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He Built His Own Backyard Roller Coaster

Not too many people know how to have fun like John Ivers of Vincennes, Ind., who built a roller coaster in his own back yard. It measures 180 ft. long, 20 ft. high, and goes up and over the barn behind his home.

"I call it the Blue Flash because I got a deal on some blue enamel paint. It runs at a top speed of 25 mph. I built it for me and my grandkids to play on," says Ivers, who started work in early 1999 and completed the project last year.

The roller coaster is powered by an electric motor that powers a chain-drive lift at the base of the barn. It takes the rider up to the top of the barn, which is the crest of the first drop that leads to a 360-degree corkscrew. From there the rider zig zags for a while before coming to a stop.

Most parts used in construction were scrap metal that he scrounged at work. The seat is off an old Ford Escort.

Ivers couldn't find any plans or blueprints for a do-it-yourself roller coaster, so he did the design work himself.

His creation was a fairly well-kept secret in southwestern Indiana until roller-coaster

enthusiasts Paul and Carrie Drabek spotted it while driving down U.S. 41. They pulled into Ivers' driveway, knocked on the door and asked to take photos, which they posted on a Website (www.geocities.com/negativeveg2002). The photos changed everything.

The roller coaster was featured on NBC's Today show this spring. And on April 1, Ivers received a call from a producer for TV's "Ripley's Believe It or Not". He had seen the roller coaster on the Website and wanted to feature it on the show. The segment will air in August or September.

Ivers is now building a second roller coaster inside the barn. It'll be bigger, heavier, faster and taller than the original. But the biggest difference will be that individual sections will bolt together (the first model is welded together), for ease of assembly and disassembly.

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Ivers heads up and over the barn toward the big drop.



From top of barn, rider gathers momentum before entering this 360-degree corkscrew.



"Coaster car" is equipped with four sets of wheels that ride along a pair of steel rails.



Coaster seat is off an old Ford Escort.



Unit is powered by an electric motor that powers a chain-drive lift at base of barn.