



# Riding on bicycle biz

## Entrepreneur banks on three-wheel cycles, pedal-powered carriages

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SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (AP) - The traditional bicycle simply wasn't enough for rental entrepreneur Brian McInerney.

After all, why have two wheels when you could have three or four? Why seat only one when you can seat nine?

McInerney, the founder of Wheel Fun Rentals, hopes to take his specialty bicycle franchises nationwide with a host of products that include the three-wheeled Slingshot, the go-cart-inspired Quad Sport and his many surreys, four-wheeled, pedal-powered carriages that can seat whole families.

The business began with a deal between McInerney and an Italian manufacturer of surreys to distribute the carriages to various bike rental shops.

"It started out as a hobby business at first," McInerney said. "It was fun and family-oriented. And you were dealing with people who were on vacation and looking for fun activities."

In 1989, McInerney began opening a few shops of his own and the rentals became so popular he decided to explore franchising the business.

### Targeting baby boomer families

Last year, he and Al Stonehouse, the president of Camarillo, Calif.-based Diamond Back Bicycles, conducted market research and found strong potential for an amusement-driven business that pegged baby boomers in search of family activities.

McInerney was sure his surreys, with their one-to-three-bench seating, would be perfect.

Jim Colitz, a longtime franchise owner of a Uniglobe Travel, joined the operation in December as vice president, with Stonehouse taking the reins as president.

Since that time, Wheel Fun has opened franchises in six locations across California, from San Francisco to Fountain Valley, and plans to expand among the 225 rental shops that purchased exotic bicycles from the company.

McInerney estimated that most beachfront bicycle rental sites made 75-100 rentals each day during the summer, with prices ranging from \$6 per hour for traditional bicycles to \$25 per hour for surreys.

Wheel Fun will stand out among other rental shops, he said, because of its wide variety of

cycles. Other rentals include items like the Chopper, which is a single-seat, low-riding bicycle designed to look like a motorcycle, and the Deuce Coupe, a three-wheeler with two side-by-side seats.

### **Hub-and-spoke expansion plans**

The company's expansion could reach as many as five mobile locations in a tourist area, or "spoke sites," for every permanent franchise, or "hub site," translating to nearly 1,000 daily locations nationwide.

The concept was hot enough that Success magazine of North Carolina named Wheel Fun one of the "Top 10 Hottest New Franchise Concepts" of 2000.

"It's new, fun and appealing to a growing number of potential franchisees," said Jane Shealy, a senior editor covering franchising for Success.

"Baby boomers looking to retire early from corporate America, run their own show for a change and live in an area most people only see during a week's vacation each year."