



A Steam Yacht reveals its underside as it swings almost vertically. Behind it, the hanging seats of the Chair-o-Plane wait to be filled.

“My late husband just couldn’t stop collecting things, and finally got around to fairground rides,” says Anna. “We were trying to make a living organising collectors’ fairs and vintage car shows. Part of our revenue was having fairground rides come along to those. When we got let down by the showmen, John decided to buy a set of Gallopers to fill the gap, and that side of it just took over.”

Returned to beauty

Gallopers are the British version of the American carousel ride. The difference is they rotate clockwise, not anti-clockwise as the American ride does, and the horses are not prancing. The bones of the Carters’ set date back to the 1890s, though they have seen plenty of alterations since then. It is one of two rides still powered by

steam, with the rest running on electricity.

The dilapidated set John found was thought to date from approximately 1910, and was built by Robert Tidman & Sons, of Bishop Bridge Iron Works in Norwich. The wooden horses were carved and fitted together in sections by a company of renowned early 20th century fairground carvers, Andersons of Bristol. The Carters paid £1,500 for them, then spent all their free time restoring them. This involved stripping back the woodwork, making spare parts, and repainting them using skills they had both learned in art school.

A friend had a steam engine, also built by Tidman, that fitted exactly. The sounds are produced by a century-old Gavioli organ, bought from Roger Daltrey, lead singer of The Who.

“We made sure the set was structurally

sound and brought them out plain, painted in basic colours,” says Anna. “We had to get them out to earn some money.” Since then, they have been decorated with paintings of exotic creatures and famous people, and the horses given names of friends and family. “I grew up with them. They’re beautiful and quintessentially English,” says the Carters’ son, Joby. “It’s the classic ride everyone thinks of when they think of a funfair.”

At first, the family toured the Gallopers as part of other funfairs. Then they bought other rides, such as the Chair-o-Plane, a revolving swing ride from the 1920s. The 1921 Steam Yachts were eventually added to the touring rides when a steam engine, Yorky, built in 1901, was restored. The two ‘boats’, with seats inside, swing to an almost perpendicular angle.