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Poll: Super Rich Plan to Spend \$46K on Fashion This Holiday

By Valerie Seckler

Yacht charters, automobiles and other vehicles; jewelry; charitable donations, and villa rentals are projected to command the highest levels of holiday spending among Americans with net worths north of \$10 million, according to a survey by Elite Traveler magazine.

These wealthy individuals anticipated spending an average of \$487,900 for the poll-topping yacht charters; \$187,400 for various vehicles, and \$152,400 for jewelry, figures that include outlays for gifts as well as things for themselves.

Fashion rated as the category expected to command the ninth-highest holiday purchasing, or an average of \$46,000 for the individuals described by Elite Traveler as "super rich." By comparison, consumers considered mass affluent intended to part with \$2,100, on average, for fashion items. "Mass affluence" was the phrase used by ET to describe people with wealth of at least \$1 million and less than \$10 million. The poll participants were reached via client lists of financial advisers and lawyers, and they projected their seasonal spending in 14 categories of goods and services.

Eighty-five percent of the super rich and 79 percent of the mass affluent said they planned to buy fashion goods this holiday.

Upper-income consumers, like their middle- and lower-income counterparts, "will blow their wad relatively early," forecast Michael Silverstein, a senior vice president at Boston Consulting Group. "We're not anticipating a big week before Christmas. All three groups will be chasing some spectacular bargains in a highly promotional season," he added of intentions expressed by holiday shoppers in an online survey conducted for BCG by Harris Interactive Oct. 10 to 23.

Money spent by U.S. shoppers trading up to pricier, premium goods will grow by about 7 percent both during the holiday season and in the full year, BCG is estimating, growth that would result in \$770 billion worth of trade-ups for 2007. In addition, the roughly 2,600 people polled for BCG, including 2,060 with annual incomes of at least \$50,000, said they'd be most likely to spend more next year for things such as premium cars, travel, vacations, restaurants, home goods and home entertainment.

When asked to reveal the "most unique" gift they were going to give this season, responses of the wealthier of the two contingents in the ET survey ranged from a \$30,000 couture dress for a four-year-old to a \$200,000 restored, classic Chevrolet Camaro to a custom, jewel-encrusted pony saddle.

"What happens at the gas pump or in the subprime mortgage crisis doesn't affect the super rich," noted Douglas Gollan, editor in chief of Elite Traveler in disclosing results of its survey of 840 people, taken the week of Nov. 12. The super rich accounted for 280 of those polled and had a median net worth of \$22 million.