

ASTRONAUT FIRST TO TEST NEW OUT OF THIS WORLD RIDE EXPERIENCE

Astronaut Chris Hadfield is the first to test Galactica, Alton Towers Resort's new world first rollercoaster that takes passengers into space

Galactica is the world's first rollercoaster fully dedicated to virtual reality
Canadian astronaut, Chris Hadfield, tested the ride before its official opening on 24 March

Hadfield, who commanded the International Space Station and famously sang 'Space Oddity', said his experience was 'incredible'

Astronaut Chris Hadfield has today become the first person to travel to space from Staffordshire on Alton Towers Resort's new world first rollercoaster Galactica, which is fully dedicated to virtual reality.

The first Canadian to walk in space became the first person to test the virtual reality on a flying rollercoaster, as he boarded Galactica for the first time.

Hadfield, who gained notoriety for his rendition of Space Oddity by David Bowie which was shot in space and subsequently went viral, called the experience 'incredible' and 'breath-taking'.

Galactica, the world's first rollercoaster entirely dedicated to virtual reality, will open to the public on Thursday 24th March. The cutting-edge technology is set to be a game-changer for rollercoasters.

Each rider wears a specialist VR headset where an on-board artificial intelligence guide transports them from the launch pad up into space. The visuals have been perfectly synchronised to each and every turn in the track to recreate the sensation of soaring through space. Visitors will ride in a prone position along the 840-metre long (2,760 ft) track, to recreate the feeling of flying.

Speaking after his first experience on Galactica, Chris Hadfield said "This is one of the best rides I've ever been on and I've been on some rides! I've been lucky enough to serve on three space flights, including five months on the International Space Station, but this is as close as I've come to a virtual trip across the universe."

"As Galactica launches you through its opening space portal, the view looking down over the Earth is simply incredible. Having seen this for real, it certainly makes the exhilaration of space travel possible for people that would never otherwise get to see such amazing sights. The ride is visually and sensually evocative and I'm sure it will capture the imagination of all those that board it."

Gill Riley, Marketing Director at Alton Towers Resort said: "It's been an honour to welcome Chris on board Galactica today and we hope the thousands of passengers set to experience the ride this year will have the same reaction that he did. There is nowhere else in the world that people can experience the sensation of flying through space as you physically soar through the air - which is what makes Galactica such a game-changer.

"The new ride experience combines the physical exertion and adrenaline rush of Alton Towers Resort's iconic flying rollercoaster, with the emotive experience of travelling through space. Galactica is a completely unique rollercoaster experience and we can't wait to open it to the public in just over a weeks' time."

The launch of Galactica forms part of an innovative year for the Resort which will also launch its Rollercoaster Restaurant in May.

For more information visit www.altontowers.com or call 0871 222 1100

GALACTICA IN NUMBERS

- * Total G-force: 3.5 Gs
- * Track length: 840 metres
- * Height of drop: 20 metres
- * Ride duration: 189 seconds
- * Maximum speed: 75km per hour
- * Capacity per car: 28 passengers
- * Capacity per hour: 1500 passengers

CHRIS HADFIELD: FACT BOX

- * First Canadian to walk in space
 - * Three space flights
- * Over 5 months on board the International Space Station
 - * Commander of the International Space Station
- * Gained over 30 million views of his rendition of 'Space Oddity':
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaOC9danxNo>
- * Spent over 14 hours outside on spacewalks (the equivalent of travelling 10 times around the world)
- * The first person to travel on board Alton Tower Resort's new ride, Galactica

ENDS

Notes to editors:

For more information, please contact Mischief PR on 0203 128 6600 or
altontowers@mischiefpr.com

ABOUT MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS

MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS plc is the leading name in location-based, family entertainment. Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin now operates 111 attractions, 12 hotels/4 holiday villages in 23 countries and across 4 continents. The company aims to deliver memorable and rewarding experiences to its almost 63 million visitors worldwide, through its iconic global and local brands, and the commitment and passion of its managers and c26,000 employees (peak season).

Among Merlin's attractions are - SEA LIFE, Madame Tussauds, LEGOLAND, DreamWorks Tours SHREK's Adventure, The London Eye, Dungeons, Gardaland, LEGOLAND Discovery Centres, Alton Towers Resort, Warwick Castle, THORPE PARK Resort, Blackpool Tower, Heide Park Resort, Sydney Tower Eye and SKYWALK. All brands which are distinctive, challenging and innovative – and which have great potential for growth in the future.

Visit www.merlinentertainments.biz for more information.