

HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

Jerry Barber, an amusement rides inventor, says ride injuries are rare and mostly the result of patron error.

By David Dykes
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Jerry Barber, a veteran of the amusement ride industry, has a simple safety tip for families headed for the Upper South Carolina State Fair over the next few days.

"This is many, many, many times the most important thing," he said. "Fasten their seat belt in their car on the way to the fair."

The truth is, he said, "that car is so much more dangerous than amusement rides, it's not even in the same ballgame."

Amusement rides take center stage today as the Upper South Carolina State Fair opens its 11-day run at the Greenville-Pickens Speedway near Easley.

Amusement rides, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, are some of the safest recreational activities.

The injuries that do occur, according to experts, stem from rider misconduct.

"You get people running out while the ride's running and trying to touch the girlfriend on the shoulder, or something like that, and they miss,"

See RIDES on page 7A

Families seeking cheap thrills give fairs a whirl

Tough economy proves boon for attendance in some places

By Julie Howle
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State, regional and county fairs are holding up well at a time when many people are looking for ways to trim their family budgets.

Generally, overall attendance, along with the number of exhibitors, is up so far this season, according to Jim Tucker, president and CEO of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions.

"The value of fairs really has hit home this year as we struggle with the recession," Tucker said. "People are staying at home. People are going to the fair."

The Upper South Carolina State Fair kicks off an 11-day run today at the Greenville-Pickens Speedway.

Keith Cochran, marketing director for the fair, said he is expecting a good run this year.

"A lot of people who have curtailed the big trips to big amusement parks and to big vacation spots because of the economy are opting for the local entertainment," Cochran said.

Thousands are expected to flood the fairgrounds along U.S. 123 for the 46th year of an event that will bring everything from amusement rides and live music to a demolition derby and a rodeo.

Jerry Pitts, president of the South Carolina Association of Fairs, which is a part of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions, and who is also with the Coastal Carolina Fair, said that in South Carolina, fairs generally run from late summer into early fall.

Pitts said attendance has been up so far for fairs that have already completed their run this year. Many of those are in the East and Midwest.

He said attendance at those events has been up anywhere from 2 percent to 5 percent and he expects similar results at South Carolina's fairs.

See FAIR on page 7A

YOU CAN GO

Where: Greenville-Pickens Speedway
When: Today through Sept. 13
Hours: Today and Sept. 10, 4 p.m. – 1 a.m.; Friday, Sept. 4 and 11, 4 p.m. – 1 a.m.; Saturday, Sept. 5 and 12, noon – 1 a.m.; Sunday, Sept. 6, noon – midnight; Sunday, Sept. 13, noon – 11 p.m.; Monday, Sept. 7, noon – 11 p.m.; Tuesday, Sept. 8, 4 p.m. – 11 p.m.; Wednesday, Sept. 9, 4 p.m. – 11 p.m.
Admission: $6; some events have additional fee
Highlights: Sept. 4, Checkers or Wreckers 150 Enduro Classic, 8 p.m.; Sept. 6, cowboy rodeo, 7 p.m., Sept. 8, Dance-Dance-Dance Competition; Sept. 9, Upstate Star talent competition; Sept. 11, Demolition Derby, 8 p.m.



KEN OSBURN / Staff

Amusement rides are set up in preparation for today's opening of the Upper South Carolina State Fair. Experts praise the safety record of the rides, but say patrons should observe all rules to avoid hurting themselves.