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Felicity Williams

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WHEN it comes to Christmas wish lists, it appears that high rollers want Rollers.

Southbank-based prestige car retailer Trivett delivered no fewer than five Rolls-Royces around Melbourne this month - making up more than a third of its average yearly sales of 14 vehicles.

Chris Green, Trivett Classic's service manager, said it was "unusual" to sell so many Rolls-Royces in a single month and that overall sales of prestige cars in the lead-up to Christmas were better than last year.

And with a top-of-the-line Drophead Coupe costing a cool \$1.2 million, it all adds up to a very good year at the top end of town.

Big investment banks such as Goldman Sachs JBWere, UBS, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse and Merrill Lynch are notoriously tight-lipped about the bonuses they pay.

But word on the street is that Goldman Sachs and UBS were among those that enjoyed record years in 2007 - and that means their top brass have a lot of extra cash to splash on Christmas presents.

Jeweller Hardy Brothers - long-standing destination of choice for Collins St types looking for something sparkly - is one store that has enjoyed the fruits of Australia's prolonged economic boom.

James Baron, store manager for Hardy Brothers Melbourne, said sales of big-ticket items had been noticeably stronger all year and had still picked up for Christmas.

"The upper end of the market is without a doubt the strongest for us this year," he said. "We're talking about pieces over \$100,000 and they've risen dramatically."

Diamonds set in white metal were the most popular while large coloured gems had also made something of a comeback, Mr Baron said.

Elsewhere, wine auction house Langtons recently sold two complete libraries of Penfolds Grange wine for the princely sum of \$308,000.

The so-called vertical collections contain a bottle of every vintage produced between 1951 and 2002.

Langtons also sold a single bottle of 1951 Penfolds Grange for \$51,000.

Rather than providing cash bonuses, some companies are choosing to reward their hard-working employees with lavish holidays.

James Dutton, managing director of luxury online directory duttondirect.com, said there was a trend towards travel this year compared with items such as wine and cars last year.

"There's been quite a few vouchers being given out through our luxury travel section," he said.

"It's nice that people start to share out across the family of the workers as well."

Bookings included Double Island - an exclusive private island in North Queensland - Greece and Spain, Mr Dutton said.

And even the horse flu outbreak has failed to put a dent in racehorse sales over the past few months.

David Chester, managing director of Magic Millions thoroughbred sales, said there were a lot of new people getting into horse racing.

"We've noticed that has been a trend while the economy has been strong and the property and stock markets have been buoyant," he said.

The recent Magic Millions horses-in-training sale at the Gold Coast in Queensland had a record clearance rate of over 86 per cent with a record average price of \$38,000.

That compares with a "pass mark" of around 70 per cent, Mr Chester said.

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