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Rock & RIDE

with the Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit
Roller Coaster at Universal Studios

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ROCK 'N' RIDE

THE HOLLYWOOD RIP RIDE ROCKIT AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

Blast off with Orlando's
Newest, Most High-Tech
Roller Coaster

by **DEBORAH BRAUSER**
photos by **MATT ROSEBOOM**



Rip Ride Rockit's 17-story lift smoothly sends riders gliding 90-degrees upward the sky.

As the bright red mini cars of the new Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit roller coaster go hurtling by the new Music Plaza stage at Universal Studios, its goal of mixing music and thrills into one unique package is apparent. From the high-tech on-board touch panels that let guests choose their own ride soundtrack, to the first-of-its kind non-inverted loop leading right into the twisted metal track shaped like an actual treble clef, guests know they're in for one incomparable ride.

While enthusiastic (and sometimes stunned) crowds watch from below, riders find themselves ascending almost straight up a 167-foot vertical incline before being dropped

down and around the rest of the ride's sharp curves, high banks, and even through the remnants of the old Ghostbusters firehouse at speeds of up to 65 miles per hour.

"No one has ever created such a sophisticated ride experience," said Mark Woodbury, president of Universal Creative. "And no one has ever used technology the way we have to pull it all together."

Although it was originally scheduled to open in early summer, the Rockit has quickly gained many fans since its eventual opening in August. Most agree that it has lived up to its promise from a pre-opening press release that called it "the tallest, largest, and fastest X-CAR style roller coaster in the world."

Orlando resident Chris Kraftchick, regional



The queue entertains waiting guests with video, music and artwork.



Creative Director
Louis Alfieri

representative of Florida for the American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE) said he was very impressed with Rockit, the 360th coaster he has ridden. "It's really different from coasters we call "off the shelf" – ones that are just kind of slapped in somewhere. But realizing their limitations with real estate, it was just amazing how Universal has interwoven this into the park and made it an incredibly good ride."

Building a Rockit

The Universal design team, led by Creative Director Louis Alfieri had several challenges when they first started thinking about a new ride. They knew they wanted music to be a strong component, but they also needed the overall design to fit into a small footprint, due its location. The team basically wanted to come up with a high-tech, compact design full of unique maneuvers.

"One of the things we wanted to do was bring something new to the resort and to all of Central Florida, something that had never been done before," said Alfieri. "We wanted to revolutionize the coaster experience."

He explained that before working on Rockit, his team prototyped some of the technology with Hollywood Dream, a roller coaster at Universal Studios Japan. "Then, when we brought some of that technology to fruition, we all agreed it was such a great idea that we wanted to advance everything – levels and levels beyond what we had initiated it at. So this is the second stage in the process."

For Rockit, the Universal team worked with steel roller coaster manufacturer Maurer Rides, an international company that has designed and built for theme parks all over the U.S. and Europe. "It's such a collaborative effort where the creative staff

and the engineers and the construction group all gets together and everybody's a part of bringing something to life," said Alfieri.

At one meeting between the teams at Maurer's headquarters in Germany, the idea for the non-inverted loop came up. Alfieri gives credit to Dr. Alfred Müller from Maurer, the head

engineer for the project.

"He [Dr. Müller] said he had this dream that he wanted to do something new





with the loop,” said Alfieri. “So we all sat together and we brainstormed where he was going with it and how we could integrate it into the coaster. At the time, the project team was also doing the new Music Plaza. So we tried to set up the coaster and the plaza together to create one overall experience.”

He said the treble clef maneuver was originally sketched out on a napkin. “I was trying to find different ways to incorporate music symbols into the coaster and the layout. When the team got together, the engineers were like, ‘Wow, you really want to do that?’ And the team said, ‘Sure, let’s give it a shot.’”

To figure out the right technology for the music, the team pioneered several prototypes and several interesting experiments. “In an effort to get just the right sound and isolate the speakers, we actually built a trailer that we strapped two of the coaster seats together with,” explained Alfieri. “And we drove

it on the highway at 65 miles per hour, testing different speaker locations and different speakers and different kinds of music until we found exactly the way we wanted it to be on the ride. It was quite the sight to see us all going down the highway on the chairs, but it’s the only way to test it!”



Rockit’s moving load platform and multi-colored lights are just some of its unique high-tech features.

Marrying Hard Rock with High Tech

Letting guests customize their ride experience by choosing their own song is something no other coaster in the U.S. offers. Rockit has a 30-song playlist, with tracks from some of today’s and yesterday’s biggest stars from five different genres –



Guests use touch screens to choose the song they want to listen to while riding.

When asked to confirm the rumor of hidden tracks on the new Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit coaster, Universal Creative Director Louis Alfieri just said with a smile, “Rockit has the ability to offer layers of discovery to the guest that no other coaster has ever had before.”

Other riders have been more forthcoming, sharing not only how to access these hidden tracks, but

#103 - “Break on Through” by The Doors
 #104 - “Crocodile Rock” by Elton John
 #105 - “Do it Again” by Steely Dan
 #108 - “8 Miles High” by The Byrds
 #109 - “Fantasy” by Aldo Nova
 #112 - “Freebird” by Lynyrd Skynyrd
 #113 - “Immigrant Song” by Led Zeppelin
 #114 - “Just Because” by Jane’s Addiction
 #115 - “Live” by Lenny Kravitz
 #123 - “Stockholm Syndrom” by Muse
 #124 - “Diary of Jane” by Breaking Benjamin
 #127 - “Urgent” by Foreigner
 #129 - “Wheel in the Sky” by Journey
 #130 - “Won’t Get Fooled Again” by The Who
 #131 - “Klein Mandelbrot” remix by The Blue Man Group

also what numbers correspond to which songs. Just remember, these hidden songs will not be added to the on-ride videos.

To access the tracks, press the ride’s logo at the top of the screen for five to 10 seconds and then let go. When the number keypad comes up, enter a three-digit number from 001 to 999 and press enter. Be aware that there aren’t anywhere near 999 songs available. So if you try a

#132 - “Drumbone” by Blue Man Group
 #301 - “Float On” by Modest Mouse
 #302 - “I Want You Back” by The Jackson Five
 #303 - “In My Pocket” by The Cat Empire
 #304 - “It’s Still Rock And Roll To Me” by Billy Joel
 #306 - “Lose Yourself” by Eminem
 #307 - “Ride Like The Wind” by Christopher Cross
 #308 - “Run to You” by Bryan Adams
 #309 - “Save Room” by John Legend
 #312 - “My Everything” by Barry White
 #508 - “Pivot” by Dry
 #701 - “Cyanide” by Metallica
 #702 - *unknown song* by Metallica
 #704 - “Forever Down” by Black Label Society
 #707 - “Know your Enemy” by Rage Against the Machine

number that doesn’t correlate to a specific song, the default song will play – reported to be “Busy Child” by The Crystal Method.

As we go to press, not all the songs have been identified, and they could change at any time. Check out our blog entry at AttractionsMagazine.com/blog for the most up-to-date song list. For now, here’s the unconfirmed hidden song list so far:

#709 - “Mouth for War” by Pantera
 #710 - “Painkiller” by Judas Priest
 #711 - “Paranoid” by Black Sabbath
 #713 - “The Wicker Man” by Iron Maiden
 #715 - “Wake Up Dead” by Megadeth
 #718 - “You’ve Got Another Thing Comin’” by Judas Priest
 #901 - “Movin’ Right Along” by Kermit The Frog and Fozzy Bear
 #902 - “Rainbow Connection” by Kermit The Frog
 #904 - “Night on Bald Mountain” by Modest Mussorgsky

If you find any other hidden songs, e-mail their names and numbers to info@attractionsmagazine.com.

rock/metal, pop/disco, rap/hip-hop, country, and club/electonica. These include songs from Kanye West, Fergie, and Kenny Chesney,

“Riding a roller coaster, going fast and the energy that’s in my music – they go hand-in-hand,” said MC Hammer. His song, *U Can’t Touch This* is included in the ride’s playlist. “Riding Rockit at 65 miles per hour with the music pumping is going to be a lot of fun,” he added.

Amy Lee from the group Evanescence said, “I think is a really creative use of music. We’re very excited to be a part of something so outside the box and for our fans to experience music in this cool new way.”

The entire playlist is also posted on Universal’s Web

site, so guests can preview and pick their soundtrack ahead of time.

The Rip Riding Experience

The overall set-up for the ride, as explained in its queue, is that guests are actual rock stars about to shoot their own music videos, complete with a video production crew to make sure everything runs smoothly. This includes going over exactly how to select their songs with vertical monitors displaying the choices.

Once through the line and up to the loading platform, the size of the small cars may seem a bit surprising. However, longer cars wouldn’t work due to the

sharp turns and tight maneuvers needed for the relatively small space that now houses the coaster. Each of these X-CARs may only hold 12 guests (two to a row), but designers have packed a lot in.

The vehicles feature stadium-

style seating, which means each row is raised a little higher than the one in front of it. Instead of an over-the-head restraint, a tight-fitting, yet comfortable lap bar swings over from the side.

Industrial-grade, water-resistant touchpads (with the feel



of an on-board mp3 player) are built into each restraint arm. Be sure to tap in your music choice just as soon as the arm comes across.

Chosen songs are pumped out at 90 decibels through individual sound systems with marine-grade stereo speakers built into the seats. This

ensures that your song is the only one you hear.

As your song selection starts, the 16.5-second ascent up the 17-story vertical lift feels like going up in an elevator – while lying on your back. In fact, it almost feels as though you're leaning a little further back than that, giving no view at all of what lies just ahead.

At the top, which is the highest point of any coaster in Orlando, there's a slight pause before the vehicle barrels down the first and steepest plunge and heads straight into the non-inverted loop. Officially named the "Double Take," this 136-foot tall maneuver doesn't actually take riders upside down. Instead, it zooms along the inside of the track until reaching the top, where it twists to the outside of the track and rides over the top of the loop before twisting back inside for the descent.

The Treble Clef is next, ending as it shoots through the a building facade along with the sensation of being almost close enough to touch its walls.

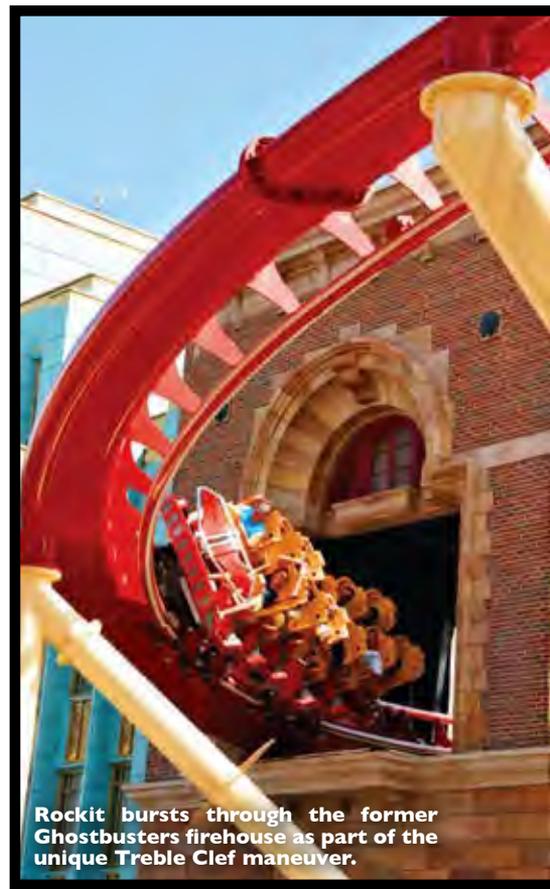
Manager of Show Development (and former Ghostbuster) Michael Roddy said it pained him when he first saw a giant hole being cut into the firehouse during Rockit's construction. "But I got over it pretty quickly because I think it's flipping cool that you go through the building ... because it's real architecture. How often do you get to go through a building?" Other thrills include the Crowd Surfer, where guests are turned at a 95-degree angle while flying over the waiting

One guest said he's ridden three times and has chosen *Sabotage* by the Beastie Boys all three times. "That song works out perfectly," he explained. "It's slow during the ride's first rise and then breaks out fast during the descent. I just couldn't help picking the same song over and over."

A Universal employee said he'd advise guests to pick songs from the heart. "Don't just choose ones that you've heard are cool. Pick something that means something to you. There's nothing like hearing one of your favorite songs as you're rocketing over the tracks. It just makes the experience more special."

At night, it's a whole different experience with the track brightly lit and bands of moving lights encircling the verticle lift. Each ride vehicle is also outfitted with 36 different lights programmed to change color at

crowd; and the Plot Twist, which has an inclined loop, a 150-degree banking turn, and a final 360-degree turn before heading back to the loading station. Overall, it's a fast-moving ride that feels much longer than many roller coasters and offers several breath-takingly fun tricks not offered anywhere else. And the personalized music really does add to the overall experience, as you choose different songs with every ride – or not.



Rockit bursts through the former Ghostbusters firehouse as part of the unique Treble Clef maneuver.

varying tempos.

"The three components at the beginning – the lift, the music and the amazing light show – really set the stage and build excitement for the rest of the ride," said ACE representative Kraftchick. "And then you crest the top and drop down and then go into that very unique loop, which is the part I was most salivating over during the construction process. And it was even more than I expected. It was an incredible sensation and much more than I could have even imagined."

Lights, Camera... Coaster!

Contributing to the whole "this is your music video" theme, six on-board and eight track-side cameras capture each guest's ride experience.

Once it ends, each video is then

downloaded to a viewing kiosk where guests can purchase an edited take-home version that mixes the custom footage, ride footage, special effects, and your song choice. These can come in DVD and/or digital formats to share with friends, posted on Web sites or even uploaded on YouTube.

"This is the first attraction where you've been able to have a pre-park experience, in-park experience, and after-park experience," said Alfieri. "You have the ability to go to our site and play games, interact with the characters we've created, and preview a sample of your music before coming to the park. And then afterward, you have the ability to create more music videos at home."

Re-Ridability

"Everybody has something they're looking for in a coaster and I think it's going to peak a lot of

people's curiosity," said Kraftchick. "It has some very unique things like the vertical lift and the non-looping loop; and it's a very long ride. I'm looking forward to going back to re-ride and re-ride and re-ride. Some coasters are a little intense and you need a little break right after, but after I rode this one, I was energized and wanted to do it again immediately."

"It's such an experience to have spent so much time building this coaster and be so close to it and then to have the ability to see guests get off and then get back on the ride multiple times to hear different things and have a great experience," said Alfieri. "One little kid got off the other day and started jumping around and screaming that it was 'wicked epic.' And I thought wow. That's such a cool term and just so great to hear."



Guests waiting to ride are treated to an up-close sneak preview of what's to come by way of the Rockit cars zooming close by.



Rip Ride Rockit stretches all the way out into Universal CityWalk where everyone can get a great view of the action.