

## A Great Fit for Fun

### How Bumper Cars Enhance the Bowling Center Experience

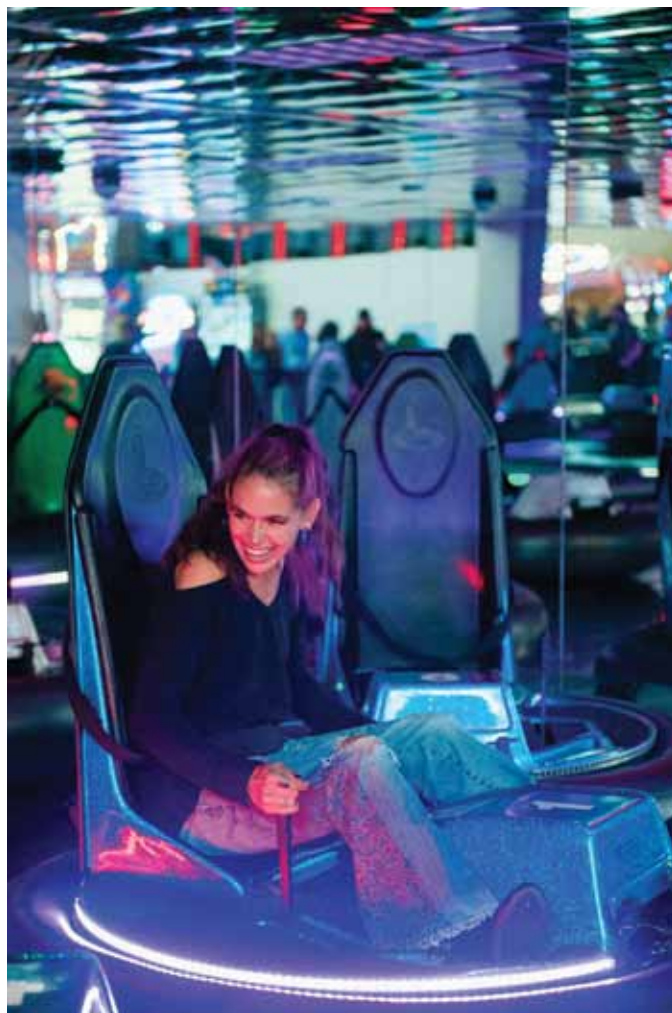
**B**umper cars have been a fixture at many bowling alleys for decades. And the classic, kid-friendly pastime shows no signs of waning: Under pressure to diversify their offerings in a crowded entertainment landscape, more bowling centers are adding bumper cars to the lineup.

"In our industry, having more attractions is very important," noted **Brad Shepherd**, who owns All Star Lanes' four Utah locations. One facility is located in the company's home base, West Jordan; others are in Tooele, Draper, and Sandy, with a fifth location due this August at the Valley Fair Mall in West Valley City. At all of them, bumper cars have been a big factor in increasing the lucrative birthday party packages, Shepherd said.

Bumper cars were not part of the mix at the original All Star Lanes, which opened in 1993. But as patrons were demanding a greater array of recreation options, Shepherd added bumper cars to All Star locations that also offer 32 lanes of bowling, game rooms, laser tag, mini golf, and full service restaurants and bars. Several facilities also have escape rooms, and Shepherd is adding an axe-throwing attraction soon. "We have a lot of requests for it, and it's pretty affordable," he explained of the latter, a hot 2019 trend. "And it's a little bit different."

Bumper cars, in contrast, have been a hit with All Star customers since their installation. Motivated by their popularity, Shepherd replaced the original, high-maintenance cars with modern, "much more dependable" models from RDC, an Independence, Oregon-based company.

Bumper cars have been "a great gap filler" at the Apex entertainment bowling centers in Marlborough, Mass., which opened in 2017, and Syracuse, N.Y., which opened last year, said General Manager **Marcus Kembrowski**. He explained that the popular cars bridge both the multigenerational age gap, and the hours-long wait that overflows from weekend lane and arcade crowds. Bumper cars, Kembrowski said, bring together the entire family and give patrons a fun activity while they wait for bowling lanes to open up.



*A woman in a bumper car at the Apex location in Marlborough, Mass. According to the general manager, bumper cars are a great way to entertain guests while they wait for bowling lanes to open up.*

"Bumper cars are very safe, very easy to get the hang of," Kembrowski noted. "They're a great way for children to interact with both their parents and with younger siblings, who may not be tall or old enough for the ropes course or laser tag. And adults really enjoy it together with their kids."

With mirrored walls reflecting the LED lights on Apex's RDC-manufactured vehicles, bumper cars are

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“a fun experience,” Kemblowski added. The Marlborough location also offers golf and other sports simulators, “apocalyptic” laser tag, a ropes course, a multi-level go-kart track, 70 arcade games, and 30 lanes of bowling with a VIP area. The Syracuse facility is smaller — 55,000 square feet inside a local mall. In addition to bowling and an arcade, Syracuse offers a virtual reality attraction, shooting simulators, and futuristic New York City-themed laser tag. Both locations have a full restaurant and bar, as well as event space that accommodates several hundred guests. Kemblowski said Owner **Robert Walker** plans to open additional Apex locations in the future.

Around the globe, bumper cars are holding their own alongside more contemporary FEC attractions. That’s the case at Timezone, Australia’s largest FEC chain, which is owned by TEEG and has dozens of locations across Asia and Oceania. Bumper cars are part of a Timezone mix that includes bowling and mini-bowling, laser tag, arcade games, VR, karaoke and es-



Apex staff members. The company has locations in Massachusetts and New York.

cape rooms. “We’ve had bumper cars for over 25 years,” noted **Kane Fong**, general manager for Timezone and Zone Bowling ANZ. “It works well as an extra add-on to any entertainment experience at Timezone.”

Like many FECs, Timezone has found that bumper cars sweeten the deal for customers shopping for party packages or other bundled promotions. At Timezone, “you can purchase arcade packages or arcade credit loads to use the bumper cars,” Fong said. “You can also add them on as an extra to your birthday party package. We want all our guests to be able to try the bumper cars, no matter what they’re doing in our venues.”

Along with laser tag and the arcade, bumper cars are part of the most popular packages for Premier Entertainment’s two Louisiana bowling centers, in Lafayette and Gonzales. (A third Premier location, which does not have bumper cars, is in Oxford, Miss.; the chain is owned by Baton Rouge-based Malco Theatres.)



Maddie Crapo, a manager for Apex entertainment bowling centers in Marlborough, Mass. Bumper cars are a great gap fill for the company, according to the general manager.



Guests riding bumper cars at a Premier Entertainment location. The cars are part of the most popular pricing packages for the company’s two Louisiana centers.



The cars “add another part of the whole FEC experience,” said District Manager **Marc Pater**. Bundling several entertainments within a single package has been key to boosting revenue for Premier’s Louisiana locations, he added: “Patrons can do several attractions within the FEC. You don’t even have to bowl.”

Spin Zone brand bumper cars were installed six years ago at the Gonzales facility, alongside a laser maze, an arcade, a ropes course, and bowling that includes dedicated lanes in a VIP area. “They’re still doing very well; they’re a very good attraction,” Pater said of the Spin Zone cars.

Yet when it came time to install bumper cars in Lafayette — following a complete two-year remodel and expansion of the location, which added a large arcade and a laser tag arena alongside 32 lanes and a bar and restaurant — Pater went with newer, electric floor-driven models from RDC. “The upkeep is easier,” he explained. Spin Zone cars, like many classic models, operate on batteries that have to be changed frequently, so “the maintenance can be quite stressful sometimes,” Pater added.

(This story includes interviews with individuals from locations that use Ride Development Company (RDC) bumper cars. The company is located in Independence, Ore. For more information, email [sales@bumpercar.com](mailto:sales@bumpercar.com) or call 503-606-4438.) 🍷



General Manager Marcus Kembrowski of Apex entertainment bowling centers holding an award. Kembrowski said bumper cars bring together the entire family.

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