

A Journey Into The Past: Epcot's Future World

by Jill Clinevell Shelton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Future World at Epcot is an adventure in technology and experimentation.

We can experience the thrill of blasting off into outer space in a space shuttle, play the role of crash test dummies as we participate in vehicle testing or find out just how powerful our imagination can be.

Although Epcot opened twelve years after its Magic Kingdom sibling, Epcot originated as an idea of Walt Disney's many years earlier. Walt believed **EPCOT Center**, as it was originally dubbed, to be the most important part of his Florida project. He envisioned EPCOT, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, as a working city where the brightest ideas of science and technology came together. However, since Walt Disney died years before Epcot was to be built, Imagineers were forced to reconsider his vision and go forward with a revised plan. Epcot was to be divided into two "lands:" Future World, where the latest technology was displayed and where we were allowed glimpses into the future, and the World Showcase.

As technology has evolved and the future that had been envisioned was not coming to pass, some of the older, original Epcot attractions were viewed to be quaint but passe. So, **several of Epcot's attractions were revised or completely razed** to make room for newer, more thrilling attractions. As with most Walt Disney World and Disneyland attractions, these original rides held a special place in the hearts of many fans that were sad to see them changed or replaced. But in true Disney fashion, the Imagineers have some nostalgic surprises "hidden" in plain sight for those of us who look closely.

Mission: SPACE is a thrilling simulated space flight that allows guests to experience technology never before offered to the general public. It not only displays state-of-the-art technical capabilities but also gives guests arguably one of the biggest thrills in the World. But before Mission: SPACE even dreamed of thrilling thousands of guests a day, Horizons was a headliner attraction at Future World.

Horizons opened on October 1, 1983: one year to the day after EPCOT Center's opening. Guests boarded omni-mover vehicles with side-mounted cabins. (Visitors faced side-ways instead of straight ahead.) Horizons, sponsored by **G.E.**, explored the notion of life in the 21st century and the possibilities of living under the sea, in a space

colony and on a desert farm. The ride culminated in the guests choosing the method by which to return to the 20th century: land, sea or space. Horizons closed on January 9, 1999 to the dismay of many loyal fans.

Today, however, fans who are searching for a fossil of this bygone attraction can find the old Horizons logo prominently displayed on the gift shop counter in the **Mission: SPACE** shop and also on the center of the gravity wheel in the queue. Interestingly, the gravity wheel itself is a set piece from the old film, Mission to Mars, also an extinct ride as well as predecessor to Mission: SPACE, at the Magic Kingdom. The mission control room at the end of the queue in Mission: SPACE is a tribute to a comparable set in Mission to Mars as well.

Another relatively new, but **wildly popular Epcot attraction in Future World is Test Track**. Guests enjoy riding along through vehicle testing grounds and racing around the partially exposed track. But before Test Track, guests explored the idea of traveling in vehicles inside the World of Motion. Also sponsored by General Motors, World of Motion was a fun jaunt through history with scenes depicting travel from walking, through the invention of the wheel and on to cars and motorcycles. There were two speed rooms in which the visitor felt as if he or she was speeding underwater, in the air and through the world of computers. The final sequence was a pass by a mirror in which the guest was reflected riding in a futuristic car, a tip of the hat to the Haunted Mansion ghost hitchhiker scene.

Inside the new **Test Track queue** you can find a car that was originally displayed in World of Motion, up on blocks and stripped down to its frame. A pig from World of Motion relocated to California in 1996 and took up residence in Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean!

Journey Into Imagination has a long-standing history in Future World. It opened in October 1983 with Dreamfinder, a happy, imaginative character who invents Figment, a little purple dragon-like creature with tiny wings and yellow eyes who helps us explore our imagination. There was a revision in 1999 in which Dreamfinder was removed completely and Figment only made two cameo appearances. This disappointed many Epcot guests who had fond memories of this classic attraction. So in 2002 there was a second revision and Figment was again center stage, but Dreamfinder was still absent.

In tribute to the **beloved Dreamfinder**, Imagineers have labeled a door in the attraction, immediately following the Smell Lab, "Dean Finder." The Dream Vehicle in which Dreamfinder and Figment ride in the original attraction can be found now on a shelf near the ceiling in the MouseGear shop in Future World. And a large representation of the

sheet music to the original theme song, "One Little Spark," is seen in the climactic scene of the ride.

As old favorites are revised or replaced with time, we can't help but feel nostalgic about the ones that are no more. But most of the time, if we look closely, we might just **find a surprise "hidden" in plain sight**.

About The Author: Jill is a former schoolteacher and a stay-at-home mom of two little Disney princesses. She and her family love learning about Disney secrets and history and are currently planning their next trip to the World, a Grand Gathering, for later this year.

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