

# Up and Running

## The Magic Skyway

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*The Three Titans: Robert Moses, Walt Disney and Henry Ford II embark on a publicity trip for The Magic Skyway*

SOURCE: New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Corporation Publicity Photo - Craig Bavaro Collection

The Magic Skyway show was generally considered to be better than the Futurama. This sentiment was expressed primarily in the press. When it came to rating the pavilions on a whole, public opinion rated the Ford Pavilion as a "statistical" equal to the GM Pavilion.

In a Gallup Organization, Inc. survey taken in May, 1964, 89% of the people polled "strongly recommended" the Ford Pavilion as compared to 90% for GM. When the study focused on the major exhibits of each pavilion, the "Disney Skyway Ride" was rated by 73% of the people as their "principal like" in the Ford Pavilion as compared to 55% for the "Futurama Ride" in the GM Pavilion.

Considering General Motors had an "open ended budget" the press and public acceptance came as great news to Ford. GM wanted to be #1 at the Fair and they didn't care what they had to spend. The final total for their Pavilion amounted to a staggering \$55 million; it was the most expensive exhibit at the Fair. In contrast, the budge-conscious Ford had spent only \$30 million. With almost half the expenditures Ford had equaled GM in press and in popularity; the catalyst was Walt Disney.

Had Ford provided Disney with more money, the capacity could have been expanded. There is no doubt that with increased capacity Ford would have surpassed GM. Ford's Pavilion Manager, John Sattler, said it best "Capacity is no measure of popularity." A great deal of people were "put off" by having to spend hours upon end just waiting in line to see the Ford Pavilion. In fact the number one complaint against Ford, as illustrated in the Gallup studies, was waiting in line (22% of the people listed it as their "principal dislike" as compared to only 10% for GM.)

The Walt philosophy of keeping Disneyland "clean and fresh" rubbed off on the automaker. Ford went to great lengths to keep their Pavilion immaculate. Every car was given a full wax and polish between each ride-through. The interiors of each car were replaced every month.

The only major problem to surface with the Disney designed exhibit concerned the audio. People would toss their trash out of the car. Throughout the day, as the trash slowly built up it started to trip the limit switches for the audio narration in the car radio. By the middle of the day most of the car's narrations were off. People would be riding through the primeval world and be listening to narration on the City of Tomorrow. Each night the entire system was reset.

When the final curtain fell on the 1964 season, the very next morning saw the job of getting ready for 1965 get underway. All of the 1,236 drive wheels and small electric motors on the mile-and-one-half long Magic Skyway were removed to drain the oil and check their bearings and seals. Each unit was then refilled with oil and carefully balanced before being re-set in the track.

The 127 [AudioAnimatronic] figures received similar attention. The vinyl materials forming the skin or hide of each figure was stripped off in sections to facilitate the testing and repair of the Audio-Animatronics. This arduous task took the better portion of the off season. Also consuming most of the off season was the exacting job of a complete maintenance check on the Ford Pavilion. This ranged from simple maintenance work on air conditioners to repairing the reinforced aluminum foil material that formed the cave walls and ceilings in the prehistoric settings. The latter required a tricky scaffolding system and a large crane with a 42-foot boom.

The fleet of 1964 convertibles were replaced with 146 brand new 1965 models ... Aesthetic changes were instituted for the 1965 season, as well. Most significantly was that Disney improved the animation of the figures used in the Skyway ride. Four new scenes were also added to International Gardens.

Everything was geared toward increasing attendance and interest. In an effort to do just that, Henry Ford II asked Walt if he would do the narration for the Magic Skyway. Walt reluctantly agreed.

When the Fair closed on October 18th Ford had attracted 8.1 million people as compared to the 6.8 million the previous year. Rumors surfaced that the Ford Pavilion would be relocated to Dearborn, as had been done with the Ford Pavilion from the 1933 Chicago Exhibition. It did not transpire.

The Pavilion, like most of the 400 plus exhibits, was torn down. The only thing from the Disney-designed show that Ford took with them was the Auto-Parts Harmonic orchestra. It would surface again three years later at HemisFair 1968 in San Antonio, Texas as the "Autolite-Ford Car Parts Orchestra" in the Ford Pavilion.