THE BLOCK ZONE:

When I say 'Boulder,' you say 'Dash'

by Sean Aitken
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
sean.aitken@uconn.edu



Boulder Dash winds through the dense forest at Lake Compounce in Bristol, Connecticut. The wooden roller coaster features steep drops and sharp turns as it races through the trees at speeds of nearly 60 miles per hour.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @COASTERFORCE ON INSTAGRAM.

Welcome to the first addition of The Block Zone. This column is to discuss the ins and outs of everything rollercoasters and theme parks. As a proud Nutmegger, there is no better rollercoaster to start with than a Connecticut icon: Boulder Dash.

Boulder Dash is comprised of 4,725 feet of southern yellow pine built by the legendary rollercoaster manufacturer Custom Coasters International. The now defunct company filed for bankruptcy just two years following Boulder Dash's construction.

In 1996, Lake Compounce was purchased by Kennywood Entertainment Corporation. They added a few rides including a Vekoma Boomerang, the first real thrill coaster the park had ever seen. Four years later, the park built a beast for $6 million: Boulder Dash.

Boulder Dash was built into the side of a mountain and is categorized as a terrain coaster. The first drop of Boulder Dash is 115 feet tall despite the ride never rising high off the ground. Rollo Coaster at Idlewild was the inspiration for Boulder Dash, but Boulder Dash is a much more ambitious and wild ride. Boulder Dash is known as one of the world's best wooden roller coasters and a world class night ride.

Boulder Dash put Lake Compounce on the map. According to the blog Theme Parks and Entertainment despite being the United States's longest continuously operating theme park, Lake Compounce was struggling in the early 1990s — from owners going bankrupt, to the park being sold twice, to low attendance. Boulder Dash brought many people around the world to the middle of Connecticut. It can be credited to saving the park from closure.

Boulder Dash begins climbing up the mountain before a right curved drop. It soars past the station at 60 miles per hour and disappears into the woods. The coaster follows a sequence of hills, flying through the woods before turning around right next to the lake. The coaster then speeds past the path back to the station, originally going into a trick track, but in 2008 the trick track was replaced with a triple-up. Today, the ride features a double-up due to the roughness and rotten wood on the triple-up.

The coaster formerly operated two trains from Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters Inc. that had six cars per train. According to Roller Coaster Database, each train seats 24 riders. With Boulder Dash's block zone set up, the coaster can only run two trains.

Boulder Dash has been a safe operating rollercoaster for riders for the entire 26 years it has been open.

However, in 2001, just one year into its existence, Boulder Dash suffered a freak accident. On June 13, 2001, a park employee was struck and killed by a test train in the morning, while he was doing lawn maintenance. The ride had not been locked out, so when a ride mechanic arrived, they had no way of knowing there was anyone out there. Today, Boulder Dash has a horn that goes off to alert everyone in the area that the coaster is to begin operation.

As the 2000's continued, Boulder Dash started to become a household name in the amusement park industry. It took home the Golden Ticket award for Best Wooden Coaster in 2004. Boulder Dash would win the award four years in a row from 2013 to 2016 and was part of the top five from 2001 to 2023. It was now evident that a small park in Connecticut had a world class rollercoaster.

Boulder Dash would see its first retrack in 2007 and 2008, then again in 2017 by Martin & Vleminckx.

2017 was another scary year for the coaster. In August of that year, the two trains would collide, causing serious damage to both. Thankfully, nobody was on the ride. The ride would go on to operate with only one train until 2025.

In 2023 Boulder Dash began another retracking, this time by Great Coasters International. The company added around 580 feet of their patent-pending titan track. Titan track is a steel track used to replace old wood track on wooden coasters. It can be a mixed bag because while it makes the coaster smoother, it can detract from the charm of wooden coasters. Over the next three seasons, more titan track was added.

The state of Boulder Dash today is a melancholy one. The juxtaposition between the wooden track and titan track leaves the ride in an awkward place. The areas with the titan track have increased the coasters' speed, which is awesome in theory, but not during the transitions into the old wooden sections.

While still a great ride, it has become extremely rough. The ride is only bearable to the majority in the front non-wheel seat. These changes are reflected in the media as Boulder Dash finished 10th in the Golden Ticket Awards, its lowest finish since the year it opened.

On top of that, to install the titan track, trees around the coaster were torn down. This has made the night ride significantly brighter and has hindered the magic of the beloved coaster.

Things are not all bad for the Connecticut icon. Lake Compounce along with all the Parques Reunidos parks were purchased by Herschend in 2025. As previously mentioned, Boulder Dash getting its second train back can be credited to Herschend. So, with Herschend at the helm, the futures of the park and Boulder Dash look brighter.

Even if the entire layout gets done over with titan track, which at this point seems inevitable, I believe all of us will never forget our first ride on this marvel of a rollercoaster.



Lake Compounce worker welcomes social media influencers to enjoy the park with a sign in front of the ride, Boulder Dash. This coaster raced around the park at almost 60 miles per hour.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @LAKECOMPOUNCE ON INSTRAGRAM.