

Bumper Cars

Achieving Smooth Profits from Bumper Cars

By Hilary Danailova

Bumper cars have been around forever — and they're still favorites at FECs all over the world. "It's a great fixture that requires minimal labor and has a short ROI (return on investment)," said **Nicole Leal**, corporate operations manager at John's Incredible Pizza Company, a Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.-based FEC-and-buffet chain. "It's a fun ride that can be enjoyed by the whole family and all ages. And it keeps them coming back time after time."

Leal's opinion is shared by operators of FECs from the West Coast to the Far East. Bumper cars are often among the first attractions to be installed in a facility since they offer a fast revenue source. "They have the biggest return on investment of anything in this building," said **Marcus Kembrowski**, the general manager at Marlborough, Mass.-based Apex Entertainment LLC, which ordered bumper cars from the Oregon-based RDC brand at its first FEC in Massachusetts, as well as for its Syracuse facility, due to open in December.

"They might get lost in the shuffle; they're not as glamorous as laser tag. So they get overlooked. But for what you pay for the attraction, and for how simple it is to train people on and to run, you can't beat bumper cars."

FEC operators praise the way bumper cars draw customers and keep them entertained longer inside the FEC, generating greater indirect as well as direct revenue. "Besides the price charged to customers, there is significant additional business brought to the location because of the bumper cars," said **Alejandro Gomez**, manager at CityPlay in Madrid, Spain. The FEC installed RDC bumper cars at its facility inside a shopping mall in 2007 alongside bowling, an arcade with redemption, mini golf, a trampoline park, a children's playground and a full bar.

Bumper cars, a unique entertainment alternative in Madrid, have also boosted revenue for CityPlay's birthday party business, which represents 23% of overall revenue, Gomez said. "Bumper cars are the best bait for birthday parties," Gomez noted. "Because we have them, we do twice as many birthday parties as our competitors."

Bumper cars were virtually unknown in Quito, Ecuador, when Ultra Play Zone installed RDC models last June. "No other place has them in our country, so the bumper cars are an innovation for us," said Marketing Manager **Alejandra Alcivar**. She said Ultra Play Zone's owner, Helen Deller, chose the models for

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RDC bumper cars at John's Incredible Pizza Company perform well for the location.

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their novelty as well as their safety.

Strategically placed to be visible at the FEC entrance, the bumper cars quickly became a lure for customers and a major revenue generator. “Customers pay a unique tickets fee at the entrance, allowing them to use all of our attractions,” Alcivar explained. As a result, bumper cars “are now among the most used attractions by our customers.”

Customers are also more likely to play other games and buy food and drinks while using bumper cars, said **Colby Johnson**, senior games supervisor at Texas-based Pizza Properties Inc., which features RDC bumper cars as part of its entertainment lineup at the Peter Piper Pizza locations throughout the western United States. “In addition to the income directly from bumper cars themselves, there’s a financial benefit that is not easily measurable, but it’s definitely there,” Johnson noted. “They’re a selling point by giving the customer another option in the game area, apart from video or redemption games and kiddie rides.”

Pizza properties started installing RDC bumper cars nearly 20 years ago, choosing them for ease of use, relatively low maintenance and availability of replacement parts. With overhead strobe lighting, rotating beacons, lasers and a thumping sound system, the bumper car area is a consistent draw at Peter Piper Pizza locations, Johnson said.

Bumper cars also have been a cornerstone of the FEC lineup at John’s Incredible Pizza since the very first location opened 21 years ago, said Nicole Leal. “We have continued to purchase the Krazee Whirl electric cars time after time because of the ease of use for guests, and the fun color options,” she said. The brightly hued RDC models catch the eyes of guests when they first walk in, spurring them to buy more ride credits at the arcade, Leal said.

Most of the chain’s 13 locations — in California, Oregon and Nevada — offer 10 to 14 bumper cars apiece; the John’s Incredible Pizza marketing team frequently includes the rides in its mailers and e-blasts. Bumper cars are also a popular inclusion in birthday party and premier group packages, Leal said, because they offer an activity that a large group can do together.

FEC operators cited the all-ages appeal of bumper

cars as a prime reason for the attraction’s enduring popularity. “Ropes courses can be too scary and high for young kids, and laser tag can be dark and scary too. But the bumper cars are the first ride they’ll go on,” said Marcus Kembrowski at Apex Entertainment. “Then the moms and dads will jump right on them with their kids. You get the whole family out there together.”

From school children on field trips to professionals bonding over team building events, bumper cars are a reliable draw for the group sales packages that Apex does “a ton” of, Kembrowski said. “People just really enjoy it; they forget how much fun it is,” he noted. From a liability standpoint, Kembrowski added, bumper cars “are by far the safest attraction in the industry.”

RDC’s tire tube car models struck Guy Caminsky as

a particularly safe option, so he now offers them in all 11 locations of his South Africa FEC chain, The Fun Company (another two locations are due to open by the end of 2018, giving the company a presence in all five South African provinces). “We were the only company in South Africa that had the tire tube ones,” Caminsky said, observing that other entertainment centers have older,



The Fun Company, an FEC chain in South Africa, offers RDC bumper cars in all 11 locations. Another two locations for the company are scheduled to open at the end of 2018.

bumpier models that are less comfortable for patrons. “It makes us unique, which is a selling point versus our competitors.”

The Fun Company started as a bowling center in the 1970s; a decade ago, Caminsky changed the facility name and expanded the concept to a full-fledged FEC, adding bumper cars among the first attractions. Each location also features arcades, sports bars, 4-D theaters, glow mini golf, laser tag, and trampoline parks. Along with the added value bumper cars bring to his party packages, Caminsky likes them because they don’t obstruct views throughout his airy, open-feel centers, as other installations might. “They’re great to put in the front and middle of our centers, and it’s also quite an impulse thing – if they’re right in front of people’s faces, they’ll just want to do it,” Caminsky said.

As he sees it, the cars’ other chief benefit is longevity. “An arcade game can get stale,” Caminsky said, “but we believe bumper cars will be here for many years to come, so our investment will be a good one.”