



Note: The following article was composed by amusement park aficionado Jim Futrell in 1999 for the opening of darkride/roller coaster — **THE EXTERMINATOR.**

Coastin' through the dark... a long time favorite!

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For over a century the roller coaster has been the king of the amusement park. Since its invention in 1884, thrill seekers have lined up to be delighted by steep drops, hairpin turns and uncontrolled speed. In response to this demand, roller coaster designers are always searching for ways to provide new thrills to an increasingly demanding public. Adding loops and suspending the train below the track are just two of the many innovations that have been successfully utilized. Another innovation that has long provided intriguing possibilities has been placing a roller coaster inside a building to add an entirely new dimension in thrills.

Like loops and suspending the train below the tracks, indoor roller coasters are an innovation almost as old as the ride itself. In 1887, just three years after opening the Switchback Railway (the first modern roller coaster) at New York's Coney Island, LaMarcus Thompson took roller coaster design to an entirely new level by opening the Scenic Railway on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. The ride was unlike anything people had seen, with a significant portion of the ride enclosed in a large building filled with elaborate scenes from exotic locales and Bible stories. As the trains traveled past the scenes, electric lights would illuminate them, itself a novelty in an era when most homes were illuminated with gas lamps.

Thompson's Scenic Railway was an immediate, international sensation and soon amusement parks around the world were clamoring for their own version of the ride. Over the next two decades, dozens of Scenic Railways were built. They featured exteriors resembling huge mountain ranges, oriental temples or coal mines, with elaborate entrances festooned with statues and electric lights. They had romantic names such as Dragon's Gorge, Pikes Peak, Rocky Road to Dublin, Coasting thru Switzerland, Over the Great Divide or Touring the Alps.

Even Kennywood featured its own Scenic Railway, which operated near the current site of The Exterminator from 1906 to 1910. It was a side friction coaster with small hills and gentle dips, with the unusual feature of track passing through a building several times.

As the public's demand for greater thrills increased, the relatively tame Scenic Railways gave way to faster, more modern roller coasters. Most Scenic Railways gave their last rides in the 1920's. The last true Scenic Railway was the Alps at Willow Grove Park near Philadelphia, which thrilled its last riders in 1975. However, there are still a few Scenic Railways operating in Europe.

In the 1920's, enclosed coasters took on a new personality when the Twister opened, with a tunnel covering the track, at Coney Island in Cincinnati. Its high-speed nature, however, precluded the incorporation of any scenes or special effects. The Depression in the 1930's and World War II in the 1940's slowed roller coaster innovation and, as a result, the development of new types of enclosed roller coasters halted. However, during this time, Edgewood Park in Shamokin, PA, looking for a creative way to add a new attraction, placed a building around one of its old roller coasters, gave it a coal-mining theme and named it School of Mines. It is long gone, as is the park.

The theme park era, beginning in the 1950's once again made roller coaster designers think about enclosing a roller coaster, this time to make it fit in with the extensive theming these new parks were featuring. Disneyland's Matterhorn, although not a true enclosed roller coaster, harkened back to the scenic railways of old as it was placed in an elaborate mountain when it opened in 1959.

Disney pioneered the use of enclosed roller coasters in the modern era with the opening of Space Mountain at Walt Disney World in Florida in 1976. The ride has since become something of a legend with its simulated rocket trip through outer space. The high cost of Space Mountain, however, kept many parks from copying the idea. In the 1980's, however, the concept was revived by several parks in England where the Black Hole opened at Alton Towers, Staffordshire in 1983, followed by Space Invader at Blackpool Pleasure Beach in Blackpool in 1984, and the Rat at Lightwater Valley in Ripon, UK in 1987. Soon the enclosed roller coaster spread throughout the continent.

Although enclosed roller coasters continue to be popular in Europe, Exterminator will be one of a select few in the United States. Additionally, Kennywood is the first traditional amusement park in the country to add a major enclosed roller coaster. Using the cutting edge industry trend of "thrill convergence", The Exterminator will be the most unique ride ever constructed at Kennywood. Not only does it combine the unrestrained thrills of a roller coaster, but it can also be considered a dark ride complete with story line and an extensive array of special effects. As if that is not enough, The Exterminator will also feature a third ride sensation... but that is something you'll have to discover for yourself!

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