

= Falcon 's Fury =

Falcon 's Fury is a free @-@ standing Sky Jump drop tower attraction at the Busch Gardens Tampa amusement park in Tampa , Florida , United States . Manufactured by Intaride (a subsidiary of Intamin) , the ride reaches a maximum height of 335 feet (102 m) making it North America 's tallest free @-@ standing drop tower . Riders experience about five seconds of free fall , reaching a speed of 60 miles per hour (100 km / h) . The ride 's name was chosen to invoke a falcon 's ability to dive steeply at high speed to capture prey .

The project was originally planned to begin in 2012 with the ride opening in 2013 , but it was delayed by one year . Construction began in 2013 with a scheduled opening date of May 1 , 2014 ; however , the opening was delayed due to mechanical and technical issues . Following a preview opening to park employees in early August and a soft opening on August 16 , 2014 , Falcon 's Fury officially opened to the public on September 2 , 2014 . Public response to the ride has been positive , praising the height of the tower and the drop experience .

= = History = =

Planning for Falcon 's Fury began around the time the park completed its Cheetah Hunt ride in 2011 . Ground tests in the Timbuktu area (now known as Pantopia) revealed " interesting soil conditions " , with steel beams and concrete required to reinforce the site .

Rumors that Busch Gardens Tampa might replace its Sandstorm ride with a 200 @-@ foot (61 m) drop tower surfaced in the fall of 2011 when its sister park , Busch Gardens Williamsburg , opened Mäch Tower that August . Construction surveying was observed in January 2012 . Two months later plans were filed with the city to build a drop tower , possibly for the 2013 season . Speculation about the new attraction 's name began when SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment , owners of Busch Gardens Tampa , filed trademark applications for " Desert Dive " and " Falcon 's Fury " on May 2 and July 11 , 2012 , respectively , and bought the DesertDive.com domain name . When permits for the new ride differed from those for Mäch Tower in November 2012 , rumors began that the seats would tilt forward . Due to the height of the attraction , approval from the Federal Aviation Administration was required . According to the FAA and the city of Tampa , the tower was supposed to be built in December 2012 and open to the public in 2013 . For unknown reasons the project was delayed , with its construction pushed back to the second half of 2013 .

On May 31 , 2013 , it was announced that Sandstorm would close on June 2 to make room for a new attraction . About two weeks later , on June 11 , Busch Gardens Tampa announced plans for Falcon 's Fury and construction began that month . During the fourth quarter of 2013 , the park drove steel piles for the ride 's foundation nightly for about a month .

On September 20 , the tower for Falcon 's Fury was shipped from Spain in nine sections , arriving at the park near the end of October ; the ride 's smaller parts had been delivered earlier from several European countries . Installation of one of the nine tower pieces was planned for every other night , with the last piece in place by New Year 's Eve . Construction was done by the Adena Corporation , and on November 18 the first piece was installed . The ride 's second piece was installed on December 2 , and two more were installed by December 6 . The fifth section was placed by December 21 , and the sixth was erected by New Year 's Day . The seventh tower piece was installed by January 3 , 2014 , and the eighth by January 5 , reaching a height of about 300 feet (91 m) , and Falcon 's Fury 's gondola was seen at the park on January 12 . The ride 's counterweight was installed on January 22 , and the tower was capped during the weekend of February 1 . Work on the ride 's electrical components then began . Assembly of the gondola was completed by the end of March . Testing was originally scheduled to begin in February , but due to construction delays the first drop tests were not made until April 15 . Tower painting began in June , with its sunset motif estimated to take 60 hours over a three @-@ week period .

At the end of February , Busch Gardens Tampa announced that Falcon 's Fury would open on May 1 , and on April 3 the park began a sweepstakes contest for its " Falcon 's Fury First @-@ to @-@ Ride Party " . A second , similar contest began on April 11 , with fifty winners from each contest

being among the first riders . A week later , the park announced that the ride 's opening would be delayed , and several media events scheduled for April and May (including the First @-@ to @-@ Ride party) were cancelled . It was later disclosed that the delay was due to manufacturing and technical issues with the cables which pull the gondola up the tower . During the week of August 10 , Falcon 's Fury opened for park employees . On August 16 the ride soft @-@ opened to the public , and two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half weeks later Falcon 's Fury officially opened .

= = Ride experience = =

Falcon 's Fury has two shaded queue lines : a standby line which can hold guests for about 45 minutes , and a Quick Queue for guests with passes that allow them to bypass the standby line . Although the Quick Queue system will not initially be used for the ride , it may be added later . Riders must be between 54 inches (137 cm) and 77 inches (196 cm) .

When the riders are seated a catch car connects to the gondola and raises it to the top of the tower , which takes about one minute . Although the tower is 335 feet (102 m) high , the gondola stops 25 feet (7 @.@ 6 m) lower . When it reaches the maximum height the seats tilt forward , with a computer @-@ randomized wait time from one to five seconds . When the wait time ends , the gondola is released from the catch car into a five @-@ second free fall reaching a maximum speed of 60 miles per hour (97 km / h) . As the gondola passes through the pre @-@ braking section , the seats rotate back into a vertical position . After the pre @-@ brake the gondola enters the main magnetic @-@ brake run , where riders experience approximately 3 @.@ 5 g (34 m / s²) of deceleration as the gondola slows . When it comes to a full stop at the base of the tower , the riders disembark . One cycle of the ride lasts about one and a half minutes . Busch Gardens Tampa placed an Easter egg in the form of a painted Falcon 's Fury logo on top of one of its buildings , which can be seen only from a certain side of the gondola .

= = Characteristics = =

The tower and gondola were manufactured by Intaride , a subsidiary of Intamin . The ride covers an area of about 3 @,@ 600 square feet (330 m²) .

= = = Tower = = =

The Falcon 's Fury tower is 335 feet (102 m) tall , the tallest free @-@ standing drop tower in North America , and can bend 3 feet (0 @.@ 9 m) in any direction from the top to withstand hurricane @-@ force winds . The tower is composed of nine sections , including the machine house . Each piece of the tower weighs up to 105 tonnes (103 long tons ; 116 short tons) , and the entire structure weighs about 519 tonnes (511 long tons ; 572 short tons) . The 77 tonnes (76 long tons ; 85 short tons) machine house at the top contains four DC motors used to lift the gondola . Inside the tower is a 68 tonnes (67 long tons ; 75 short tons) counterweight , composed of hundreds of lead weights , to help raise the gondola . The tower 's foundation is made up of 105 steel piles , varying in depth from 75 feet (23 m) to 205 feet (62 m) . A 138 @-@ foot (42 m) eddy current brake system on the tower slows the gondola after its free fall . The structure is painted yellow , aqua and two shades of red .

= = = Gondola = = =

The ride 's single gondola has 32 seats , grouped octagonally around the tower . Each of the eight sides seats four riders , and each seat has an over @-@ the @-@ shoulder restraint and seat belt . Falcon 's Fury can theoretically accommodate 800 riders per hour . Carbon @-@ fiber wings buttress each end of a group of seats , protecting outside riders ' arms and legs during the drop . The gondola reaches a height of 310 feet (94 m) , 25 feet (7 @.@ 6 m) below the top of the tower . When it reaches its maximum height the seats tilt 90 degrees forward , with the riders facing the

ground (the first use of this feature on a drop tower) .

= = Records = =

When Falcon 's Fury opened it became North America 's tallest free @-@ standing drop tower . Although taller drop towers exist on the continent ? such as Lex Luthor : Drop of Doom at Six Flags Magic Mountain and Zumanjaro : Drop of Doom at Six Flags Great Adventure , which reach drop heights of 400 feet (120 m) and 415 feet (126 m) respectively ? those attractions were added to existing structures . Despite its height , the ride 's maximum speed of 60 miles per hour (97 km / h) does not set a speed record . Other drop towers ? such as Drop Tower at Kings Dominion , which reaches 72 miles per hour (116 km / h) ? are faster . However , Falcon 's Fury is the world 's first drop tower whose seats tilt 90 degrees . Although tilting seats were first used by Intamin in 2001 on Acrophobia at Six Flags Over Georgia , their tilt angle is smaller .

= = Reception = =

The initial reception after the ride 's announcement was positive . According to Lance Hart , a theme park enthusiast from Screamscape , " Instead of selling your picture ... they should sell baby wipes and clean underwear at the exit " and the ride could be the most frightening drop tower in the world . Robb Alvey of Theme Park Review called the ride the world 's best drop tower , later ranking it one of the top 14 new attractions for 2014 ; Dave Parfitt and Arthur Levine of USA Today ranked Falcon 's Fury in their top ten . Brady MacDonald of the Los Angeles Times originally ranked Falcon 's Fury his seventh @-@ most @-@ anticipated ride for 2014 ; on an updated list , he ranked it 17th .

For safety reasons , construction on Falcon 's Fury was done primarily at night . Residents near the park complained about noise from the pile driver during the laying of the foundation , and complaints about the ride 's operating noise continued into August 2014 .

According to the park and Twitter posts selected by news media , public response during the soft opening was positive ; Total Orlando gave the ride five stars for teenagers and four stars for adults . On Coaster101.com " Ashley " said that although the restraints were tight , they were comfortable and not as tight as those on other rides , adding : " The drop on Falcon 's Fury is different from any ride I have ever ridden . The best way I can describe it is that instead of leaving your stomach at the top of the tower , you take it with you to the bottom . " According to Florida Trip Guides , the ride was a good addition to the park 's attraction lineup : " Falcon 's Fury is not for the faint of heart . I have ridden dozens of drop towers but this one is different . Something about facing straight down and falling really makes you nervous . " Robert Niles of Theme Park Insider said that Falcon 's Fury and other recent attractions were nearing the extreme of human tolerance ; as a result , " You 're getting to the point where instead of making an attraction more popular by having it achieve some type of record , you 're actually limiting the audience for that . " Randi Nissenbaum of Bay News 9 called the view from the top of the tower incredible , and although she was nervous at first she wanted to ride again . Sue Carlton of the Tampa Bay Times said , " it was terrifying and thrilling and I held on as hard as I could and yelled and closed my eyes and afterward stepped off rubber @-@ kneed and exhilarated . "

For the 2014 season , Busch Gardens Tampa expected attendance to increase by three to eight percent . However (as predicted in June 2014 by IBISWorld Research) , combined attendance for the second quarter of the year increased by about 0 @.@ 3 percent for SeaWorld Orlando , SeaWorld San Diego , SeaWorld San Antonio , Busch Gardens Williamsburg and Busch Gardens Tampa . Compared to the same period in 2013 , combined attendance for the first half of the year dropped by just over four percent . Busch Gardens Tampa blamed the lack of its anticipated attendance increase partially on the Falcon 's Fury delays .