

Public appeal to save UK's oldest 'white knuckle' ride

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National Heritage Memorial Fund cash kicks-off campaign to secure only complete 1930s Moonrocket.

Image



Shaw's Moon-Rockets

The Fairground Heritage Trust (FHT) has been awarded £90,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) to help safeguard Shaw's Moonrocket, the only historic thrill ride of its kind still fully intact and functioning.

The money from NHMF launches the Trust's £17,000 fundraising appeal to secure this unique piece of fairground heritage.

Built in the 1930s, the Moonrocket was the ground-breaking forerunner to the white knuckle rides now a staple of theme parks and fairgrounds across the world. It represents an era when speed, thrills and excitement were the height of fashion.

The history

The 1930's saw rapid advances in the field of technology and, together with the record breaking exploits of Amy Johnson, Captain George Eyston, John Cobb and Sir Malcolm Campbell, these advances excited a general appetite for speed, travel and 'the future'.

At the same time the UK was experiencing the effects of a prolonged global economic depression and suffering mass unemployment. The Moonrocket was a response to this and the need for escapism.

Riders sit in rocket shaped cars rotated at 12rpm on a sloped base. At the same time the centre, which had a carved figure riding a rocket, rotated the opposite way at 6rpm, giving an illusion of a dizzying 24rpm to the riders.

Shaw's Moonrocket was ordered by showman John Shaw in 1938 and built by Robert Lakin and Co Ltd of Streatham, London, with Maxwells of Musselburgh supplying various engineering parts. The Moonrocket as a ride type had almost vanished from fairgrounds by the 1960s, but Shaw's carried on operating until 1984.

It was purchased by the late Howard Maden and what followed was one of the most comprehensive restoration jobs ever undertaken, with retention of the 1960s decoration. It stands as a lasting tribute to Howard, who passed away in 2012.

The campaign

Currently for sale on the open market, the Trust needs to raise a further £17,000 to secure this iconic and unique thrill ride. As with all items of this kind that go on sale, there is the potential that it could be lost to the nation forever. If the Trust is successful, the ride will be open to the public at Dingles Fairground Centre, Devon next year.

The public can help save the Moonrocket by texting RCKT10 £10 to 70070 or by visiting the crowdfunding page at www.justgiving.com/fairgroundheritage.

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of the NHMF, said: "Candy floss, carousels and coconut shies. The thrill of the fairground is an almost timeless experience that has been enjoyed by young and old, rich and poor, for generations. Shaw's Moonrocket is a truly remarkable fairground survivor. We are delighted to support the campaign to save this much-loved part of our shared heritage."

Nick Sturgess, Curatorial Manager at the Fairground Heritage Centre, said:
“Shaw’s Moonrocket is the last complete example of the ultimate fairground ride of the pre-war era. Not only is it a stunning ride to look at but it also reflects what was going on at the time in terms of people wanting to experience the speed of their idols in the air or in motorcars experienced by a bit of escapism. Even the name Moonrocket and the rocket cars play into a pre-war idea of wanting to go to space. It’ll be a fantastic addition to our collection of nationally important rides and will allow us to tell a much more complete story of the fairground industry and its impact on everyday people.”

Notes to editors

The Fairground Heritage Centre has gone from strength to strength and seen a very impressive increase in visitor numbers in the past two years.

For more details of the Fairground Heritage Centre and Fairground Heritage Trust please visit www.fairground-heritage.org.uk.

Further information

For the Fairground Heritage Trust please call Nick Sturgess, Curatorial Manager, on 01566 783 425 or Guy Belshaw, Press Officer, on 07860 214 105.