

The Ferris Wheel: Round and Round [B1]

Questa attrazione iconica, progettata per l'Esposizione Universale di Chicago del 1893 e che prende il nome dal suo creatore, voleva essere la risposta americana alla Torre Eiffel.

The highlight of **countless** fairs, theme parks or **riverbanks** today, **Ferris wheels** have been **relentlessly** turning for more than a century now. They are the **late-19th century** product of a group of engineers, who applied their **ingenuity** and courage to the design of an enormous, technologically-innovative structure, which would **make headlines** worldwide. The Ferris wheel was named after the man who constructed one of the first for Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

ENGINEERING CHALLENGE

In 1890, the architect Daniel Burnham received the important **commission** of managing the exposition in Chicago, organised to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival on the American continent. Burnham **challenged** engineers to create something that would rival the Eiffel Tower, which had amazed the world in the 1889 French Exposition in Paris. Many responded with **sketches** of similar towers, but this wasn't what Burnham was looking for: he asked them **to come up with** "something novel, original, **daring** and unique."

WHAT GOES AROUND

George Washington Ferris Jr., a thirty-three-year-old engineer from Pittsburgh, presented his idea: a structure that was similar to the Eiffel Tower in scale, but that could slowly rotate and even carry passengers, who could enjoy the view from different levels. This idea was treated with scepticism: Burnham doubted the structure was safe on the scale that Ferris suggested. Many safety tests on much smaller models were done to convince him that the project was viable. Finally, in December 1892, Ferris was given

permission to build the wheel. He did so in just four months. Seventy-five metres high, it had thirty-six **cars** and was capable of carrying a total of sixty passengers. It was the tallest structure in Chicago at the time. But who would ride on it?

AMERICAN DREAM

Amazingly, Americans did. Over the nineteen weeks following its launch, more than 1.4 million people took a ride on the wheel, paying a 50-cent **fee** each. But **despite** its popularity, after the fair ended, Ferris struggled to attract passengers. Having travelled on it once, there was now nothing new to view. Ferris died bankrupt in 1896 and in 1906 the wheel was disassembled, dynamited and turned to **scrap**. But Ferris's wheel lived on: with the expanding network of roads and railways, the **leisure** and tourism industry **took off**. Countless **Ferris wheels popped up**, not just in **funfairs** and festivals, but on **boardwalks** and city **riverbanks** across the world. Today, Ferris' wheel offers an easy way to see the sights from far above the crowds and from the comfort of a car.

Glossary

- **scrap** = rottami
- **funfairs** = fiere
- **make headlines** = fare notizia
- **to come up with** = inventare, ideare
- **fee** = tariffa
- **sketches** = schizzi
- **despite** = nonostante
- **took off** = decollare
- **popped up** = spuntare
- **boardwalks** = passeggiate sul lungomare
- **countless** = innumerevoli
- **riverbanks** = sponde
- **ingenuity** = ingegno
- **challenged** = sfidare
- **daring** = audace
- **leisure** = tempo libero
- **relentlessly** = incessantemente
- **late-19th century** = fine del XIX secolo
- **commission** = incarico
- **Ferris wheels** = ruote panoramiche
- **cars** = cabine