

# Look out below!



Debi Kinney takes a suitably impressed son Patrick for his first ride on the Boardwalk's Giant Dipper roller coaster.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

## Giant Dipper coasting along at 65

By TOM LONG  
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SANTA CRUZ — Patrick Kinney underwent a local rite of passage Saturday morning.

Well, actually it was more of a ride of passage.

Patrick rode the Giant Dipper roller coaster at the Boardwalk for the first time.

It's a mixture of fear and excitement, an adrenaline rush heightened by the youthful sense of wonder that hundreds of thousands of kids before him have experienced.

He rode alongside his mother, Debi Kinney, who first took the same ride of passage about 15 years ago.

"It was thrilling," she remembered as 7-year-old Patrick fidgeted next to her, waiting for the ride. "A friend of

mine and I, every weekend we used to come down and ride the roller coaster.

"The first few times it was like — hold on! Then we'd let go of the bar for a little time, then we'd let go all the way and hold our arms up," Kinney said.

"Oooh, I can just feel it!" Kinney said in expectation as they walked to the great wooden structure.

"Mom, we'll be in the same seat, right?" Patrick asked.

"Of course we will," his mother reassured.

The car rolled slowly up on the track. Mom and son got in alongside one another, an iron bar was lowered to make sure they were safe in their seat. Then, suddenly, the car shot off, diving into a tunnel.

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Within moments it reappeared, slowly climbing the hill that leads to one of the most famous dips in roller coaster history, a 70-foot dive that sends the car hurtling along at 55 miles per hour.

Patrick Kinney was about to become ... if not a man, at least an official kid from Santa Cruz.

The Giant Dipper is celebrating its 65th birthday this week. It is the seventh-oldest wooden roller coaster in the nation, the last active wooden roller coaster along the Pacific Coast and rated one of the best roller coasters in the nation by virtually all experts.

Since it began rolling on May 17, 1924, more than 35 million people have felt their stomachs fly as it

raced wildly past curves and down hills. More than a million people a year still brave the Giant Dipper. Some are young in age, the rest are young at heart.

The Giant Dipper was built in 47 days and originally cost only \$50,000. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987. The Seaside Co., owner of the Boardwalk, is celebrating the ride's having reached non-retirement age with a variety of promotions.

Anyone 65 years of age or older is invited to take free rides on Friday. All they have to do is show proper identification at the ticket window. And artist Boyd Tveit has produced a commemorative poster for the occasion.

But the Giant Dipper doesn't re-

ally need promoting. People come no matter what. Because it's there. Because their parents or friends have ridden it. Because they're addicted — one man recently rode the Big Dipper more than 50 times in one day.

Patrick Kinney had a slightly stunned smile on his face when the car finally slowed to a stop after his first ride. His hair was blown back off his face, his eyes looked a bit watery and were so wide they seemed pried open.

The second time he rode the Giant Dipper, Patrick held his arms over his head.

Afterwards, as he walked along the Boardwalk next to his Mom, gabbing with friends, there was a skip in his step that hadn't been there before.