



Press Release

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Once upon a time...and still alive today: Fairground traditions at the Oktoberfest

Of the 151 fairground attractions at this year's Oktoberfest, about 90 percent have their roots in the 19th century. Today, many of these nostalgic rides are only ever operated at the Oktoberfest – not only by professional amusement operators, but also, in some cases, by private individuals. Together, they embody a living and vibrant fairground tradition.

Bumper cars

The first bumper cars to thrill funfair visitors in the US and the UK were called “Dodgems” and date back to 1921. Heinrich Haase, the first major German amusement park operator, brought the innovative festival attraction to this country in 1926. And before the end of the decade, Munich sideshow operator Willi Lindner had acquired the sleek speedsters from Haase and incorporated them in the Oktoberfest. The first bumper cars were imports from America and Britain, but German manufacturers began making their own versions in 1926/27. The German name “Autoskooter” emerged around 1939 and, after the Second World War, became the standard term for this attraction. In 1958, Heinz Distel introduced chips for bumper cars to Germany. His automated Dodgems paved the way to the continuation of this popular funfair ride.

Locations: Schaustellerstrasse 1, 17, 37; street 5, nor.11

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Big Bertha

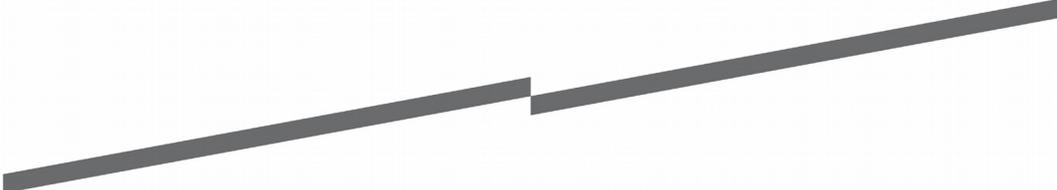
Ways to show off your strength have long been a popular attraction at public festivals. The earliest records go back to France in the period from around 1820 to 1840. The simplest devices encouraged a contestant to punch a cushion and then registered the impact on a pointer. More elaborate models involved ornately decorated impact hammers, as “high strikers” are officially known. But there are, of course, any number of variations on the theme, allowing people to test their strength by lifting, pulling and hoisting weights, dealing blows, squeezing hands and/or demonstrating the power of their lungs.

Boasting a 30-kg cannon, Big Bertha was named after a famous howitzer gun from the First World War whose size and strike force were well known. The cannon, a common sight at public festivals until the 1960s, worked on the principle of the Boer Cannon (circa 1900): An impact moves a heavy object up along a vertical track. If it reaches the top, a detonator sets off a loud bang.

Location: Oide Wiesn

Calypso

In 1958, Munich fairground amusement operators Anton Bausch and Eugen Distel, both known for their innovative approach, presented a new type of carousel for the first time at the Oktoberfest. The new design was built by Mack, a Waldkirch-based company. A popular dance from the Caribbean inspired not only the name but also the sophisticated design. A typical 1950s design, rapid acceleration and unpredictable changes of direction quickly made this ride a hot favorite with the public.



The Calypso installed at the Oide Wiesn dates back to 1962 and was knocked back into shape by Hubert Winheim for the Oktoberfest anniversary in 2010 – much to the elation of countless fans.

Location: Oide Wiesn

Journey to Paradise

The original roller coasters usually had eight gondolas in a row, each seating eight to ten people in a circle, and would go up and down over two “mountains” and two “valleys”. These rides were invented under the name “switchbacks”, probably in England in the 1880s. Around 1890, Hugo Haase became one of the first German manufacturers of roller coasters, with Bothmann and Stuhr also bringing similar products to market in the same year. The four-hilled roller coaster “Fahrt ins Paradies” (“Journey to Paradise”) was commissioned by ride operator Jacob Pfeiffer and built by the renowned Friedrich Heyn carousel factory in Neustadt/Orla, Thuringia, in 1939. In the 1950s, the ride was stored away and left in its original condition, until Toni and Jakob Schleifer bought it and painstakingly restored it in 2003. Thanks to the excellent original substance and the preservation of its original paintings and graceful figures, the outcome was a nostalgic gem that is a sheer pleasure to see and experience. In 2011, Freundeskreis Kirmes und Freizeitparks e.V. presented Toni Schleifer with its FKF award for exceptional services to the fairground and amusements industry.

Location: Oide Wiesn



Flea circus

In 1948, the flea circus run by the Mathes family made its first stop at the Oktoberfest. This venerable Nuremberg fairground amusement dynasty had been running its flea circus for about a century and a half. In 2010, Robert Birk, who had worked for the Mathes family for many years, took the circus over and has continued this time-honored tradition ever since. This particular flea circus employs only large and strong female fleas as its acrobats. To get in shape for their performance, the tiny creatures suck blood from the flea trainer's arm several times a day. Invigorated in this manner, they can operate a small merry-go-round, for example, moving many times their own weight.

Location: Street 1, no. 18

Ghost trains

The first ghost train in Germany stood at the Hamburg Dom fair in 1931. It must have been a tremendous success, because a year later, no fewer than four ghost trains were already frightening the life out of visitors to the Munich Oktoberfest.

Locations: Street 1, n

o. 7 (Spectral Palace), street C, no. 3 (Nostalgic Ghost Train), street E, no. 6, (Palace of Ghosts), Schaustellerstrasse 20 (Ride to Hell)

Witch's Swing

Also known as the illusionary swing or "revolving house", this is one of the oldest known funfair illusions and came to Germany from America in 1894. In this extraordinary example of sensory deception, the sense of balance is



disturbed as the room rotates around the axis of the swing. Very few Witch's Swings have survived at fairs to this day.

Location: Schaustellerstrasse 23

The maze

Records of itinerant mazes trace the tradition back to the year 1890. They are famous above all for such evocative names such as the “Curse of Pharaoh” and “Atlantis”. At the Oktoberfest, visitors can attempt to navigate their way through the largest itinerant two-story glass maze, by Edgar and René Rasch.

Location: Schaustellerstrasse 45

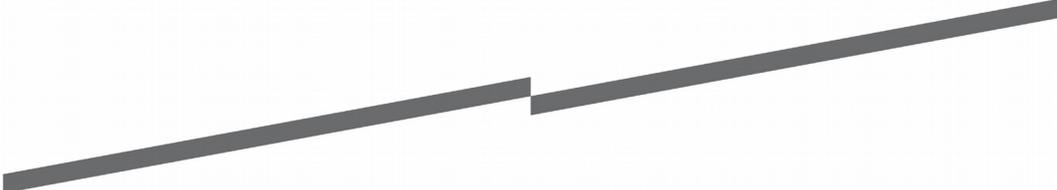
Funfair photography

Professional photographers have been plying their trade at public festivals since about 1880, and twelve photographers' stands lined the Oktoberfest in 1886. Today, visitors can have their pictures taken in a series of humorous motifs. Numerous shooting galleries also grant the option of (literally) “shooting” a photo. Snapshot photographers also roam around the beer tents, offering photos of visitors in the form of key ring fobs.

Locations: Street 1, no. 20 (humorous photographer), street 3, no. 25 (historical “Photo Palace”)

Chair o'plane

One of the very oldest fairground attractions at the Oktoberfest is Kalb's chair o'plane, created by Berlin-based Gundelwein and Fischer in 1919. The decorative elements of this high-flying carousel still bear the original paintwork by fairground painter Konrad Ochs. The Kalb family are now



operating the ride in the third and fourth generation, with Hans Martin and his son Florian at the helm. The first small high-flying carousels probably appeared around the turn of the 20th century and were inspired by aviation themes (Zeppelins and the Wright Brothers).

Locations: Schaustellerstrasse 24 (Wave Flight), Matthias-Pschorr-Strasse 20 (Wave O'Plane with Water Fountains) and Oide Wiesn (Chair O'Plane)

Krinoline

This type of merry-go-round and its forerunners date back to the end of the 19th century, with the name “Krinoline” (literally: a crinoline dress) appearing for the first time around 1900. In the early days, the swaying-platform construction was driven by hand. Not until 1909 did a Sachs electric motor bring power to this kind of ride. Together with swings, merry-go-rounds such as the Krinoline were the first funfair attractions to grace the Oktoberfest. And the one in Munich was still driven by muscle power when it first delighted Oktoberfest visitors in 1925. The Krinoline came from Berlin's Spree River to the Isar and was all the rage for the first few years. Then, when the novelty of roller coasters began to pose a serious competitive threat around 1937, Krinoline owner Michael Grossmann had another idea for the future: He modernized the ride by using planetary gearing and an oscillating tension-sprung mechanism to add electric power. The icing on the cake came when he hired a brass band to accompany the ride with musical entertainment. To the delight of all Krinoline fans, this tradition has been upheld by Grossmann's great-grandson, Matthias Niederländer, who took over the dearly loved merry-go-round from his father Theo in 2009.

Location: Street C, no. 7



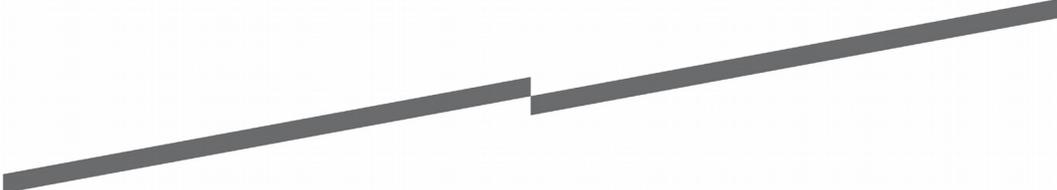
Munich puppet theater

The long and illustrious tradition of the Munich puppet theater began way back in 1858, when upright citizen and club actuary Josef Leonhard Schmid – who later attained to fame as “Papa Schmid” – asked the City of Munich to assess his plan to “set up a permanent puppet theater for children”. His intention was only to perform pieces “of a decorous, religious and decent nature” – unlike the coarse and bawdy material that, at the time, was commonplace at fairs and Punch & Judy shows. Even before the city fathers had made their decision, Papa Schmid approached Count Franz von Pocci, a local court official, artist and writer of books for young people, asking him to support the project. Pocci readily consented and thus became the theater's patron and sponsor right from the outset. It was also he who invented Larifari, the clown puppet who, from now on, would be the “landlord” of the Munich puppet theater. He went on to pen more than 45 pieces for the establishment. Puppeteer, puppet maker and voice Siegfried Böhmke is the modern-day director of the Munich puppet theater, which is headquartered in Blumenstrasse.

Location: Oide Wiesn

Theater of illusions

Gaby Reutlinger's stage program includes a number of classic tricks and illusions that itinerant variety shows presented a century ago: “The Disembodied Woman”, “The Headless Lady”, “The Floating Virgin” and “The Speaking Head” baffle and amaze modern audiences just as they did back then. This theater of illusions is probably the last of its kind in Europe.

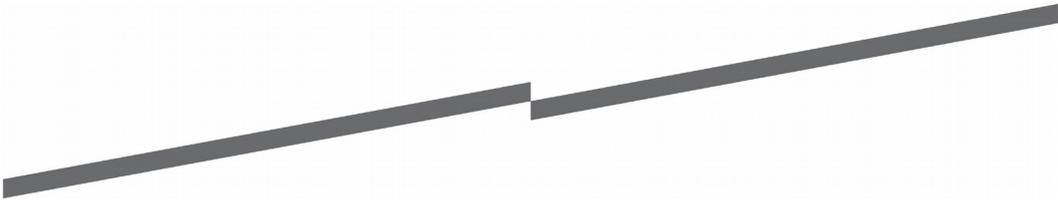
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Ever keen to seek out and revive historical illusions, Reutlinger is dedicated to keeping alive the tradition of this form of funfair entertainment. Variety theaters began springing up at public festivals in the second half of the 19th century. They entertained audiences with colorful programs involving dancers, singers, puppeteers, acrobats and conjurers performing “magic tricks” based on visual, chemical or mechanical effects. Since the 20th century, the rise of thrilling rides and the advent of film, radio and television has prompted a gradual decline in the popularity of this kind of show.

Location: Street E, no. 3

Ferris wheels

The forerunner of what we today know as the Ferris wheel was the “Russian Swing”, whose vertical circular motion was widespread in the 18th century, above all in Russia and the Middle East. (The earliest records can be traced back to Turkey in 1620.) Traveling Russian swings, also known as “Russian wheels” or “pleasure wheels” (in America) were first built as of 1880/90. They had a maximum height of twelve meters and were fitted with six to twelve gondolas. The first Ferris wheel of the kind we know today was built for the Chicago World Expo in 1893: a stationary steel construction standing 76 meters tall. Of the permanent replicas erected in London (1894), Vienna (1897) and Paris (1898), the one at the Prater in Vienna is the only one that has survived to this day. It was not until the 1960s that the modern traveling Ferris wheels made of steel were developed. In Germany, a small group of fairground families still operate these Ferris wheels, and competition is forcing them to grow taller and taller. Munich's Oktoberfest Ferris wheel belongs to the Willenborg family



and was built by Schwarzkopf in 1979. Its 50-meter height commands breathtaking views of the Theresienwiese and the entire city.

Location: Street 5, no. 2

Russian wheel

The small Ferris wheel known as the “Russian wheel” belongs to the Koppenhöfer family. An ornately crafted old-fashioned concert organ by the Bruder brothers from Waldkirch/Breisgau is its stand-out feature, and the wheel is a regular fixture at the Oktoberfest. In 1925, Josef Esterl commissioned the Gundelwein carousel factory in Wutha/Thuringia to build a “Russian swing” (see the entry on “Ferris wheels” above) and, in June of the same year, Esterl’s first ride was up and running. The original hand-carved facade with painted scenes was replaced by the present one in the 1950s. Equipped with twelve gondolas and standing 14 meters tall, it was believed to be the largest traveling Ferris wheel in southern Germany until around 1960. Herbert Koppenhöfer and his sister Edith Simon, Josef Esterl’s grandchildren, are now carrying on the family business in the third generation.

Location: Schaustellerstrasse 42

Old Bavarian clay pot shooting

The first shooting stands made their debut at fairs around 1840, followed three decades later by the first shooting galleries. Today, modern mobile shooting galleries can be seen at public festivals. The practice of shooting at clay objects can be traced back to the early 1880s. Tobacco pipes, animal figures, small round or star-shaped disks and clay pots were the “targets” that gallery operators at the time ordered almost exclusively from

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factories making clay goods and clay pipes in the Westerwald “Kannenbäckerland”. The concept of shooting at brightly colored artificial flowers and other objects, as we know it today, was only introduced in the 1930s. Back then, the targets were mounted on small clay pipes. Today, plastic holders are used for the same purpose. Be that as it may, the special feeling of shooting at clay is something visitors to the Oktoberfest can experience to this day. Mary Schröder (1899-1975) built a shooting gallery in the years following the Second World War, and her “Old Bavarian pot shooting gallery” was part of the line-up at the first post-war Oktoberfest in 1949. In 1965, the old gallery was modernized to comply with state-of-the-art TÜV safety standards, but without altering the basic structure. The appearance has remained the same to this day, as documented by old photographs of the gallery. Schröder's granddaughter, Ursula-Josy Steinker, is continuing the family tradition, having taken over the gallery from her mother Lilo Steinker-Schröder in 1994. Here, would-be marksmen can still shoot at original clay pipes and pots, just like in the olden days.

Location: Street 2, no. 2

Schichtl variety show

In 1871, Papa (Johann) Schichtl, proprietor of the “Original Theater of Magic Specialties”, touted his “special gala performance with hitherto unheard-of sensations” with the words “Raise the Curtain at Schichtl's”. The legendary Oktoberfest variety show entertained and amazed audiences with magic tricks, puppet plays, curiosities and much more besides. Indeed, the “Beheading of a Live Person by Guillotine” is still staged to the present day. Another highlight of the show is Elvira's

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traditional butterfly dance. Manfred Schauer, himself an authentic Munich character, takes pride in being addressed as “Mr. Schichtl” and is currently the compere of the variety show. His Oktoberfest career in the guise of Schichtl began in 1985, then under the guidance of former principal Franziska Eichersdörfer, with the slogan “show what you can do and hide what you can’t”. In 1986, he and a colleague began running the show together. Since 1999, he has done so single-handedly.

To this day, Manfred Schauer's masterful presentation of the Schichtl troupe in the parade that precedes every performance, backed by music from the Blues Brothers, is a sight to behold. Audiences are equally thrilled by his witty remarks and his humorous accounts of current events, ranging from the subtle to decidedly earthy.

Location: Schaustellerstrasse 48

Swingboat

The two-person swingboat as we know it today first appeared around 1890. Evidence of forerunners to this funfair attraction can already be found in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, however – at the Prater in Vienna, for example. Today, swingboats are the only funfair attraction where the riders themselves generate the motion; and it is surely the apply of playing an active part that accounts for the unabated popularity of this distinctly nostalgic ride. More advanced variations on the same theme include the roll-over and communal swings that cropped up in the 1930s, a development that culminated in the “Flying Dutchman” of the early 1980s.

Location: Street 4, no. 4 (Looping The Loop), Matthias-Pschorr-Strasse 14 (Roll-Over Swing) and Oide Wiesn



“Steilwand” stunt riders

“Steilwand” (or “steep face”) stunt riders put in their first ever performance in Germany at the 1930 Oktoberfest. A year later, visitors to the festival witnessed what, at the time, ranked as an extremely spectacular performance: the “American wall of death car drive at 60 to 100 km/h on a vertical wall”. Among the daredevils was a young stunt rider who would go on to write Oktoberfest history: Käthe Mathieu (1910-1990). Under her stage name of “Steilwand-Kitty” (“Steep-Face Kitty”), Mathieu performed as the most reckless driver in Pitt Löffelhardt’s show and achieved huge success in this dangerous profession. To this day, “Pitt’s Wall of Death” recalls the stage on which this legendary stunt rider thrilled audiences year after year. Many famous “motorellos”, as steep-face stunt riders call themselves, have appeared at the Oktoberfest over the years. In recent decades, “Kamikaze Pitt” Legner’s “Engine Inferno” and the “Motodrome” showcased by Hugo Dabbert and Donald Ganslmeier have met with stunning acclaim in this death-defying cauldron.

Locations: Schaustellerstrasse 13 (Pitt’s original Wall of Death) and Oide Wiesn (the original Motodrome)

Devil's Wheel

Also known as the “Typhoon” or “Pleasure Wheel”, this funfair amusement premiered around 1910. It is a test of skill for the passengers – and a whole lot of fun for the gleeful onlookers. The success of a devil’s wheel stands or falls with the “barker”, who animates the audience and comments on the participants. Karl Valentin and Liesl Karlstadt rank among the many visitors who have had a whale of a time at Feldl’s “Devil’s Wheel”, which nowadays is only ever set up at the Oktoberfest.

Location: Schaustellerstrasse 3



Toboggan

Slides have been around since the early 19th century. In 1906, Anton Bausch from Baden, southern Germany, built what was probably the first German toboggan, following the Parisian example of what was originally an American tower slide. The word “toboggan” comes from the language of the Canadian Algonquin Indians and refers to a light snow sledge. At the 1908 Oktoberfest, three of these toboggans were installed – and required an abundant staff presence! Spectators and sliders alike loved it. The ascent to the top of the tower by conveyor belt was not without its comical aspects, and the gentle slide down was great fun. In that respect, nothing has changed at the Oktoberfest to this day, and this attraction is unique in the whole of Germany. In view of transport costs, this traditional funfair amusement, owned and operated by Astrid and Claus Konrad, is no longer profitable as an itinerant ride.

Location: Matthias-Pschorr-Strasse 57

Ball-toss stands

In 1818, Munich landlord Anton Gruber set up a “pigeon disk” for the amusement of visitors to the Oktoberfest. This was a stationary ball-throwing stand that was also referred to as “pigeon throwing”, as records from Vienna's Prater in the early 19th century attest. Pigeon throwing remained a popular amusement at public festivals until the 1950s. Lists of amusements preserved from the 1880s include stands for the throwing of plates, knives, rings and balls. As early as 1910, records mention the ball-throwing stand “Knock the Top Hat Down”, which has been operated by the Gaukler-Michel family since 1957. No longer roadworthy, this historical ball-toss stand is set up every year for the Oktoberfest with the greatest of



care. One set of the funny wooden heads wearing the black top hats that had to be knocked off with a leather ball is now exhibited at a collection of fairground attractions in the Münchner Stadtmuseum. Long-time customers relate that, as children, they earned a bit of pocket money by putting the hats back on the wooden heads. To this day, young visitors to the Oktoberfest love to try their hand at this ball-toss stand. Operated by Annemarie Neumeier and her family, this is yet another unique stand that contributes to the incomparable blend that is the Oktoberfest.

Location: Oide Wiesn

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