

## Finally Forty Inches (Part 1): Disneyland Attractions for Little Ones

by Brian Rawson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

On last year's Walt Disney World vacation, my 39-inch, 3.5 year-old daughter watched longingly while "everyone else" rode Splash Mountain, Big Thunder Mountain, and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster.

Sure, she loved playing in the awesome little playground under the Frontierland train station and goofing off with cast members in Rock Around the Shop, but she also talked about riding Splash Mountain continuously for the next 11 months.

40 inches is the first major height requirement for Disney thrill rides. This is the height required by the most popular "Disney mountains" in California and Florida: Space Mountain, Big Thunder Mountain and Splash Mountain. 40 inches is the height requirement for a number of other thrilling attractions including Soarin', Tower of Terror, Star Tours, Radiator Springs Racers, Test Track, Dinosaur, Silly Symphony Swings, and Jumpin' Jellyfish. There are some Disney Mountain exceptions with more stringent height requirements: Matterhorn Bobsleds is 42 inches, Grizzly River Rapids is 42, and Expedition Everest is 44.

I was excited for her when she surpassed 40 inches earlier this year, and was pleasantly surprised when we arrived in Disneyland and she was just over the 42 inches mark in her favorite running shoes. We were there for a week, and we eased in a few "new to her" thrill rides every day.

My girl loves roller coasters as much as I do, perhaps even more. So I made a mental plan for helping her try all the roller coasters during our vacation, and hopefully the other thrill rides, too. This included warning her about the frightening components of each attraction that I knew of. I didn't want her to freak out like one of my six-year-old cousins, who refused to ride any dark ride for two days after her parents talked her into riding Space Mountain. I tried to talk my daughter through just about everything, with mixed success. We spent a week visiting Disneyland and Disney California Adventure, and we never tried more than three new thrill rides in one day.

We love roller coasters, so the first attraction we experienced after a long day of flying was Gadget's Go Coaster. As expected, she totally loved it, riding much of the circuit with her hands in the air, yelling, "Whee!" Rodger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin wasn't the same qualified success, as the weasels scared her so much that she

stopped steering and I had to take over. She cheered loudly when Jessica Rabbit defeated those nasty weasels. This dichotomy would continue for much of the remainder of the trip.

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□ Later in the trip, I talked her into riding Matterhorn Bobsleds, which was my first roller coaster at the age of five. I forgot how intense the Yeti was. My daughter wouldn't let me forget. She loved the rest of the ride, but not the monster, who pops up screaming several times. (I thought it was just once? I must have closed my eyes as a child.)

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□ And my questionable parenting didn't end there. I didn't do my homework regarding Space Mountain Ghost Galaxy. We used FASTPASSES to minimize the anticipation time. I also told her that there would be ghosts, but I honestly thought they would be friendly ghosts, like the Haunted Mansion. Almost immediately, our roller coaster car was chased by a huge, fiery, nasty-looking space ghost, who followed us around and screamed at us. The on-board sound system in Space Mountain makes it very realistic. This ghost scared me. My petrified daughter clung tight to me until the ride was over. "Dad, I liked the roller coaster, but that ghost was too scary. Can we ride it without the ghost?" I guess I need to plan another trip to Disneyland.

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□ We did the other Disneyland Mountains later in the trip. Splash Mountain was a huge success, despite the fact that my daughter insisted that it was Roger Rabbit who was in trouble with that nasty "weasel" (fox). She loved the drop, and tolerated the nasty fox. She would have liked to ride it over and over again all day. Although she really wanted to know the story, and I couldn't relate it quickly enough and clearly not enough to satisfy her curiosity. I will have to show her my "Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby" Disney book when I go back to my parents house.

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□ Big Thunder Mountain took a bit of convincing. I eventually figured out that she wanted to ride the roller coaster, but did not like the name "Big Thunder Mountain." So we just got in the line to ride "that fun-looking train." She was a bit nervous in the bat-cave scene, but was strangely silent for the rest of the ride. At the exit, I convinced her to pose for a picture near the exit because she was grinning ear to ear. I still wasn't sure just how much she liked it, and I casually asked what she wanted to do next. She didn't say anything, she just grabbed me and ran right back in the entrance for another lap. The next lap wasn't quiet. She had questions about everything, including, "Dad, why did they feed the goat dynamite? That's just silly."

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□ Star Tours: The Adventure Continues was the last big ride to try in Disneyland. She was very nervous about it. She didn't want to do

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it. But I talked her into trying it once. Again, we used FASTPASS to minimize fear based on anticipation. Our ride took us through the storm troopers, to Kashyyyk (Chewbacca's home planet), interrupted by Admiral Ackbar, and dropping into the space battle and city traffic of Coruscant. My little ride-junkie liked flying around Kashyyyk, but did not like the battle sequences at all. So no more Star Tours for her.

I should also note that it was a challenge to get my daughter on Pirates of the Caribbean, even though she's experienced it several times previously. I realized that it was the word "pirate" that frightened her, so I talked her into riding a boat ride past a restaurant. We boarded without incident, and as soon as we were past the fort and into the town, she looked at me very seriously and loudly asked, "Daddy, why aren't you singing?"

Here's a quick summary of my daughter's favorite rides.

Most are fast outdoor attractions:

- Gadget's Go Coaster
- It's a Small World
- Mad Tea Party
- Astro Orbiter
- Splash Mountain
- Big Thunder Mountain
- Jungle Cruise
- Enchanted Tiki Room

The following attractions were too frightening for her to experience more than once. Dark rides and monstrous encounters dominated her frightful experiences:

- Space Mountain Ghost Galaxy (It scared me too!)
- Matterhorn Bobsleds
- Star Tours: The Adventure Continues
- Mr. Toad's Wild Ride
- Haunted Mansion Holiday
- Snow White's Scary Adventure
- Pinocchio's Daring Journey
- Buzz Lightyear's Astro Blasters

To be continued in Disney California Adventure!

*About The Author: Brian Rawson is a single dad, now living near Calgary. His father took him on the Matterhorn Bobsleds when he was five, and since then, he has travelled extensively to feed his roller coaster addiction. He has ridden around 200 different roller coasters and experienced all the "Disney Mountains" in Florida, California, France and Japan.*

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