

## Roller Coaster Training

Roller coasters are just like bikes. You have to learn to ride them. There are the little easy coasters and the big olympic sized coasters. There are the little kiddy coasters and then there are Millennium Force and Top Thrill Dragster. Although Wonderland's coasters are not the biggest or tallest or fastest, they are the best in Canada, and within easy reach of home.

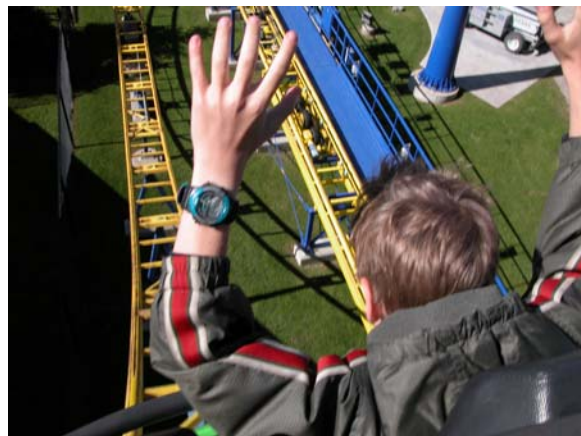
In late April the park opened one Friday evening, only for season pass holders. I took Liz and the boys (it was the first time ever in the park for the boys). Alex wasn't having anything to do with the rides, but Scottie was.

I thought it best to start at the beginning: the Ghoster Coaster in the very back of the park in the kiddy section. But before we got there Scottie spied the **Klockwerks** and said he'd go on that one. Never to miss an opportunity for a ride I climbed on with him. Round and round it went, up and down as well. Not a roller coaster, but certainly a good introduction to speed and the "loosing your stomach" feeling of semi free fall. Scottie really enjoyed that. He was so excited, by his own courage I think, that he said he'd try the Fly.



The **Fly** was Scottie's first real rollercoaster. It is of the Wild Mouse variety (*Wild Mouse - rides using single-car trains on a track with very tight turns. The cars' wheels are positioned closer to the rear of the car than a traditional coaster. The front of the car travels past the turn before changing directions, giving the sensation that the car will fall off the track.* (Descriptions in *italics* are from [www.rcdb.com](http://www.rcdb.com) the roller coaster database: my Bible!)

The Fly was built in 1999, has a drop of 49' and a top speed of 35mph. The lineup was short and in no time we were on and up the hill and going down. Liz was with us, if you can imagine (but in the back with her eyes shut tight). It certainly was scary on those turns. I mean I was really scared: I had never been on it before. But Scottie loved it. The main hill was a bit scary, but heck he wanted to do it again. In total over the course of our 4 or 5 visits in April and May Scottie and I have been on it at least 12 times. He can raise his arms from start to finish!



Getting back to that first evening, after the Fly we had to find something for Alex, so while the boys and Liz played mini golf while I went on the Shockwave. It was a cool ride to look at, but not at all scary for me. I was with some teenage boys who thought it was awesome, but I was bored with the lack of any serious speed or drops. It was twisty, and fortunately not pukie, so it was okay, but certainly not a favourite.

After the boys finished with the mini golf we continued the hike to the Ghoster Coaster, only this time to get side tracked in the new **SpongeBob Squarepants 3D** theatre. We all went in and enjoyed ourselves immensely. Not a rollercoaster, but lots of fun with the 3D effects “right-there” in front of your face.

Finally we got to the **Ghoster Coaster**. This is a classic wooden coaster (*Wooden - a roller coaster with track consisting of layers of wood. Occasionally wooden roller coasters will use steel structures to support the wooden track, this does not have an affect on it's wooden status.*) that also meets the ACE standards (*ACE Coaster Classic - a coaster meeting the criteria specified by the American Coaster Enthusiasts club. These roller coasters must meet guidelines like single position lap bars, no seat dividers or headrests, and more.*)

The Ghoster Coaster is a family coaster, designed primarily for children, but adults can comfortably fit in the seats too. It was built in 1981, one of the original park coasters, with a drop of 39’ and a top speed of 35mph.

Scottie and I walked right on this one without any wait and were off. The nature of a wooden coaster is to shake you around. This one did. But being small, it was quite tolerable and Scottie liked this one too. That was three for three on the rides: he could handle them all.



So I thought that the time was right to go to a bigger coaster: the Wilde Beast. (Though I didn’t know it at the time, I swear, it is the FASTEST coaster in the park.)

The **Wilde Beast** was also one of the original coasters built in 1981. It has a drop of 78’ and a top speed of 56mph. (I knew it was fast, but not the fastest: I had thought the newer ones like Top Gun was faster, but according to the database I’m

wrong.) In any case I was dangerously wrong, Scottie was not happy with the ride. Like Neil and I the first time on MF, it nearly killed us, so too with this and Scottie. He tried to fight the Beast. No one fights the Beast and survives. You have to RIDE it. Scottie got understandably scared on the big hill (30’ higher than the Fly’s hill) and lost his balance in the seat. The ride was so fast and shaky that he slid down in the seat then was riding

more on his back than his bum. The thing was shaking so bad, I was just trying to hang on myself that I couldn't help him. On the exit ramp afterwards he nearly puked. He had been so scared and upset.

While he recovered, Liz volunteered, I kid you not, that she would go on the **Drop Zone**. This is a simple ride: go up 230' and then plummet to earth at about 60mph. Liz said she'd do any ride that didn't turn her upside down or shake her up. This did neither. There was a slight tense moment when we saw a previous rider not allowed on as he was too big. He had failed the "tubby check". Liz did fit however, and she liked the thrill!

By now it was dark and Alex wanted to go home. I couldn't let Scottie end on a note of defeat, so we looped back to Klockwerks for a second ride and then on to Thunder Run.

**Thunder Run** is steel coaster, build to look like a wooden mine train that runs through the mountain. It reaches a top speed of 40mph, but has no real hill at all. What it does have are dark tunnels, complete with a fiery dragon. Also you do the entire circuit twice! Scottie certainly handled the ride from a coaster point of view: it's easy, but he was not keen on the dragon. Liz sat behind Scott and I, but was on the wrong (read 'upper') side of the seat when it slowed down coming into the station on its final lap. The poor kid sitting next to her got a bit squished ☺

The next weekend Liz, Scottie and I hit the park early. At 9am, one hour before the "hords", the season pass holders get to ride a few select rides. That Saturday it was the new Tomb Raider. We did that first thing.



**Tomb Raider** is the newest ride in the park, it just opened in 2004. It is a suspended flying coaster. (*Flying - a roller coaster ridden while parallel with the track. Suspended - a roller coaster using trains which travel beneath the track and pivot on a swinging arm from side to side, exaggerating the track's banks and turns.*) The ride is 50' high, but has no real drop. It just spirals around with at one point a double corkscrew that sends you upside down twice.

Scottie was certainly nervous of this because you were lying down holding on to grips in front. It is a strange ride, and it grows on you!



Scottie wasn't sure he liked it. Once was good enough for Liz, but I had to try it again. So while they watched I rode it a second time. There was no one around and it was working (since then we've seen no end of delays, breakdowns and long lines). So I convinced Scottie to try it a second time. Liz thought it was a good idea too. He did it and enjoyed himself much more this time.



We hiked over to a couple of newer rides that I had never done before. I tried the **Psychone** alone. Paramount describes it as *the most powerful pendulum on the planet! Daring thrill-seekers will rock 120-feet in the air, while spinning on a giant, sky teasing disc.* It was high. I enjoyed it a lot. It was definitely the best new ride I've tried in the park since the Bat. It had no problems re 'head banging' as other new coasters have and was surprisingly not puky at all. (A similar ride, the swinging pirate ship is barf city.)



Then we went over to **Sledge Hammer**. It is not a rollercoaster, but it certainly looks fun. The Paramount website puts it this way: *Sledge Hammer is a menacing, mechanical giant, cutting the skyline at an awesome 80-feet in the air. Its massive power will hurl riders through accelerated jumps and freefalls.*

Scotty and I climbed aboard and off we went. At 80' it was certainly the highest thing he had been on. The sudden drops had him a bit unnerved, but he was a trooper and wasn't upset at all. In fact we have gone on it several times since. He did however come to disaster getting off the ride the first time. The seat was pretty high and he lost his balance and ended up on his hands and knees on the hard cement underneath. That shook him up a bit but not too bad.

We finished out that day with more of Klockwerks, the Fly and Thunder Run.

The next two Saturday's it was just Scott and I. (First it was 4, then 3 and now only 2! When the weather warms up, the others will join us for Splash Works and all the water and tube rides.) We did Sledge Hammer again, and while we waited for Tomb Raider,

did the old **Antique Carrousel**. The first time Scott got a dead horse: it didn't go up or down!

Anyway we eventually got on Tomb Raider and Scott claimed it was now his favourite ride. Back over at the Fly, Scott was so comfortable that he could hold up his arms the entire ride. So I said it was time for a new coaster: the Vortex.



The **Vortex** is the typical steel, suspended rollercoaster. It has a drop of 85' and a top speed of 55 mph. Though it took a lot of coaxing, he got on and enjoyed himself right from the first drop. We stayed on for three rides!

The next Saturday's quest was to add yet another coaster to the repertoire: the Dragon Fire. Liz and I had said that this was an easy one, but it looks bad with its two big loops and a double corkscrew. Being inverted 4 times was a scary thing. Yet as I pointed out to him, he had been inverted and liked it on Tomb Raider. So we did it.

**Dragon Fire** was built in 1981 and it another of the original five coasters. It has a drop of 76' and a top speed of 50mph. It's a normal coaster, on top of the rails and Scottie loved it. On the first hill he said, "That's puny!" He was a natural on this one, the very first time. We rode it several times that morning with great delight.

This past Saturday we practiced up with about 4 runs of Vortex and 3 or 4 of Fly in preparation for the Great Canadian Mine Buster.

The **Great Canadian Mine Buster** is the classic wooden rollercoaster. It is the longest coaster in the park, with a drop of 87' and a top speed of 56mph. We were the only ones on it the first time and we rode in the very front car. Scottie put up his arms on the first hill. He claims all the hills are "pumpy" now! After that we raced to the back seat and did it again and yet again. Three times in total. A classic.



With that done we were ready for a return to the Wilde Beast. This time I emphasized how he needed to lead forward down the first hill so that his bum would stay put. He did, it did and we had an awesome ride! However by now it was 10:30 and the lines were too long. We did the Dragon fire once and tried to get on the Bat, but its line was over an hour.

The last ride we did was a standup, spin around in a circle, backs to the wall, while the entire thing lifts up vertical to 90°, called **Night Mares**. It was fun and easy.

So that's where we stand with regard to Scottie's coaster training. The Bat is the next big coaster. After that Top Gun, to finish off the roller coasters. Then it's on to the Drop Zone and along the way we need to pick up a few others like Jet Stream and Cliffhanger, to say nothing of the water rides. Lots more to do!

30 May 2004



shot from Vortex



Night Mares at night