

TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Take your seat and get blasted into the sky

By Randy Kraft
Of The Morning Call

Top Thrill Dragster, the world's tallest and fastest roller coaster, is scheduled to begin blasting riders into the sky today at Cedar Point amusement park resort in Sandusky, Ohio.

Unlike traditional roller coasters, Top Thrill Dragster only has one hill. But it's a monster, a record-breaking 420 feet high. It is the first and only roller coaster in the world to break the 400-foot-tall milestone, according to Cedar Point.

Riders aboard sleek "dragster style trains" go from zero to 120 in four seconds as they rocket straight up the hill. After going through a 90 degree turn about halfway up, then cresting the top, they drop 400 feet straight down while reaching 120 mph for a second time and falling through a 270-degree spiral.

This "coaster of epic proportions" weighs 1,150 tons. It has 2,800 feet of steel track. Each of its six 16-passenger trains weighs five tons. They are powered by a hydraulic acceleration system.

Angles of both the ascent and descent are 90 degrees. Low bucket seats, T-shaped lap bars and seat belts keep riders from falling out, as does centrifugal force. But the coaster does have height and weight limits for riders.

Top Thrill Dragster is the 16th roller coaster in the park, which claims more coasters than anywhere else on Earth. At \$25 million, it also is one of the largest single investments in the park's 132 years.

The new ride covers eight acres in the heart of the park. Two spinning rides, Chaos and Troika, were relocated to make room for Top Thrill Dragster, which was manufactured by Intamin AG of Wollerau, Switzerland.

With the new coaster, the park reclaims the title of owning the world's tallest and fastest roller coaster. It has held that title three times in the past, most recently with Millennium Force in 2000.

The 310-foot Millennium Force was the first to go higher than 300 feet. In 1989, Cedar Point was the

first park to introduce a roller coaster more than 200 feet tall, the 205-foot Magnum XL-200.

Cedar Point, the second-oldest amusement park in North America, draws more than three million visitors each year. The 364-acre park with 68 rides is on a Lake Erie peninsula. It has four hotels, a marina, a beach and boardwalk, an RV campground, cottages and cabins, an 18-acre water park and more.

Although open today, Cedar Point will be closed tomorrow through Thursday. Daily operation begins Friday and continues through Sept. 1. The park will be open weekends through October.

Admission is \$43.95, \$29.95 for adults 60 and older, \$26.95 for military, \$21.95 for anyone age 3 and older who is under 48 inches tall. Children under 3 are free. Multi-day tickets are available for the amusement park and water park. For information, call 419-627-2350 or check cedarpoint.com.

Celebration City opens

Celebration City, a new nighttime theme park for families, opened Thursday in Branson, Mo.

The \$40 million park is called the largest new park development in North America this year. It highlights some of the most colorful and entertaining eras of 20th-century America.

Celebration City is a new sister park to Silver Dollar City, which is about five miles away in Branson.

"Celebration City will be as different as night and day from Silver Dollar City," said Rick Baker, Silver Dollar City's vice president for product development and research.

Celebration City features 30 rides, attractions and activities, including a new wooden roller coaster named Ozark WildCat. WildCat claims "a one-of-a-kind 310-degree spiraling double-down first drop."

The 28-acre park has two other coasters, a 95-foot-high Ferris wheel and Accelerator, a tower ride. A nightly highlight is an out-

door, multi-media laser production called "Celebrate!"

Visitors enter Celebration City on Celebration Street, which seeks to recreate the ambience of the early 1900s. Other sections of the park include the Electric Boardwalk, which has a boardwalk/trolley park atmosphere, and Route 66, which celebrates the 1950s and '60s.

The new park is open 3-10 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays through May 22, then 3-11 p.m. daily from May 23 through Aug. 17. It has reduced operation in late summer and fall.

Celebration City is along Route 376, off Route 76 at the west end of Branson. Admission is \$30.10, \$27.87 for adults 62 and older, \$24.52 for children 4-11. Parking is free.

Multi-day tickets include Silver Dollar City and the White Water water park, which has two new slides called Raging River Rapids.

Silver Dollar City, which is not open at night, is an 1880s-style theme park. It features 50 daily shows, 100 resident craftsmen who demonstrate traditional American crafts, a working homestead, rides, music and entertainment, plus four major festivals.

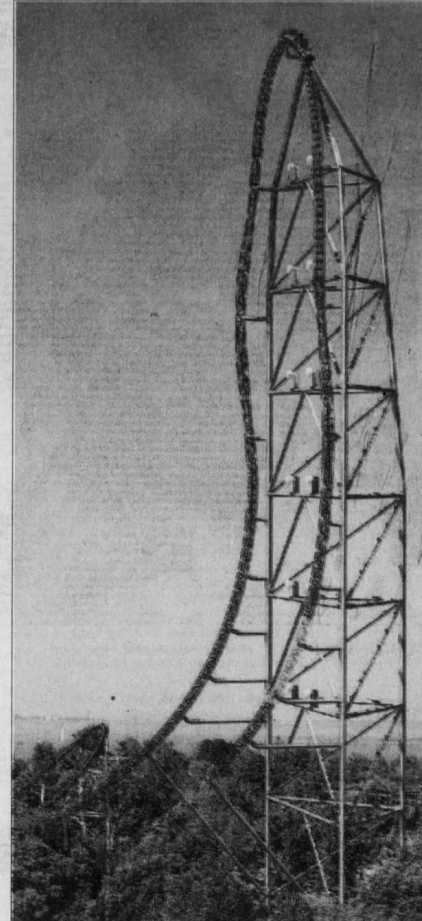
Silver Dollar City opened in 1960 to increase business at Marvel Cave, a tourist attraction on the property.

Silver Dollar City is at 399 Indian Point Road west of Branson. That park is open 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays. Daily operation begins May 21, when that park will be open 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. through Aug. 17. Admission to Silver Dollar City is \$37, \$27 for children 4 to 11.

Both Celebration City and Silver Dollar City are owned by Herschend Family Entertainment Corp., which also owns the water park and a 700-seat paddleboat named Showboat Branson Belle.

For information about both parks, call 800-831-4386. Or check www.silverdollarcity.com.

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THRILL-SEEKERS will enjoy Cedar Point amusement park's latest ride, the tallest and fastest roller coaster on Earth. Named Top Thrill Dragster, the 420-foot-tall, 120-mph steel coaster opens today.

Courtesy of Cedar Point

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for water, and "O" is how you

The glass blocked the blaring musical accompaniment, so we dined in blessed peace amidst the original Picassos and surrounded by a clientele

hood happens to be lower Manhattan — dark wood, soft cushions, high-tech audio and plasma screen TVs. The crowd had apparently just slipped out

I'm finding out."

The 10-ounce martinis that customers sipped as the music cranked up a few decibels apparently were designed for

that was an exception."

Specialty drink: the Oreo Shake Martini. Clothing style: cool sweaters, sportcoats with T-shirts. Celebrities: "There

you pay a \$15 cover charge to just stand around or drink at the bar. Another bar in another alcove takes care of more standees. Or reserve one of