

BUMPER CARS

The Payoffs of Offering an Enduring Classic

Bumper cars have come a long way since the day of the metal bodied Dodgem and Lusse Auto Scooter. They've bumped and jostled their way into a variety of settings and surfaces, chugging away from amusement parks to indoor venues, some versions altered to maneuver on water or ice. And they're a real hit as reported by those who are enjoying the revenues resulting from their popularity, though the decision to upgrade rather than abandon them was not always a direct route to the current bumper car fleet.

The patented innovations of Ride Development Corporation, or RDC, based in Independence, Ore., are responsible for a major part of the bumper car improvements seen since the 1980s by focusing at the core of the entire bumper car system to engineer a series of fun, reliable and safe choices to fit every venue, age group and pocketbook. RDC cars have accelerated across the country and worldwide because they are built and designed for the long haul, adaptable to a small footprint requirement, easy to install and maintain, and come with the company's attentive customer service practices.

John Elio, owner of C&C Amusements, a ride rental company in Putnam Valley, N.Y., originally had a battery-operated set of cars that was difficult to steer in a circular manner causing riders to get stuck in corners

of the corralled surface area. Riders didn't understand how to drive them and kept turning the wheel, said Elio, who switched gears when he purchased an inflatable arena and also a well-made, 30-by-30-square bumper car track that was simple to set up. His next step was to line up with RDC after a trade show encounter

to set the cars up as of June of this year, and to start marketing.

He added the bumper cars to the website offerings, plugged them through word of mouth, and suggested them as something new and different during phone inquiries. "In this business, everybody has a moon walk slide combo, ...and people can buy them at Toys R Us. Inflatables are over-saturated. I couldn't compete with the price and everyone having one. So for a change in direction I got bumper cars. Even though [the cars and the insurance] is more expensive, they can go in the backyard, schools, for Bar Mitzvahs and for company picnics. The draw-

back is that they need a hard surface, as the grooves sink into the ground."

It's all worth it, said Elio, "Many customers rent them for the day and the batteries don't run down for four hours. Their fun is nonstop, there's no lull in the action from the time we get there to the time we leave."

San Diego Coaster Company expanded the ride options to visitors of Belmont Park in San Diego,



Young people enjoy the bumper cars at Belmont Park in San Diego, Calif. The San Diego Coaster Company expanded the ride options to visitors of Belmont Park after its general manager saw RDC's Crazy Cars at a trade show.



The owner of ride rental company C&C Amusements of Putnam Valley, N.Y., is doing well with an inflatable arena.

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Calif., once General Manager **Wendy Crain** caught sight of RDC's Crazy Cars at a trade show. "We had the traditional bumper cars that looked like vehicles, and these were unique and different to offer from the typical. I was nervous because Belmont is a small park that doesn't offer many choices. It turns out people love them equally, and it's never a choice because they each do different things."

Offering both opens up the spirited fun of bumper cars to all ages, said Crain. "The good news is the Crazy Car height limit is lower so kids and parents can ride. Bumper cars have always attracted an older demographic, so now we can market toward all ages and bumper cars become a family ride. It bridges all ages and we see high-capacity

crowds for them."

Pacific Park was built upon the world-famous Santa Monica Pier in Santa Monica, Calif., in 1996

where the original Carousel Building still operates for a buck a ride and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Because it's such an historic, nostalgic pier, recalled Director of Operations **Dana Wyatt**, "It took a leap of faith in 2009 to upgrade from the old-style bumper cars to go with a new style, and which became one of the best decisions we've made. The popularity of the ride increased 30 percent right out of the



Children are all smiles riding bumper cars at Pacific Park. In 2010, the bumper cars were the most popular ride after the pier's roller coaster, Ferris wheel and sea dragon, and ranked ahead of the Scrambler.

gate, and we saw a 40 percent increase in revenues."

Bumper cars are now available to kids of all ages in the form of two versions, each located on separate

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floors. Both from RDC, the adult version, the 16-car Mark VIII, is more popular with teen to adult riders and a smaller one, the Bump-A-Bouts, accommodates 10 kids under 7 years of age.

Any ride would be hard pressed to bump the roller coaster, Ferris wheel and sea dragon from their crown positions on the pier, yet in 2010 the bumper cars accounted for the most popular ride behind them and ahead of the Scrambler. They get a top billing with Wyatt, though, for service. "Because they're made in the USA as opposed to Europe, we don't have to figure exchange rate, service calls are answered immediately, and we get 90 percent of parts overnight."

Specializing in fun and food, the Peter Piper Pizza chain had operated as FECs, and the San Antonio, Texas-based location still had a bumper car style that ran on concrete, each car with its own set of batteries. A bad idea, said **Colby Johnson**, senior games supervisor. "We converted to RDC bumper cars in a small number of Texas locations because most are not big enough."

The cars, which incorporate state-of-the-art safety features, attract the customer base particularly for birthdays when it's party time, and everyone rides, from teens to grown men to 7 year olds, said Johnson. In comparative popularity, they out-rate carousels, an indoor roller coaster and rides similar to roller coasters with cars designed as worms and dinosaurs at two of the chain's larger locations. "People come from 30 to 40 miles and further, specifically to the San Antonio store, to have a birthday party where there are bumper cars," Johnson said. ♪

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Colby Johnson, senior games supervisor, Peter Piper Pizza. Bumper cars attract the customer base, particularly for birthday parties.