



# SCREAM IF YOU WANNA GO FASTER

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS THEME PARKS ARE CHANGING THE GAME WITH MOVIE RIDES – WE TOOK A TRIP ON THE **JURASSIC WORLD VELOCICOASTER** TO FIND OUT MORE WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



**T**HE WORLD MAY HAVE GONE INTO a forced "hibernation" of sorts but life, ah... finds a way. While many were busying themselves with Zoom, others were working on a different kind of zoom entirely – namely building Florida's fastest, tallest and most intense launch rollercoaster ever. And, now that travel has re-opened, you can take a trip to the newly-expanded Jurassic World – albeit the much safer version at Universal Studios' Islands Of Adventure in Orlando, Florida.

In production since 2017, and looking to elevate guest thrills to the next level, it was decided that Jurassic World made the most sense for the evolution of the theme park and the future of rollercoasters.

"We treated VelociCoaster like it was truly at Jurassic World, an attraction that existed just off-screen in the movies," Universal's Senior Show Producer Shelby Honea tells SFX. "We placed our attraction shortly before the events of the first *Jurassic World* film, when the park is operating as intended. The premise is simple, and classically *Jurassic* – VelociCoaster gives you the next-level animal encounter, a 'prey's eye view' that is only possible at Jurassic World. What could go wrong! As theme park designers, it's beyond fun to imagine how a coaster would exist alongside real velociraptors."

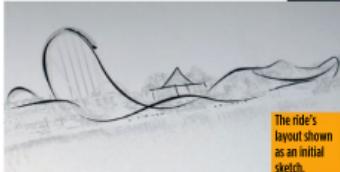
"The dinosaurs are the most enduring aspect of the franchise. Their natural world will always feel timeless and that's why we chose the raptor paddock as a major setting."

## SMELL THE FEAR

As is the way with Universal Studios, you've seen the film, now *live* the film. In this case, that means escaping from apex predators – specifically Velociraptors – in Jurassic World VelociCoaster. Throughout the ride you'll experience 22 different raptors in fact; we would say "come face-to-face with", but at these speeds you might not catch 'em all...

Not only are you going to see them, you're going to *smell* them. Yes, Universal worked with a scent company to truly cover all bases. Because, as with most modern day theme parks, the actual ride is only a part of the experience – with the queue and entrance to VelociCoaster creating an immersive dinosaur habitat from the start. Surrounded by 36,000 square feet of elaborate rockwork, a giant waterfall and lush jungle vegetation, the space the ride inhabits is more than just a track.

"The approach for queues has changed considerably, especially here at Universal," Honea explains. "Our story starts the moment our guests walk under the marquee. Queues are a prologue to the action on the ride. For Jurassic World VelociCoaster, the queue story was doubly important. Given the dynamics and ➔



The ride's layout shown as an initial sketch.

speed of the coaster, we have limited opportunity to deliver the key story beats – knowing most people will be closing their eyes and screaming for the duration of the ride. In our queue we needed to establish that guests are here at Jurassic World, but also build the tension and play with the natural anxiety one feels when waiting for a coaster... a coaster with raptors!

"The first rooms start bright, airy and brimming with Jurassic World corporate polish. As you move deeper, the rooms are darker and smaller – again building the tension. In our final room, Claire Dearing and Owen Grady introduce the coaster and provide a colourful safety briefing. We love to watch the guests in this scene; some enjoy a tense laugh as the characters banter, and others are dead silent, knowing they are about to board! Mission accomplished!"

## HISTORY REPEATING

Original cast Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard and BD Wong reprise their roles as Owen Grady, Claire Dearing and Dr Henry Wu.

"We wrote the scripts internally, and then worked with Universal Pictures and Colin Trevorrow to make sure the script and tone felt authentic to the characters," Honea explains. "Filming took place on the historical Universal Studios Hollywood backlot shortly before filming started for *Domino*. We filmed the scene simultaneously on two sections of the stage, so that banter you see was authentic as the actors played against each other."

It's in these early rooms that you'll first encounter Blue, Charlie, Delta and Echo in a state of the art raptor paddock where the caged creatures will move and breathe on you.

"For our animated figures, we were fortunate to work with some of the best creature designers in the world," Honea says. "While small, each raptor holds an impressive number of functions. My favourite is the nuzzle flutter. It's such a subtle movement, but it brings so much life and nuance. Even the eyeballs are an incredible process, using layers of precious metals and inks to capture the depth and brightness in the iris."

If you weren't nervous before, you get the chance to see the VelociCoaster taking off via windows in the queue... but you're not the only ones watching, as you'll witness raptors chasing after the recently departed guests.

"The raptor windows are an epic effect that we developed in house," Honea tells us. "We had a very cool opportunity to open the walls



The view from the raptor paddock. Very nice!



Nervous laughter as the queue progresses...





An artist's conceptual rendering of the ride.



Concept rendering compared to real effect.



Coaster cars await their victims... er, guests.



Constructing the coaster; it took a while, you know.

and let guests in the queue see into the 70mph launch. That alone was very cool, but we challenged ourselves to deliver a way to put the raptors out in that launch as well. That scene is a great example of cutting-edge audio/video technology, lighting and media, combined with traditional effects to create something new."

Technology, Honea says, is not what drives the creation of new rides at Universal. "We develop the most compelling story, and then look for the best technology to achieve that. Where no known technology exists, we create new solutions."

## DINO EASTER EGGS

But it's not all about cutting-edge technology and fancy effects - VelociCoaster sits with simple old-fashioned Easter eggs too. "We hope that the love and respect for the Jurassic franchise is evident in the details!" Honea grins. "Nothing is an accident. Some of my favourite Easter eggs are the call backs to the original *Jurassic Park* series."

"In our trainer lockers, there's a new book from Dr Ellie Sattler – it was very special to get her name on that shelf. There's also a *Dominion* easter egg, if you keep your eyes peeled for the book from Ian Malcolm."

There's even Easter eggs for theme park enthusiasts, Honea notes. "VelociCoaster sits on land once occupied by a walk-through experience called Triceratops Encounter. One of the 'Dino Chow' bags from that attraction is visible coming out of our second inversion..."

"We spend a considerable amount of time gathering reference photos, working with the filmmakers, and establishing a visual language that is consistent with the world we are trying to make. Some examples from Jurassic World VelociCoaster: our concrete fences and load station overlook are direct lifts from the Indominus Rex paddock seen in the films. Our iconic ride vehicle looks right at home next to the Gyrosphere attraction seen on screen."

As for the ride itself? Well, if you've ever wanted to feel weightless, you're in luck. The only thing is you're going to be catapulted 155 feet into the air at speeds of up to 70mph – while avoiding a raptor pack – to achieve it. You're also going to find yourself in 360-degree inversions – dangling you inches above the lagoon – as well as an inverted stall that spans over 100 feet and a plummet down a severe 80-degree drop while you hurtle along 4,700 feet of track. Terrifying? Yes. Brilliant and exhilarating? Oh hell yes. ☀

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