

speedy delivery

blooloo.com checks in with **andy keeling**, park manager for **ferrari world** abu dhabi as it nears completion

By Charles Read

Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, the world's first Ferrari theme park and largest attraction of its kind, will open its doors to the public on October 28, 2010. Blooloo's Charles Read talks to Park Manager Andy Keeling about the eagerly anticipated new theme park and his life in the Attractions Industry.

Share with us some of the key leadership roles that you've held in the amusement and leisure industry.

I have 24 happy years working in our industry. My first manager job was in 1994 as Entertainment Manager for Alton Towers. This was my first management role but more importantly it exposed me to the world of IPR (intellectual property rights) characters including Peter Rabbit, Barney etc. Alton Towers was the grounding which prepared me for a more demanding position in Germany at Warner Bros. Movie World, where I became Group Manager Entertainment in 1998; this time my helpers were Batman, the Police Academy Cadets and Bugs Bunny to mention but a few. Here in 2000 I made the cross over to operations becoming the Group Manager Operations & Entertainment.

In 2002 my career took another leap forward when I took the opportunity to participate in an indoor theme park as Director of Operations Space Center Bremen. This move was important because a) it was my first start-up project, and b) I was responsible for all operating departments and the day to day running of the park. Due to development problems with the master project, a giant mall complex, Space Center Bremen closed after 6 operating months despite achieving its targets. For the last two years I have had the pleasure to be involved in Ferrari World Abu Dhabi as the Park Manager, responsible for the future day to day operation of the world's largest indoor theme park and the first major theme park in the UAE.

Who in the industry has been an inspiration to you and why?

With every boss I have/had I have made myself a list of things a) I want to adopt from them and b) a list of things I don't want to adopt. "Take the best, leave the rest" is my approach. Of course I will only share some of the items from my "take the best" list:

Martin Barratt: Martin instilled in me my core values both as a person and leisure professional, as well as infecting me with my passion for our business. Thanks Martin.

Mark Garmyn: Mark showed me the importance of prioritising and getting the balance right; "don't spend your time stamping on the ants when the elephants are charging behind you!". Thanks Mark.

Joe Meck: Joe was not a manager you found behind his desk, he was in the thick of it with his team learning from personal experience what works and what does not. 60 pairs of shoes later I am still practising the old school approach of "management by walking around". Thanks Joe.

Claus Frimand: Claus can really see the big picture, he helps keep my efforts focused on the important stuff & picks me up when the going is tough. Empowerment: he preaches but more importantly lives it! Thanks Claus.

At what stage were you brought into the project and what was it in your



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All photos and illustrations courtesy of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi

background that has made you the man for the job?

I joined a very small team (I am employee #6) 2 years ago. We were brought in to fine tune the theme park's design and to maximise its efficiency and revenue potential. Why me?

- I have a good pedigree i.e. I have been exposed to and performed "best practice" at each of my parks.
- I value and practice attention to detail.
- Working with exacting and demanding partners is normal to me e.g. Tussauds, Waner Bros., etc. and now Ferrari.
- I want to share my enthusiasm and knowledge for our industry so coming to the UAE is a perfect opportunity to be part of the leisure industry development in this region.
- I never give up, somehow I will find a solution and make it work.
- A sense of humor.

What are the park's unique attractions?

Everything in the park is in some way unique, an obvious example being the (soon to be) world's fastest roller coaster, Formula Rossa. However, even our rides that use existing platforms like the Huss Shot & Drop Ride have a uniqueness e.g. where else but on this ride can you get into a replica GT racing seat? At the other end of the spectrum our young driver experiences use miniature F430 spider cars for the driving

school, and the racing school uses miniature GP Ferraris. (I wish I my first driving experience had been in a Ferrari!)

One of the theme park's key design strategies is that of "part or full interaction for Guests", be it participating in a live theatre show or driving your own Ferrari (a simulator based on the Ferrari pilot sims) on the world famous Yas Marina Circuit. In addition our goal is to bring world class theme park experiences to the UAE and MENA Region. To do this we have engaged top manufacturers to create entertaining rides, such as Oceaneering's dark ride featuring an onboard simulator, 3D AV experience and a few other surprises!

How do the rides reflect the Ferrari brand through the guest experience?

We have been inspired by the Ferrari Spirit to create exhilarating and thrilling moments, but it is the authenticity and depth of the experience that has most impressed me. Here are some examples:

- Only if you work in the factory or buy a new Ferrari do you get a factory tour; we offer this unique insight to all our Guests.
- We use real Ferrari parts in some attractions. The steering wheels, gear shifter, seats, pedals and even some of the safety harnesses in the simulators come from the Ferrari factory.
- A custom made large format film captures the passion and spirit of winning that began with Enzo Ferrari and still exists in the GT

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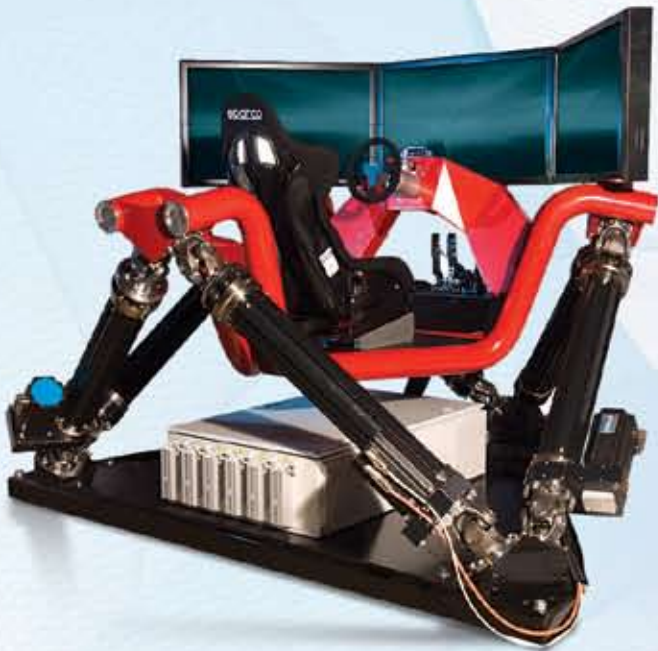
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and GP cars and drivers of today.

Ferrari World also pays homage to the beauty and uniqueness of Italy through its park wide theming and in particular the Bella Italia ride, featuring vintage California Spyder cars and our "flying over Italy" ride.

As a family park, will there be something for everyone? There are some high octane thrill rides but what is there for the older and younger members of the family?

Yes is the simple answer; self drive experiences, theatre experiences, live shows, a carousel, large themed play, a museum together with 8 additional world class family rides which have minimum height restrictions of 90-110cm (approx 3-4yrs).

We are the first theme park of this kind in the region and indeed the world. What I can say is that we have 20 world class experiences to offer. We also have numerous food and beverage outlets, including an authentic Italian Food Court where we make our own gelato, pasta and where key ingredients are imported direct from Italy, as well as a signature Fine

Dining Restaurant. We know that dining and shopping greatly influence leisure time here, and as we also have a fantastic Ferrari Store and "fun" shopping experience for kids it is impossible to guess a "dwell time" at this point.

How has your understanding of theme parks and of Ferrari evolved in the course of this project?

We all learn every day so this project has taught me and the rest of our team much; I think the greatest asset of our team is its understanding that all the lessons we have learnt and best practices we observe need to be carefully tailored to our cultural and physical environment. For instance in order to maintain operational readiness of the outdoor attractions when we have temperatures of over 40 degrees C (104 F) in the summer, we have developed special eye protection goggles with a leading safety wear company for riders of the coasters because there is more air borne dirt here due to the desert environment. On a cultural note we have developed an item of clothing to be worn over head scarves or gowns to safe guard riders of the thrill rides.

Working with Ferrari is inspiring. Their passion for their product and brand, their attention to detail and their significant contribution to motor vehicle history are an example to us all.

How are you building a team to fit this unique park and its particular needs?

Our core management team has been recruited from both the local leisure and hotel industry as well as seasoned veterans from Europe and US theme park industry. Having been involved in opening a Disney or similar park is not an unusual claim to fame here! To start with we have recruited a first class Team from the local and international talent pool who in turn will go on to share their knowledge and passion for our industry with entry level colleagues from all over the world. We will focus on operating safely, courteously supplying outstanding customer service and having fun!

