

50,000,000 skipped heartbeats



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Santa Cruz native Dave Ferrari, at age 88 and with 200 rides on the Giant Dipper under his belt, still gets a kick out of the ride.

Beloved Giant Dipper reaches an astounding milestone

By WALLACE BAINE

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Quiz: Fifty million is:

- A) The times your teen-age daughter says you've reminded her to be home by 10.
- B) The number of junk e-mails in your in-box after a week's vacation.
- C) The times the theme song to "The Brady Bunch" drifts through your mind on any given day.
- D) The total number of people who've ridden the Giant Dipper roller coaster at the Boardwalk.

This answer is, of course, all of the above.

While A through C might not surprise you, answer D is actually something more than just a flippant estimate.

The Giant Dipper, the grand old lady of Santa Cruz fun and games, first opened for business in May 1924.

Calvin Coolidge was president during the first ride, the movies were silent and beer was an illegal substance.

That was the year the Miss California pageant was first held at the Boardwalk (the winner went on to become 1924's Miss America).

Since then, the Dipper has induced 50 million screams. To mark that nice, round number, the

Beach Boardwalk is offering free rides on the roller coaster all day Friday.

Santa Cruz native Dave Ferrari was a 10-year-old kid in 1924. He had ridden the roller coaster's predecessor, the Scenic Railway, which was the Boardwalk's first thrill ride.

"I was there the day it opened," said Ferrari, now 88. "I don't remember too much about it — I think it was 10 cents or so — but I know I rode it two or three times."

Ferrari will be there Friday when the Dipper reaches the 50 million mark.

As a kid, he worked at the Boardwalk, pick-

Dipper

Continued from Page B1

ing up pins at a bowling alley that no longer exists. Over the years, he's gone back again and again to his hometown amusement park.

He estimates that he's ridden the Giant Dipper around 200 times and says Friday's ride might be his last.

"The ride's about the same as it's always been," Ferrari said. "But as you get older, the twists and jerks affect you a little bit more. It takes me awhile to recover nowadays."

The Giant Dipper — which has become a symbol for Santa Cruz to the outside world — has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. National Park Service.

It has appeared in several movies over the years — don't tell me you haven't seen "The Lost Boys"? It's the seventh-oldest roller coaster in the United States.

It reaches a speed of about 55 miles per hour. The ride lasts a little less than two minutes over a half-mile track and can carry 24 people at a time per train (there are two trains).

"It's one of the oldest roller coasters in the world," said the man who's been around the Dipper's entire life span, "and one of the best."

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Please see **DIPPER** on Page B3