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Website last updated: 04-18-2016



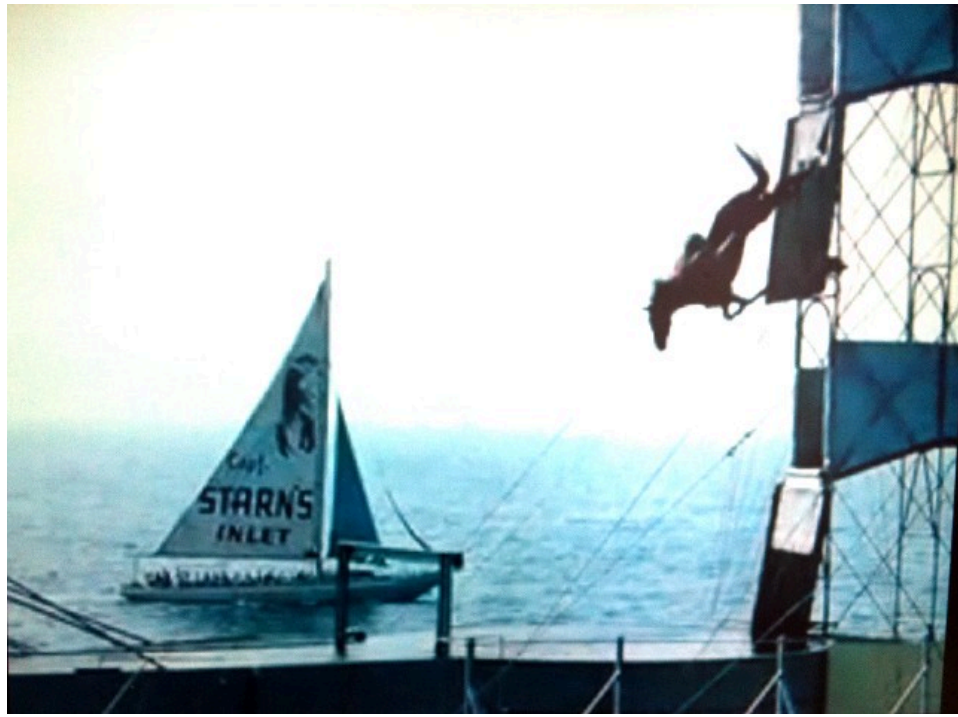
Club-A-Rama Week 14:

## DIVING HORSE

Steel Pier, Atlantic City, NJ

1963





This mold is engraved GRIFFITH PARK, PONY RIDE, but there has never been a *diving* horse at the Pony Ride of Griffith Park in Los Angeles, CA. Plus the engraving was done by hand, which infers a later use (if at all - the operator doesn't recall using this mold at Griffith Park). While a quick glance at this mold might appear to depict a *jumping* horse suitable for Griffith Park, a closer look clearly shows that the horse is *diving* into *water*. Note in the figure not only the depiction of an ocean in the background, but also (look closely) a sailboat! (There's a cute reason why a sailboat would have been included in a Mold-A-Rama figure, but we'll discuss that in another week . . .) The photo above is from a postcard for the STEEL PIER at Atlantic City. Pretty similar isn't it?! All this, together with the fact that there are other known Atlantic City moldsets, I think, confirm with rather high confidence that this moldset was originally made for the Diving Horse at the STEEL PIER of Atlantic City, NJ.

UPDATE: A second Diving Horse moldset has been discovered that is, indeed, engraved from the STEEL PIER!

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THE MAGIC SOUVENIR MAKER





The (strange) idea of horse diving exhibitions was conceived of in 1881 by William "Doc" Carver when he was crossing a collapsed bridge while on horseback (before the days of the automobile.) As the story goes, Doc Carver's horse executed a dive from the collapsed bridge into the waters below, and whallah! An (odd) entertainment industry was born! Doc Carver and his daughter, and daughter-in-law, brought their act to the Steel Pier in Atlantic City in the 1920s. The most notable female horse diver, and one of the first, answered an ad in 1923 placed in the paper by Doc Carver himself. Sonora Webster Carver was an instant sensation and soon became the lead diving girl for Doc's act. Sonora married Doc's son Al, who took over the show in 1927 after the death of his father. Sonora's sister Arnette also became a horse diver, in 1928. Divers jumped 2 to 6 times a day.

In 1931, Sonora and her horse "Red Lips" lost their balance on the platform. Sonora survived, but suffered detached retinas in the fall, permanently blinding her. Amazingly, she continued horse-diving for another 11 years while blind. The 1991 Disney film "Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken" is based on Sonora's life. In a 1997 interview Sonora's sister Arnette said that when Sonora screened the movie about her life (she lived to be 99!) she was disappointed because she said "the only thing true in it was that I rode diving horses, I went blind, and I continued to ride for another 11 years."

When Sonora jumped and injured her eyes the horse and rider were plunging 60 feet into a special tank. Afterwards the jump was lowered to 40 feet, and eventually to 35 feet. Each horse apparently had their own style of diving. One horse would wait a good five minutes before jumping, then would hold his head up and watch the seagulls fly by. Some dove with their front legs straight out, while others tucked up their legs as if they were going over a jump. One horse would twist in the air and land on its side (but I think that horse didn't last long in the show, for obvious reasons.) Another horse would charge up the ramp and take a running jump off the diving board, leaving the rider behind, so the girls would try to leap on him as he flew by. Sonora's sister Arnette said that in all the years of the show no horse was ever injured (though I guess no one asked the horses *their* opinion on that . . . :) The diving horse act ran at the Steel Pier from the early 1920s through the 1970s.



To make sure all CLUB-A-RAMA members are able to clearly see the sailboat on the horizon of the water in their own personally-made figures, I had to carefully inspect and discard (i.e., recycle) a high number of molds that didn't pass an unusually high level of quality control!



The numbering of the DIVING HORSE moldset places it squarely in 1963.

Disclaimers: The color and/or exact condition of the MOLD you get in the CLUB-A-RAMA may or may not be as shown. Not for children under 3.

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**If YOU would like to own this very moldset** (and perhaps even include a fully operating MOLDVILLE machine to go with it) so you can reissue your own souvenirs from 50 years ago, please email [MoldvilleMachine@gmail.com](mailto:MoldvilleMachine@gmail.com) TODAY - before someone else beats you to it!

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