is one of the biggest polluters in Houston," he said. "Now they're bringing their pollution to Matagorda County." Daley gave no specific examples of Houston pollution.

The public hearing is one of a series that is federally required before the utilities can receive a construction permit to begin building

the plant. Once the plant is constructed, there will be additional hearings before operation is permitted. Other hearings will deal plant safety and the environmental aspects.

The hearing on Tuesday concentrated specifically on the site selection. The hearing was expected to continue through Wednesday.

Campus briefs

Textbook display on wheels

Faculty members can browse over a rolling collection of textbooks, journals and their publishers next week.

The College Marketing Group Trailer will be at the University Center from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 29, sponsored by the TAMU Bookstore.

The rolling display includes publisher lists, and books in the trailer will be for sale.

Faculty members can also make suggestions during their visit as to books that would better suit their needs and the staff will forward the requests to various publishers.

Shakespearean author due

C. Wilson Knight, Shakespearean author, is including TAMU on his tour of Texas universities.

Knight will be on the TAMU campus for a lecture April 30. He has penned a number of works on Shakespeare as well as other poets and dramatists.

Vet college workshops

Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine will offer a one-day workshop April 27 on infertility and pregnancy diagnosis in cows.

The limited-enrollment seminar will be instructed by Dr. John C. Ramage of the TAMU Department of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery.

Films, demonstrations and reproductive tracts will be used to develop skills in early pregnancy diagnosis.

"Skid-a-Doo" nearing

The A&M Forestry Club is holding a "Skid-a-Doo" this Saturday from noon till evening on Scott Shartle's tree farm near Navasota.

The event features competition in log-rolling, pole climbing, crosscut sawing, ax cutting and many other skills.

Afterward there will be a fish fry, beer bust and entertainment by a progressive country band.

Winners of the competitions are sent to the annual conclave of the Association of Southern Forestry Clubs, this year to be held at Mississippi State.

Contact Ken Koehler, forestry club president, for further information.

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