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At Ferrari World, F1 fans can experience the rush of the race

Park in Abu Dhabi is a grander version of tourist destination envisioned for Austin.



Luca Bruno/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Ferrari World Abu Dhabi features the Formula Rossa roller coaster, above, which is designed to resemble stretched-out Ferrari Formula One race cars. It accelerates from a standstill to 60 mph in two seconds and reaches its top speed three seconds later.



Ferrari World, Abu Dhabi

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The children's area of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi includes a kiddie driving school where instruction and 'driver's licenses' are given.



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By **Angela Shah**
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES — The sounds coming out of him as his body traveled 150 mph were unreal.

"It was just weird, but I just couldn't help it," said Cory Ryan, a Canadian engineer who works for Schlumberger. "I'm sure people around me thought I was getting sick."

Ryan had just ridden the Formula Rossa, billed as the world's fastest roller coaster and a star attraction at the newly opened Ferrari World Abu Dhabi theme park, adjacent to its new Formula One racetrack. The coaster, designed to resemble stretched-out Ferrari Formula One race cars, accelerates from a standstill to 60 mph in two seconds and reaches its top speed three seconds later.

Though just 1.6 miles and 92 seconds long, the eye-watering ride — passengers in the front car are given goggles to wear — literally takes your breath away with its twists, turns and dips.

No matter. Ryan, 22, said he loved the roller coaster. "It was so cool."

Ryan, who is in Abu Dhabi for a two-month training course, was among the first guests at the futuristic Ferrari World, which opened last week. Park operators are hoping to iron out any kinks before the deluge of 100,000 people expected this weekend during the four-day Abu Dhabi Grand Prix race. The invitation-only grand opening will be Nov. 30.

Abu Dhabi's racetrack, which debuted in 2009, was designed by the same German firm working on Austin's proposed F1 facility in southeastern Travis County. Austin promoters are also hoping to turn that site into a tourist destination with concerts and other attractions, but nothing as over-the-top as Ferrari World.

That project began rising out of the sand dunes on previously undeveloped Yas Island three years ago as part of oil-rich Abu Dhabi's plan to diversify its economy into tourism and hospitality. Abu Dhabi expects to spend as much as $40 billion of its petrodollars on Yas alone, building the racetrack, luxury hotels and attractions such as Ferrari World, the first to be opened by the Italian luxury sports car maker. The state-run investment company, Mubadala Development Co., sponsors the Italian F1 team.

By contrast, the State of Texas's commitment for Austin's Formula One facility is so far limited to $250 million over 10 years, to pay sanctioning fees.

At 926,000 square feet, Ferrari World calls itself the world's largest indoor theme park. Nearly all of it is air-conditioned — a key amenity in this coastal city-state where summer temperatures can hit 120 degrees with 60 percent humidity.

The park is subdivided by its 20 rides and attractions, many of which are located within self-contained "boxes" that can be closed off and refashioned without affecting the rest of the park. The entire park can hold up to 10,000 people at a time, a load factor operators say they can meet during Grand Prix weekend.

"We've had all the stress tests," says Claus Frimand, Ferrari World's general manager. "We've tested the toilets, whether the food and

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beverages outlets can handle the traffic. It's working."

The scene at Ferrari World was relatively quiet Sunday, the start of the workweek in many Gulf nations. A group of young children raced toward the Junior Grand Prix, home to a child-size race track and mini Ferrari F1 racers.

The children's area includes a kiddie driving school where instruction and "driver's licenses" are given on F430 GT Spiders and a junior training camp that takes the littlest riders through a waterless car wash and into a play area where cars and wheels are made of foam. All along the course, Ferrari World employees — no surly carnies here — cheer and clap the young riders along.

Standard tickets cost $61 for visitors 5 feet and taller, and $45 for those shorter. (Some rides are inaccessible for the shorter visitors.) Premium tickets, with access to an exclusive lounge, cost about $100 or $74 each, depending on a person's height.

"You can have tour groups that do a desert safari by day and this at night," Frimand said.

Though the aim is to attract all ages, and not just car enthusiasts, Ferrari fans will quickly see the park for what it is: a unique love letter to the 81-year-old iconic Italian company.

For instance, its carousel forsakes horses in favor of Ferrari prototypes designed by students from some of the world's top automotive academies. (The only equines to be found at this theme park are dozens of its "Prancing Horse" logos.)

"The Scuderia Challenge" features nearly a dozen simulators that let wanna-be F1 drivers release their inner-Michael Schumacher, and the V12 is a water ride that takes riders through the heart of a Ferrari engine, twisting through giant pistons, fuel injectors and cylinders.

Other attractions include films and exhibitions that illustrate Ferrari's history and culture, such as "Cinema Maranello," a 1920s-style movie theater that plays a film illustrating the life of the company's founder, Enzo Ferrari.

The "Galleria Ferrari" is the biggest collection of Ferraris outside of the company's headquarters in Maranello, Italy. The cars are on loan from various members of the Ferrari Club around the world, and the lineup will periodically change, as with exhibitions in art museums.

"They really get a kick out of having their cars here," said Jon Barber, a Ferrari World spokesman. "Rather than sitting in a dusty garage somewhere, they're out on display, being appreciated."

Even the park's restaurants are firmly yoked to Ferrari history. Ristorante Cavallino — which has on staff Michelin-starred chefs — is a copy of the first restaurant to open near the Ferrari factory in the 1940s that Enzo Ferrari was fond of dining at. Mamma Rosella's is named after a real proprietress whose eatery was a favorite of Ferrari racers, including Schumacher.

"It's one big prancing horse," said Frimand, the park's director. "It all works together."

Angela Shah, a former American-Statesman staffer, is based in Dubai.

Ferrari World Abu Dhabi

The nearly 926,000-square-foot enclosed area of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi can fit about seven football fields laid end-to-end.

The roof structure of Ferrari World is more than 2,296 feet in diameter, almost double the longest span of the Brooklyn Bridge, or about the length of seven Statues of Liberty.

Ferrari World needed 12,370 tons of steel to create its structure. The Eiffel Tower required 7,000 tons.

The gross footprint area of the plaza level is equivalent to about 15 football fields.

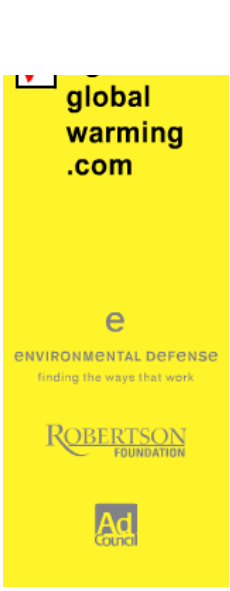
Passengers in the Formula Rossa, billed as the world's fastest roller coaster, would feel the same G force as driving a Formula 1 race car and braking at maximum speed.

Source: Ferrari World Abu Dhabi

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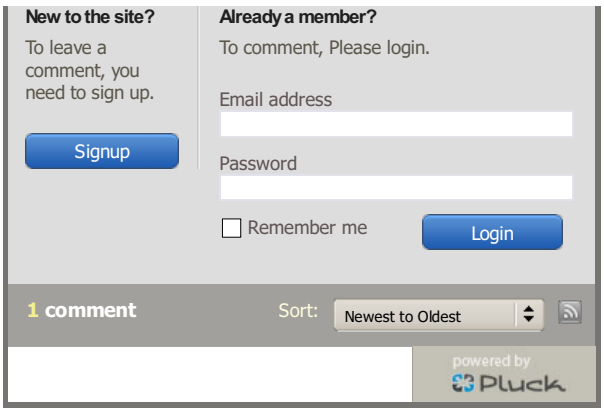
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