

King Arthur Carrousel

KING ARTHUR CARROUSEL

Back in 1955, when Walt Disney was erecting his dream park in a California orange grove, the visionary businessman spent \$22,000 for the derelict merry-go-round that became King Arthur Carrousel.

Today, a collector easily could spend as much on a single well-restored horse or two. Disneyland itself spends far more than that every year just maintaining its 85-steed herd. You might say that, at Disneyland, carrousel horse restoration is a process that never ends.

The merry-go-round that was to become the King Arthur Carrousel was found at Sunnyside Park in Toronto, Canada, where it was scheduled to be demolished to make way for a freeway. Since Walt Disney wanted only jumping horses – not the other animals which were part of the original– additional horses were found on other old carousels, including one at Coney Island. They were all headed for a wonderful new home and some very special care.

The horses on the King Arthus Carrousel are checked daily for chips, cracks and loose bolts. Overnight, when there are no guests in the Park, a painter touches up any paint that may have been nicked. Almost every year, each horse also comes off the ride for a complete refurbishment.

Since about one in every five Disneyland visitors takes a spin on the timeless attraction, at least another two million riders will climb onto the steeds this year alone. The extensive maintenance of Disneyland's steeds is required not only because of their heavy use but because all the mounts are antiques—hand carved of wood, many by German craftsmen in the late 1800's. Most are Dentzels, the most-prized of carrousel horses because of the intricacy and workmanship. A few are Murphys.

Restoration of a King Arthur Carrousel horse takes about 40 hours. Because of the time involved, only about 10% of the horses are stripped to bare wood each year. Disneyland carpenters undertake the major repairs. Broken legs, for example, are split open and reinforced with steel rods. Steel plates are used to strengthen stress points like leg joints.

Mounts suffering from bad cracks or holes are turned over to the staff shop for patching. The detailing of each horse is re-accentuated by careful routing of the edges that inevitably wear down during the year. Next, the first of many coats of paint is applied by hand. Sanding follows, and then as many as a dozen undercoats—each separated by more sanding—to achieve the glossy finish that belies the wood underneath.

Each horse receives a coat of white, a standard that replaced the multi-color coats the horses wore until about 10 years ago. Then the artful trappings are brushed on in bulletin colors. The colorful gear of each horse was designed by art directors at Walt Disney Imagineering, Disney's planning and designing firm. Altogether, more than 30 colors are used on the animals, no two of which are alike.

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