

Jim Rossman: Are you ready to ride? Tech expert takes on Six Flags' new VR coaster

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So are you a roller coaster person or not?

I go back and forth.

Since my youth, I've loved roller coasters and ride them when I have the chance, but as I've grown older (and wider), I see these new coasters on TV and say, "No, thanks."

I have to admit when I saw the news a year ago that Six Flags Over Texas and Samsung were teaming up to bring a new virtual reality [roller coaster](#) experience, I wasn't exactly rushing to be the first in line. In fact, I was pretty sure I wouldn't like it.

I was wrong.

After last year, I'd pretty much forgotten about the VR roller coaster, but recently I got an email announcing a new VR experience called Galactic Attack at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington.

Like last year, the ride takes place on the Shockwave, an older coaster with the double-loop that's closest to I-30.

This year the experience is mixed reality. Riders wear a Samsung Gear VR powered by Oculus headset (equipped with a Galaxy S7) during the ride.

When you start out, the goggles are showing you a live view out of the phone's camera along with some onscreen graphics.

You can see your surroundings and your seatmate, but when the coaster gets to the top of the hill, your vision starts to ripple and you appear to be entering a wormhole. The view of your surroundings disappears and you're immersed into [virtual reality](#) as the pilot of a spaceship.

When you start down the first drop, it's obvious you are in a space battle. You don't get to steer the fighter, but you can control a laser that aims as you move your head around.

There is an underlying game going on, and you get to see your point total when you finish, but the points are just for fun.

The game has three different outcomes. During the ride you can turn your head to fly through one of three drone bays that offer a different ending.

I also found out there's a hidden fourth ending that can only be accessed by the best of the best pilots.

I guess if you ride often enough, you'll figure it out.

The ride is totally immersive. The action in the headset matches perfectly with the movement of the roller coaster. Since riding in a roller coaster is one of the closest experiences we have to flying in a space fighter, you can really forget where you are.

I was impressed with how fluid the experience was—especially knowing that 26 people can be looking in 26 different directions at the same time. The 360-degree view in all those headsets is being driven wirelessly from a single computer on a moving roller coaster.

I was also impressed with the presentation of the ride and the technology involved.

The headsets don't take a whole lot of time to put on, but getting 26 people fitted with VR goggles will take a bit of extra time as people are getting loaded into the cars. There are no wires attached. There is a safety lanyard you put around your neck, and a chinstrap you cinch up under your chin. A knob on the headband is used to loosen or tighten the fit.

I appreciated the live view at the beginning so I wasn't just thrust into darkness. It takes a little time to get your bearings.

That said, once the action starts, it's a little strange (OK, a lot strange) to be dropped into a video game where your whole body is being slammed from side to side, climbing and dropping with twists and turns.

I said earlier that I loved roller coasters, and I do, but a big part of my enjoyment is from knowing what's about to happen during the ride.

I like knowing when to brace myself for a sharp turn or a sudden drop. I can get my body ready for the pounding it's about to take.

With the Galactic Attack Virtual Reality Coaster, the twists and turns and drops take you by surprise, which made for a bit rougher ride for me.

I loved the ride, and I'll likely ride it again if I'm at Six Flags this season.

I felt good before I got on, and I was a little worried about how I'd feel after riding, as I tend to get dizzy.

It turns out one ride was enough for me, at least for now.

I didn't get that strange off-kilter feeling, which was great. I also marveled at the experience for the next half hour or so.

My ride was filmed with both a view of me and the view I saw through my goggles, which helps me relive it until I get to return.

This is a great second life for the Shockwave. I have to admit, on some of my last visits to Six Flags, I kind of overlooked it, as there are plenty of newer and more exciting coasters to ride, but with the addition of VR, there's a great reason to put the Galactic Attack Virtual Reality Coaster first on your ride list.

The Galactic Attack will debut to the public March 9 and run through Memorial Day weekend. The VR experience is included with park admission.

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