

SHAKY ECONOMY DOESN'T CURTAIL OUTDOORS GEAR

Hits include inflatables, lights, downsized goods

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The newest outdoor and adventure gear is just hitting stores, and you may want to toss the old and buy a few of the new marvels.

The big trends this year were miniaturization, inflatables and illumination.

Lamps by LED Lenser allow variation of the light output from minimal to searchlight bright, allow the focus to be changed from spot beam to flood beam, and come with a rechargeable battery. The light beam itself can be positioned at angles, so you don't have to move your head to have light where you want it.

Nite Ize, which makes fun

LED products powered by button batteries, offers a super bright dog ball, the Meteorlight.

The Spokelite attaches to a bike-wheel spoke and transforms your bike tire into a circle of light as it turns, making night riders much more visible.

Last year's show hits were the flexible lightweight solar panels that could be rolled up and stowed in a backpack so you could recharge your computer or anything else out in the wilderness. This year's improvement is a battery that stores that energy, so you can have power during a dark and stormy night.

Inflatables run the gamut, from kayaks to luxury camping beds. One of the best products is the Aerobed Tailgater Chair, sturdy

enough to hold even the heartiest partier. It comes with a battery-powered pump that inflates or deflates the lounge-style easy chair in about a minute and a half, and the pump can be plugged into your vehicle's ciggie lighter.

But the sour economy is taking a heavy toll on the outdoor industry. Despite new products, sales have been down in a major way for nearly every exhibitor at the recent outdoor retailers show — anywhere from 30 percent to 50 percent.

A few companies had no sign of a sales slowdown. Garmont, which manufactures hiking and ski boots, was one of the few manufacturers whose sales were up, especially in their back-country ski boot division.