Life

THE BLOCK ZONE:
TWO TRACKS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

by Sean Aitken
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
sean.aitken@uconn.edu



The Racer station and queue across the lagoon at Kennywood. Race was designed by roller coaster designer John A. Miller with the first version built in 1910 and the second version built in 1927.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THRILLZING.COM

Welcome back to another edition of The Block Zone. Today we are exploring ways to spice up a usual coaster ride. How about if there were two tracks instead of one? Sounds interesting. Dueling and racing roller coasters are unique as they feature tracks placed side-by-side from each other.

Dueling and racing coasters have some differences. Dueling coasters are two tracks side by side, normally with mirroring layouts. They are designed to traverse the layout next to each other and are placed close together to create near-miss and interactive elements with the other train. Near miss elements are when the ride gets close to each other or other parts of the track, making it seem like the ride is about to collide. The appeal of a dueling coaster is watching the other train fly past, above or below while already experiencing the thrill of the ride itself.

Racing coasters are almost the same, except as the name implies; they race against each other. They have the same interactive and mirrored elements as the dueling coasters, but with more track placed directly side by side, close enough where riders can almost reach out and touch others on the opposing train. At the end of these, normally a train is crowned the winner, after reaching a finish line.

Möbius loop roller coasters are another variation. While still dueling or racing, it's one single track. The train is dispatched and then returns to the station on the other side of where it began. There are seven of these left in operation, most notably Racer at Kennywood.

Then a quasi-Möbius coaster is a Möbius coaster, except the train will not stop at the station but complete both sides of the duel or race in one long ride. Six Flags Magic Mountain cannot get enough of these, as it features the only two in the world: Twisted Colossus and West Coast Racers.

The first notable coaster to duel or race was the aforementioned Racer at Kennywood. Racer was designed by legendary roller coaster designer John A. Miller. The coaster has two versions; the first was built in 1910 and then the second in 1927, which still stands today.

Another coaster called Racer stands tall in Mason, Ohio. The Racer at Kings Island is a coaster icon, built in 1972., then jJust a year later the coaster was featured in an episode of "The Brady Bunch." The Racer can be credited for the beginning of the coaster wars.

In 1982, the trains on one side were flipped to ride backwards, the first ever racing coaster to do that, according to Fox 19 Now and The Times Recorder.

Taking a slight step back to 1978, Gemini opened at Cedar Point and was advertised to hold records like the tallest and fastest coaster., Iin reality it only held the record for the largest drop. An 118-foot drop was nothing to scoff at in 1978. Gemini is a unique coaster; Roller Coaster Database and Coasterpedia classify it as an Arrow Special Coaster Systems. It has a wooden structure with steel track, the same track seen on the Matterhorn at Disneyland; Gemini is a Frankenstein monster of a record-breaking coaster.

Moving ahead to 1981, American Eagle opened at Marriott's Great America, now known as Six Flags Great America, and is the tallest and fastest dueling wooden roller coaster. Not only that but it was the second coaster created by Swiss manufacturer Intamin, who would go on to become a goliath in the industry. American Eagle would race for the first time in around a decade in 2026 in honor of the park's 50th anniversary.

1997 had two coasters that could be classified as failures. Windjammer Surf Racers at Knott's Berry Farm is certainly a failure. Replacing a quad steeplechase, lasting just three years and closing at the turn of the century, Windjammer Surf Racers had a brief problematic time in southern California. Knott's Berry Farm ended up suing manufacturer Togo, stating that the ride had major design flaws related to wind.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the suit claimed "In some wind conditions as low as 3 mph, the cars will not operate." The looping roller coaster was a painful mess that never even raced often.

Then Batman and Robin: The Chiller opened at Six Flags Great Adventure. It opened for just a day in 1997; some mechanical failures pushed its reopening to the following year. The ride model was a Linear Induction Motor launch shuttle coaster. Opening at the same time as the Mr. Freezes at Six Flags St. Louis and Over Texas, these models were prototypes. Maintenance issues plagued the coaster's lifespan. After changing the layout in 2007, the ride would not even make it to the end of that season, shutting down before lasting a full decade. However, the Mr. Freeze clones still live almost 20 years after their sibling ride shut down.

In 1999, Universal opened Islands of Adventure, along with the iconic Dueling Dragons; a pair of blue and red Bolliger & Mabillard inverted coasters. Universal was competing with Disney — an invert at a Disney park would just never happen. It has many near miss-elements, including the two tracks heading straight at each other before flying up into a vertical loop, with riders' feet coming just inches from each other. The original track themes were Fire and Ice; the Fire side had a pair of Immelmann turns compared to the cobra roll seen on Ice. The coaster would be renamed and re-themed in 2010, following the creation of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, to Dragon Challenge. Ice would become the Hungarian Horntail and Fire would be Chinese Fireball.

2011 would see injuries to riders from loose items from one train flying off and hitting riders on the other train. That would mark the end of the ride's dueling life; the dispatches would be sequenced apart to avoid loose item accidents. This crippled the ride's appeal; without the dueling aspect, they were just regular old B&M inverts. The ride would close in 2017, making way for Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure in 2019.

In 2014, the famous dueling coaster Colossus at Six Flags Magic Mountain would close and be converted. Then in 2015, Twisted Colossus rose from the ashes. It is the only dueling Rocky Mountain Construction I-Box coaster. The coaster is an example of a quasi-Möbius circuit; riders complete the blue side, then ascend a second chain lift to complete the green side before returning to the station. Near-misses galore, including a high five element, zero-g roll over the green side and a stall above the blue side. It is rare to see a Twisted Colossus duel these days; the quasi-Möbius loop requires precise operation that has not been seen as of late.

2025 saw the opening to Epic Universe in Orlando. Just like Islands of Adventure before, this Universal park opened on day one with a dual-track masterpiece. Stardust Racers is a Mack Rides Linear Synchronous Motor launch coaster. It's the longest dueling coaster of all time, with a whopping 5,000 feet of track on each side.

Stardust Racers won the Best New Roller Coaster award in 2025. The ride features metal detection; no loose articles are permitted on the ride — Universal was not making the Dueling Dragons mistake again. The ride's layout is jampacked with negative g-force and features a catch-up moment on the ride's second launch. Whichever train has fallen behind will have a punchier launch to catch up to the train in the lead. That launch sends riders into the inversion dubbed the Celestial Spin. The Pulsar side speeds into a zero-g roll with the Photon side underneath, then after the Photon side dives into a barrel roll drop over the Pulsar side — one of the world's best inversions.

The question without an answer is if dueling and racing coasters count as one or two coaster credits, but that is a discussion for another time.

SUBOG Weekly Events:

November 15th - November 22nd

November 18th – Comedy Bingo @ 7 pm in the Student Union Theatre

November 19th – Asian Cultural Night @ 7 pm in BUSN 106

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu



A Dueling Dragons Fire train banking through a turn on the red track at Universal's Islands of Adventure. This iconic coaster was built in 1999.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THRILLZING.COM