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Roller Coasters: Background and Design

Spring 2015

Week 13 Notes

## Amusement Parks Part 2: Amusement Parks in North America, Europe, and Asia

### Some Notable North American Amusement Parks

Below are some notable (American) amusement parks. These parks are either flagship parks of chains or have some other significance. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I invite you to look at other amusement parks. Other major parks not discussed include Six Flags Great Adventure, Kings Island, Dollywood, Canada's Wonderland, Six Flags Great America, Hersheypark, and Knott's Berry Farm.

#### Cedar Point

- Cedar Point is the flagship park of the Cedar Fair chain and one of its biggest parks, getting over 3 million visitors annually.
- Cedar Point, located on a peninsula jutting out into Lake Erie in Sandusky, Ohio, was founded in 1870 as a bathing resort. It was popular as a picnic destination and had dance halls, bath houses, a bowling alley, and other attractions.
- It got its first roller coaster in 1890, a LA Thompson Switchback Railway
- During the First Golden Age, more amusement rides and coasters were added to the park, as well as other resort attractions like hotels.
- The Depression and WWII hit the park hard, and it went into despair until the 1960s, at which point there was a plan to turn the park into a Disneyland style amusement resort with themed areas and hotels. While this fell through, a railroad similar to Disneyland's was constructed and still exists today
- Cedar Point's oldest operating coaster, Blue Streak (a PTC out and back woodie), was built in 1964. Afterwards, roller coasters began to reemerge at the park.
- The park featured constant growth, usually adding a new coaster every couple years. They focused on steel coasters, and at one point had the most coasters of any park in the world.
- Cedar Point commonly went for the height record for coasters, first with Gemini in 1978 (which was beaten by Loch Ness Monster the same year), Magnum XL-200 in 1989 (the first hyper coaster), Millennium Force in 2000 (the first giga coaster) and Top Thrill Dragster in 2003 (the first strata coaster).
- Cedar Point, while an amusement park, also owns and operates several hotel / resorts, restaurants, a marina, and campgrounds on the peninsula.
- Cedar Point has been voted by Amusement Today (an amusement industry trade magazine) as the Best Amusement Park in the world for the past 15 years (every year the award has been given).

#### Six Flags Magic Mountain

- It's hard to label one park in the Six Flags chain as their flagship park, but their biggest park in terms of coasters is Six Flags Magic Mountain (SFMM), located near Los Angeles, California
  - Other possible 'flagship parks' include Six Flags Great Adventure, Six Flags Great America, and the original Six Flags Over Texas

- The park was built as Magic Mountain in 1971 and featured many rides designed by Arrow Dynamics, who did much of the ride building for Disneyland. This leads to the natural conclusion that Magic Mountain, like pretty much every other park at the time, was influenced by Disneyland.
- The park started out with an Arrow mine train coaster (Gold Rusher) and ever since has added a new coaster every couple years.
- While originally having license for the Looney Toon characters, the park started out with trolls as mascots, which continued until 1985.
- In 1979, Six Flags bought the park and added the Six Flags name
- The large amount of roller coasters in the park has earned it the title of park with the most roller coasters (17, to be 18) as well as being known as a park catered to coasters. However, this has led to criticism that the park only cares about the number of coasters rather than quality of ride or location
  - Scream!, built in 2003, is a perfect example. It is a nice B&M floorless coaster, but Six Flags built the coaster in a parking lot, without even removing the pavement. This earned the ride nicknames like 'Parking Lot: The Ride'
- In 2006, while Six Flags was making desperate attempts to save themselves from debt, they announced that they were considering selling the park, which surprised the enthusiast community since SFMM was such a major park. No offers were taken, and in 2007 they pulled back the offer to sell.

#### Busch Gardens Williamsburg

- Built in 1975 by Anheuser-Busch as part of a project to develop the Williamsburg area of Virginia (where Anheuser-Busch had a brewery).
- The part was themed after Europe (it was originally called Busch Gardens: The Old Country), with different areas themed after European nations like Germany, England, Ireland, Scotland, Italy, and France
- The park focuses less on rides than scenery and theming, but does put lots of effort into incorporating the rides into their areas, like the water ride Escape from Pompeii in the Italy section.
- While they only have 6 roller coasters, they tend to be major roller coasters. Three of them are B&M coasters at or near 200ft tall. One of them, Apollo's Chariot, consistently gets ranked as one of the top steel coasters in the world.
- The park is famous for its landscaping, and has received Amusement Today's Golden Ticket Award for Best Landscaping every year it has been awarded. The National Amusement Park Historical Association also ranks Busch Gardens Williamsburg not only as the most beautiful park, but also their favorite amusement park among members.

#### Holiday World

- Holiday World is a family-owned amusement park located in Santa Claus, Indiana (that's right, a town named after Santa Claus)
- The park began in 1946 as Santa Claus Land, a park which allowed visitors to visit Santa year round. It wasn't until 1984 that the Koch family renamed the park Holiday World and added theming for other holiday like Halloween and the Fourth of July.
- The park has three major coasters, all wooden: The Raven (CCI), The Legend (CCI), and The Voyage (TGG). They are all praised by enthusiasts, with the Voyage often time considered the best wooden coasters in the world.

- The park also has a large water park called Splashin' Safari which houses many large water slides, including some of the longest ones in the world.
- The park is often recipient of many Amusement Today Golden Ticket award, including Cleanest Park and Friendliest Park. Many attribute this to being family owned.
- One of the things Holiday World is famous for is offering free unlimited pop to all patrons; they have soft drink fountains all across the park free to use.

#### Amusement Parks outside the USA

- Currently, the USA only accounts for 21% of coasters worldwide. Coasters are becoming worldwide phenomenon that has spread to every continent, and similarly, amusement parks have spread as well, but with different twists based on where they are.
- In general, you can split amusement parks into one of three groups: North America (mainly USA), Europe, and East Asia (defined as Japan, South Korea, and China). 80% of the world's roller coasters are at parks that fall into one of these categories. Coasters exist elsewhere, but not in such large numbers, and major amusement parks are rare.
  - One unexpected country in the amusement industry is India. Even though it has a population of more than a billion people and a strong economy, there are only about 70 roller coasters in the whole country (same as Italy), and until last year, none of which were 'major' roller coasters. Last year saw the opening of Adlabs Imagica, an amusement park with large coasters, like a B&M floorless coaster and Premier launch coaster.

#### Amusement Parks in Europe

- While roller coasters were initially popular in America, many parks in Europe are actually older than American parks. This is because they usually began as other areas or were actual parks or garden, and later became amusement parks. Some parks like Tivoli Gardens date back to the 1850s.
- In general, parks in Europe will differ from American parks in that they focus more on scenery and the park atmosphere, rather than being a park full of roller coasters and other thrill rides. They also tend to be a bit more spread out.
- Being Europe, you also usually find things that would never exist in America due to legal issues. This includes things like self-operated rides (see Wild-und-Freizeitpark Klotten), full out adult playgrounds with swings and slides (including trampolines sometimes), and sometimes strange or offensive theming, such as the infamous Dog Fart Coaster at Bon-Bon Land or occasional nudity (both tasteful and random).

#### Notable Parks in Europe

##### Alton Towers

- The name actually refers to a castle in central England that existed where the amusement park is today. The park opened to the public as a garden in 1860, but wasn't transformed into an amusement park until 1980.
- The park is quite spread out, and features 13 themed areas. Some don't even contain rides.
- Local zoning limits place constraints on the park to build no rides over about 100 feet tall. This constraint has resulted in some phenomenal roller coasters, like Nemesis and Oblivion, which escape this limit by digging down into the ground.
- In 2011, the park had 2.7 million visitors, making it the most visited amusement park in the UK.

### Europa Park

- Europa Park, located in southwest Germany, is the largest amusement park in Europe and 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular resort by visitors annually (after Disneyland Paris)
- The park was built in 1975 by the Mack family (owners of Mack Rides) to showcase their amusement rides and roller coasters. The park has since expanded with many more Mack rides
  - Some exceptions to the Mack only rule are Silver Star (a B&M hyper coaster) and Wodan Timbur Coaster (a GCI woodie), neither of which are similar to typical Mack coasters
- The park is themed after different European countries, with over a dozen countries represented.
- One of their most notable coasters is blue fire Megacoaster, a launched coaster similar to Intamin coasters like Maverick and iSpeed. This coaster shows off Mack's ability to compete with Intamin and B&M for the large steel coaster market.
- Europa Park is very similar to American amusement parks, being very coaster and ride oriented.

### Tivoli Gardens

- Tivoli Gardens is the second oldest amusement park in the world, opening in 1843.
- It is located in the heart of Copenhagen, Denmark, and is surrounded by dense city (similar to Central Park, but much smaller)
- The park has beautiful scenery and historical theming, such as a lake with a pirate ship, a pagoda, and at night the park is lit up by thousands of decorated lamps.
- The park attracts about 4 million guests a year, more than any seasonal American park.
- The park is said to be one of Walt Disney's inspirations for Disneyland.
  - The creator of Tivoli Gardens once said "Tivoli will never, so to speak, be finished" to indicate it will continue to evolve without losing its ideals. Disney used a similar quote, saying "Disneyworld will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world".

### Other Notable European Amusement Parks

- Blackpool Pleasure Beach (northwest UK Coast) – Coney Island like costal park with several major roller coasters, including an Arrow hyper coaster called the Big One
- Thorpe Park (near London, UK) – Medium park best known for 10 inversion coaster Colossus
- Heide Park (northern Germany) – American style amusement park, starting to get coaster centered
- Parque Warner Madrid (Madrid, Spain) – Six Flags like park with coasters themed after super heroes and movies.
- Port Aventura (near Barcelona, Spain) – Former Universal Park; has several B&M and CCI coasters
- Mirabilandia (northeast Italy) – Major Italian park with award winning coaster Katun and iSpeed
- BonBon-Land (eastern Denmark) – "Family" oriented park full of strange cartoon characters and questionable theming. Home of the Dog Fart Coaster

### Amusement Parks in East Asia

- Before the turn of the millennium, Japan was the only country in East Asia with large amusement parks. Recently, South Korea and China have joined Japan, with China experience particularly rapid growth.
- Japanese park are somewhat similar to American parks, but are usually better with landscaping. Sometimes Japanese parks will have a 'Roller Coaster Tycoon' effect, with coasters that are built

with many straight lines and 90 degree turns, and the coasters will be all built near each other or on top of each other (see Nasu Highland Park for a good example of this).

- South Korean parks are not super common, but those that do exist tend to have large roller coasters and high quality coasters from manufacturers like Intamin and B&M (Japan has few of these).
- China originally only had small wild mouse coasters (similar to America in the 1950s), but starting in 2000s began rapidly developing its amusement sector. Dozens of new parks were being built, and even more coasters were built.
- Some Chinese parks have very sketchy coasters that have been highly run down and whose operation is questionably safe.
- Another common occurrence in China is knock-off coasters; coasters that mimic track and train styles of other manufacturers (usually Vekoma) with minor layout changes. Beyond possible patent infringement, these coasters are generally of a very low quality, and are quite painful to ride. Despite this, they still appear all over China and are still being built.
- Beyond the above two bullets, China is actually becoming a major location for coaster innovation and large coaster installation, mostly because parks are loaded with money and can afford such coasters. The last few years have seen many major coasters installed in China, including B&M coasters usually only found in Europe and the US and high quality TGG wooden coasters. They also will sometimes do large-scale theming for their rides and parks (on the level of Disney).
- One of the main differences between East Asia and the USA and Europe is the lack of wooden coaster. Excluding Japan, there were no wooden coasters in East Asia until 2008. Recently, wooden coasters are gaining popularity, with the coasters being built all receiving rave reviews (like T Express, Wood Coaster, and Dauling Dragons)

### Theme Park Review

The website Theme Park Review (link on course website) features many great photo trip reports of international parks as well as over a thousand videos on their Youtube channel (themeparkreviewtpr). I highly encourage you to take a look at these trip reports to get a feel for how parks are outside the USA. There are some very interesting differences not mentioned that you'll notice, as well as some funny videos.

NOTE: So you're aware, the website does contain 'adult humor', so be aware that there will be occasional profanity in the videos and trip reports. There are even some trip reports (ie Tivoli Gardens and Bon-Bon Land) which have cartoon female nudity. But while some is NSFW, most is.