



The very young have no monopoly on enjoying the magic of the Boardwalk's Looft Carousel.

on the Slow turn Carousel



Each wooden horse on the Boardwalk's carousel was hand-carved.

By **PATRICIA SMITH**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Boardwalk

6-24-00

Last Tuesday was lame. I got a parking ticket, a computer virus, and more guff from the boss. Three strikes and I was out of the office. Like any self-respecting, mature adult, I headed for the carousel.

✓ The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk carousel is a treasure, recognized locally and nationally. The biggest antique carousel in Northern California features 73 horses, two Roman chariots adorned with cherubs, a mighty 342-pipe band organ, and spots on the California Historical Landmark list and the National Register of Historic Places.

This 1911 gem, hand-carved by Danish immigrant Charles I.D. Looft, holds a special spot in my personal history as well. It was here — as a bright-eyed girl many, many years ago — that I first fell in love. Not with another person, but with a whirlwind ride that sparked a life-long belief in the restorative power of merry-go-round magic.

Twinkling lights, mirrored panels and a blaring band organ invited me in, displaying the same warm welcome of days gone by.

Prancing ponies sporting real horsehair tails called out: Choose me! And I did.

Sidling up to a white, bejeweled jumper, I gave a leap and was perched atop the handsome steed. Home.

I wrapped my hands around the cool, brass candy cane, as the old carousel moaned and lurched forward. One swift glance around the circle revealed I was the only rider in the ring. Home alone.

An uncommon occurrence. This “pure” carousel (meaning, all the horses were carved by one master carver) attracts riders of all ages throughout the year.

According to Ann Parker, who recently retired as the Boardwalk's community relations director, more than a half-million people ride the historic carousel annually.

Please see **CAROUSEL** on Page B2

SANTA CRUZ STYLE

Carousel

Continued from Page B1

Wild and crazy coaster rides come and go, but the carousel holds court on the exact spot where Loeff delivered his creation in 1911 — 89 years ago.

Stability doesn't draw the crowds. Brass rings do.

In 1958 a decision was made to retire the large canvas clown who beckons riders to hurl a brass ring into his hungry mouth.

Ridership dropped off 75 percent.

The rings were reinstated; Bozo ruled again. A carousel worker fed rings onto the mechanical arm until the early '50s when it was mechanized.

Brass rings were replaced by steel rings 20 years later when the brass ones interfered with the ride's electronic stop-and-start device.

The mechanism holds 5,000 rings at one time; over 85,000 rings are replaced annually. Santa Cruz is one of the few carousels in the country still offering the challenge of catching the brass ring.

The greatest challenge this antique carousel presents is maintenance. Jan Bollwinkel-Smith, communications manager for the Santa Cruz Seaside Company, which owns the Boardwalk, said it costs \$2000 to restore each horse.

This includes chemically stripping off the paint, recarving and rebuilding dilapidated joints. Well-worn areas are often coated with fiberglass for added endurance.

The 342-pipe, Ruth und Sohn, air-driven band organ also needs frequent renovation. Built in 1894, the

German-made machine is rapidly becoming extinct. When refurbished in 1979, many parts were no longer available and had to be made by hand. Cost can be prohibitive; when refurbished again in 1993, the bill was over \$25,000.

Popularity has its price. Constant wear-and-tear continues to erode knees, saddles, and manes of the horses.

But one special Loeff legacy remains in tact — Santa Cruz stallions continue to smile.

While other wood-carvers whittled wild, stern, snorting animals, Loeff carved smiles.

Many of the Boardwalk horses display their teeth, a rarity among carousel menageries

But not among carousel aficionados such as myself. As the

ride wound down, thoughts of parking tickets, computers, and bosses succumbed to a smile.

As I walked away from the carousel canopy, the band organ struck up a familiar tune: "Happy Days Are Here Again."

Maybe, maybe not. But whatever the future holds, I find comfort in knowing a place where the ups and downs of life dissolve in a three-minute magical escape.

Have you had a magical merry-go-round experience at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk? If so, please contact Patricia Smith at newsgirl@earthlink.net or in care of the Sentinel.

Patricia Smith is a freelance writer residing in La Selva Beach.

International Year of the Carousel

This is the International Year of the Carousel, and the Beach Boardwalk is helping Jacob's Heart, a local organization that supports parents of children with cancer, by donating 500 all-day, unlimited ride passes to the group.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The Boardwalk's carousel is one of a remaining few merry-go-rounds that still features a ring dispenser.

Carousels have a language of their own. Every part of the animal, machine mechanism, band organ, and carousel environment has a name.

Cantle: the raised portion at the back of a figure's saddle.

Jewels: glass inserts of various shapes and colors, simulating precious stones.

Jumper: horse that goes up and down with no feet touching the platform.

King or lead horse: largest, most ornate horse on a machine, always found in the outside row and sometimes inscribed with the manufacturers name or initials.

Menagerie figure: any carousel animal other than a horse.

Mixed machine: a carousel with figures manufactured by more than one company.

Prancer: stationary horse with rear feet on platform, front legs raised.

Romance side: the public side of the carousel figure, which faces away from the centerpole and toward the approaching rider, thus is more elaborate and ornate in detail.