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The Beast celebrates 30 years of terror in 2009

Kings Island ride still the world's longest wooden roller coaster

KINGS ISLAND, Ohio – Still growling and prowling, after all these years. A legend in its own time; it is arguably the greatest wooden roller coaster ever built.

The Beast roller coaster at Kings Island celebrates its 30th birthday in 2009 and shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, the ride remains as popular as ever with park visitors.

When the Beast opened to the public April 14, 1979, it was acclaimed America's ultimate roller coaster. It broke all existing records as the longest and fastest ride in the world. It is still listed in the prestigious "Guinness Book of World Records" as the world's longest wooden roller coaster.

The Beast is also unique in that it was completely designed and constructed by Kings Island personnel. The original design was modified so many times the final product looked nothing like the one envisioned when the project began. The Beast was going to sprawl over 35 wooded acres and the design team was determined to save as many trees as possible. Every turn, dip, twist and curve was designed to fit the rugged natural terrain. The Beast is unlike any other coaster, since many of its thrills are hidden from view by towering trees.

The designers studied nearly every major wooden roller coaster in the country and incorporated the best features of each into the Beast. They even included some of the most exciting thrills of the old Shooting Star that was so popular at Cincinnati's Coney Island.

It was constructed in less than a year, after two years of research and design. Charles Dinn, former director of construction, maintenance and engineering at Kings Island, headed the project. The renowned late John Allen of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company was a consultant. His company built the trains.

The record-breaking features of the Beast included:

- A 7,400-foot long track (1.4 miles) and ride time of four minutes, 10 seconds.
- Vertical drops of 135 feet (at a 45-degree angle) and 141 feet (at an 18-degree angle).
- A 125-foot long underground tunnel at the bottom of the 135-foot drop.
- Eight banked turns, some to 45 degrees.
- A massive 540-degree helix tunnel near the end.
- Speeds up to 64.77 miles per hour.
- Three tunnels.

By the time workmen had completed the massive Beast construction in March 1979, they had used 650,000 board feet of southern pine lumber; 37,500 pounds of nails; 82,480 bolts; 5,180 washers and 2,432 square yards of concrete.

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The ride was officially, and quite appropriately, “unchained” in a steady downpour Friday, April 13, 1979 for hundreds of media representatives from around the U.S. and Great Britain. The following individuals climbed about the gleaming red coaster cars for the first official ride:

- Charles S. Mechem, Jr., Chairman of the Board, Taft Broadcasting Company
- Dudley S. Taft, President, Taft Broadcasting Company
- Gary S. Wachs, Executive V.P., Amusement Park Group, Taft Broadcasting Company
- Charles Flatt, V.P. Construction & Engineering, Amusement Park Group, Taft Broadcasting Company
- William C. Price, Vice President & General Manager, Kings Island
- Frank Thompson, Operations Director
- Walt Davis, Director of Park Services
- Charles Dinn, Director of Construction, Maintenance & Engineering
- Bill Reed, Director of Rides
- David Palmer, Director of Marketing
- Dick Fussner, Director of Loss Prevention
- Chris Schaffer, Controller
- Al Collins, Resident Engineer
- Jeff Gramke, Assistant Engineer
- Jimmie Nickell, Assistant Director of Construction, Maintenance & Engineering
- Charles Swing, Maintenance Manager
- Charles Wright, Carpenter Foreman

Members of the media then spent the next four and one-half hours taking turns aboard the Beast, many attaching cameras to special mounts on the front cars to try and capture the sights and sounds of the unique thrill ride.

Since that time, a long list of satisfied customers have ridden the Beast including “The Incredible Hulk” Lou Ferrigno, former Cincinnati Reds stars Johnny Bench and Ken Griffey Jr., The Oak Ridge Boys, daredevil Robbie Knievel, Nick Lachey, Carmen Electra, Jessica Simpson, TV talk show host Montelle Williams and author George Plimpton.

A Cincinnati man who rode The Beast almost daily from 1979 to 1983, Carl Eichelman, became a celebrity for his feat. He accumulated more than 4,400 rides before “retiring” to pursue other interests. At that time, he held the world’s record for the most rides on the same coaster.

The Beast has accumulated these amazing statistics since it opened in 1979:

- Each of the three trains has traveled a total of 741,543 miles. That’s the equivalent of 30 times around the world!
- A grand total of 42,946,843 rides have been taken by daring park visitors.
- 1980 was the record year for the most number of rides. There were 2,150,353!
- July 17, 1981 was the record day, with 20,885 riders.
- The record hour was 1,680 on June 15, 1980 (Normal hourly capacity is 1,200).

In October 2004, the Beast was given the Coaster Landmark Award by the American Coaster Enthusiasts club, an award designed to recognize coasters of historical significance.

The Beast was the ultimate dream of every coaster designer and every park in the country. There has never been another one like it.

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