

Boardwalk Giant Dipper: 60 million riders, and counting

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SANTA CRUZ BOARDWALK

SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk celebrated the 60 millionth rider on the famed Giant Dipper roller coaster.

Boardwalk officials announced that the park's signature ride would hit the milestone this week.

And Friday was the day.

The suspense built with every ride, said Boardwalk's spokesman Kris Reyes. Special treats and gifts were promised to the 24 passengers on the ride when it reached the 60 million-riders mark.

"We enjoy and appreciate to see how much people love the Giant Dipper," Reyes said. "It's amazing

to have something as special as this ride at our park, and we take a lot of pride in it."

The lucky passengers crossed the Giant Dipper's turnstile around 2:30 p.m. to cheers. After the milestone, riders were given a custom hooded sweatshirt and other prizes.

Garrett and Carrie Matthew of San

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Riders celebrate upon learning they are the group containing the 60 millionth rider on the Giant Dipper at the Boardwalk on Friday. Each rider received a certificate, a gift bag and a sweatshirt.

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Jose learned about the celebration when they arrived at the Boardwalk on Friday. Although they just missed the milestone, they received a second ride for free.

"That's life, it's all good," Carrie Matthew said. "We got that double ride to make up for it."

Garrett Matthew said he is a Giant Dipper regular. He used to come to the Boardwalk as a youngster, driving over the hill with his grandmother.

"It's a landmark on the beach, the wooden track gives you an authentic feeling," Garrett Matthew said. "The ride is exhilarating. It's a pretty good view from the top and the dip is really nice."

The Giant Dipper opened in 1924, Reyes said. It was designed by resident Arthur Looff. The oldest roller coaster in California, the ride was named a National Historic



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Riders on the Giant Dipper show their certificates awarded to the car containing the ride's 60 millionth rider since 1924 at the Boardwalk in Santa Cruz on Friday.

Landmark in 1987 by the U.S. National Park Service.

"This ride has just been a part of our community for almost a hundred years," Reyes said. "The outside world equates Santa Cruz with the Giant Dipper the

same way people associate New York City with the Empire State Building."

The Boardwalk gave out 5,000 trivia coasters to visitors all week leading up to Friday's milestone. The items featured fun facts about the Giant Dipper, Reyes said.

The wooden structure requires regular maintenance to ensure the public's safety. Boardwalk employees walk down the track every day, making sure requirements are met, Reyes said. The staff constantly repairs and replaces wood on the ride's body to keep it safe.

"It's like a vintage car," Reyes said. "You have to take real good care of it."