

Callum reports “You all came together as one and made your choice... the winning article for this entry of *Newshounds* is...”

The history of Sonic the Hedgehog at Alton Towers!

Welcome back to the fourth entry of my *Newshounds* escapades! Time sure does fly by nowadays. Anyways, according to the voting poll, you selected this article to be chosen for this entry with the *Jigglypuff 101 for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* following extremely close behind (a possible future entry?) But the *Switch for Milk* didn't even come close (seems surprising?!). However without further ado, let's delve back into the theme park industry once more and take a look at two of the most ambitious partnerships Sega and Alton Towers ever took part in!

(Keep in mind that this will be a long article, so it is best to read this in separate parts.)

The 90's

The year is 1994... The Sony Playstation was set for release, VHS is king, and two brand new rides were opening at Alton Towers: *Oblivion* (often considered one of the best rollercoasters in the UK)...



and a new water ride to replace the former *Around the World in 80 Days* ride known as *Toyland Tours*...



This attraction would take guests around a massive toy factory, showcasing many of the world's most famous classic and modern toys. Along with that, there were many jokes and 'sight gags' along the way, featuring an energetic soundtrack. However, there was one room in particular that soon became one of the most memorable parts of the ride. That's right, there was an entire section of the ride dedicated to Sonic and the Sega Mega Drive as a whole!



Within this room, there was a massive control panel with a *Sonic Statue* that would operate the control stick whilst moving his head from side to side and tap his foot along with the music. Feel free to listen to it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YmHLYV2JY>

Anyways, there were also huge TVs that would show random segments of gameplay from *Sonic 3*, *Sonic CD*, and *Sonic Spinball* (not to be confused with the rollercoaster of the same name later in this article.) There were also rings that would light up at random points. Although this was an incredible set piece, unfortunately *Toyland Tours* closed down in 2005 to make way for a new water ride using the existing boat system. As some of you may know, *Toyland Tours* was rebranded and refurbished into *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: The Ride* in early 2005 but there were only a few remains of *Toyland Tours* leftovers and the fate of the *Sonic Statue* and the control panel remain unknown, although it's extremely unlikely that they are still in good condition. Also *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: The Ride* also closed down in 2016 and remained 'SBNO' (standing but not operating) until recently to make way for the *Alton Towers Dungeon*. After the closing of *Toyland Tours*, it seemed extremely unlikely for Alton Towers and Sega to ever partner up with each other again... or was it?

Online Speculations

During the 2009 season on the Alton Towers fan site *Towers Times* there were rumours that the rollercoaster *Spinball Whizzer* was going to be re-themed for the 2010 season.



Then later on, guests supposedly claimed they had overheard staff talking about *Spinball Whizzer* being re-themed to *Sonic Spinball*. A short while later, an account was created on the *Towers Times* website under the name of *SonicTheHedgehog* (yeah, that was the actual name with no spaces) and began to post almost troll-like posts that hinted towards this re-theme...

The correct speculations

Then at last after many months of rumours and speculation, it was at last finally announced that Sega and Alton Towers had partnered up once again to re-theme *Spinball Whizzer* for the 2010 season!



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The sponsorship will encompass the launch of a Sonic The Hedgehog branded rollercoaster and Sonic The Hedgehog themed room at the Alton Towers Hotel. The Sonic hotel room allows guests to live, sleep and even play the latest games from the Sonic franchise in a room dedicated to the famous Sonic videogame universe. The rollercoaster, entitled **Sonic Spinball**, and the Sonic hotel room will open to the public on 13th February 2010.

"We are delighted to be working with Merlin Entertainments and Alton Towers Resort" commented Amanda Farr, SEGA Europe UK Marketing Director. "Partnering Sonic with one of the UK's most popular destinations for a family day out is a fantastic opportunity for people to engage, and have fun, with the Sonic brand. I'll certainly be there at the launch of the rollercoaster to have my turn!"

However, the initial deal only included the re-theming of *Spinball Whizzer* and not a hotel room, but it only took a short while to also announce that a hotel room was being made as well...

The Invite Event



At last, for the 2010 season, *Sonic Spinball* had arrived at Alton Towers and many guests who ran Sonic and Sega fan sites were invited to ride *Sonic Spinball* and check out the hotel room. Oh and speaking of the hotel room, let's take a tour around that!

The Hotel Room



This hotel room was obviously themed after Sonic as a whole with a bunk bed, a large bed with a special *Sonic Spinball* themed duvet, a PS3, an Xbox 360, and a Nintendo Wii with a HD TV (with many different Sonic games installed on them), chaos emerald lamps and much more. There was also a drawer underneath the TV which was locked and you had to solve a puzzle around the room to open it (but some guests could just open it if you pulled hard enough). Inside the drawer, guests would find chocolate coins and fast passes (basically tickets that allow you to 'jump the queue') to *Sonic Spinball*. However, within the first two weeks, guests could not only find chocolate coins and fast passes, but they could also get hold of some exclusive *Sonic Spinball* T-Shirts with the tagline 'I felt it first!' Also, guests would receive a Sega laptop bag to use while in the resort but had to be returned after their stay at Alton Towers.

Fun fact: The wallpaper that surrounded the room was based on Sonic 4 Episode 1, which was yet to be announced at the time. So some fans actually correctly predicted this was from an unannounced upcoming Sonic title!

The Opening

Then on February 13th 2010, *Sonic Spinball* finally opened to the public and many fans got their first ride on this re-theme of *Spinball Whizzer*. Then nothing much happened until two years later...

Custom Merchandise

Around two years later, Alton Towers released a medal themed around *Sonic Spinball* which guests could purchase.



Now if you've ever been to Alton Towers, you might've seen these medals or even have one yourself that claims you've ridden a thrilling ride. However, these were only ever stocked once and were never seen again after that. Although there were some *Sonic Spinball* themed mugs as well.



Expansion and extension

Around that time, a new building was built known as *Spinball Noodles*...



This area would serve soft drinks, pot noodles, chicken and more. But the deal was coming to an end, 2014 was just on the horizon and *Sonic Spinball* would've been relocated or re-themed back to *Spinball Whizzer*... or not. The deal was extended from 3 years to 6 years, due to the incredible success of *Sonic Spinball* for Sega and Alton Towers.

The future looks grim...

Around 2014-2015, entire sections of theming were removed entirely from the ride area and trees were planted around the area as well, effectively making the ride extremely hidden unless you get close to the area and by the end of the 2015 season, let's just say the rides future wasn't looking so good...



The end of an era... or was it?

After the end of the 2015 season and during the closed season when the official Alton Towers website was updated, *Spinball Whizzer* was listed.



This meant that the ride was still there, but any theming related to Sonic was removed completely. Interestingly enough, when hotel bookings were made

available for the 2016 season, The Sonic hotel room was still available to book and use for an entire year after *Sonic Spinball* was reverted back to *Spinball Whizzer*!



However, after the 2017 season arrived, fans noticed that the hotel room was no longer available to book, meaning that the partnership was fully over...

Small remnants

Although the partnership has long since been over, there are still some leftovers from the partnership if you know where to look. If you take the *Sky Ride* attraction and look out of the window at a certain point, you'll see a giant, green staff only building known as 'Magic HQ'. If you look at that building, you can still see the *Sonic Statue* that stood outside the ride as a 'mini photo opportunity'.



There are currently no photos nor videos of it, but several guests have spotted it. So if you're heading to Alton Towers for a visit, make sure to take the *Sky Ride* attraction and look at the 'Magic HQ' building and you may see it!

And with two successful partnerships completed, what does the future hold for *Sonic the Hedgehog* at theme parks? Well, only time shall tell...

According to *Word*, this article has come in at 1,429 words! I told you it was going to be long and it's my longest article yet!