

venue to the next. In advance of this, there is a pile of forms to complete, concerning everything from site access to health and safety. A team is also dispatched to put up posters.

The more complex rides can take up to five hours to install, with the aid of a crane. Others need only to be staked into the ground. All the vehicles and rides are washed before a fair, and the machinery is cleaned, oiled and inspected. “You’re putting on a show, so presentation is very important,” says Anna.

“We pull down on Sunday night or Monday, move on Tuesday, then it takes three or four days to set the fair up,” says Joby. They are helped by 25-30 other family members, part-timers and volunteers.

“I’ve got rides that should be left in the shed or sold, but it’s not the point. We love them,” Joby adds. “William Morris said do not have in your home what you do not believe to be beautiful or useful. That’s our fair. Every ride makes me smile.” He’s not alone in that. ■

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RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE

All maintenance work on the rides takes place over the winter at the Carters’ base near Maidenhead in Berkshire. “To make an object beautiful again is a great feeling,” says Anna.

“We have to keep the rides up to date and safe,” says Joby. “We’re constantly replacing rotten woodwork and painting it again. Modern rides have a galvanised chassis with checker plate and fibreglass on top. They’re good for 10 years with light maintenance. But I couldn’t love those modern rides.”

Last year, they restored a 1960s ride, the Lightning Skid, which is due on the road again this season. “It was originally painted by Fred Fowle 50 years ago, but the decoration had passed the point of saving,” says Joby. Fowle (1914-83) was a noted fairground artist. “So we stripped it off, traced the just visible design, and redid it. It’s exactly the same, right down to using aluminium leaf rather than silver paint.”

The Gallopers and Steam Yachts require the most ongoing maintenance. The last overhaul of Yorky cost £25,000, and it burns 250kg of coal each day.

“There are pieces of artwork inside a ride that don’t see sunlight or get wet, so they will go years without being painted,” says Joby. “The exterior woodwork is open to the elements, and you have to do it every two or three years.”

Then there are the traditional incandescent lightbulbs that light up the attractions. The fair uses more than 5,000, and 100 need changing each week.

Authenticity is important to the family. Originally, John’s 45rpm records were played on the dodgems. That is no longer practical, but they are in the process of digitising them. “We are a bit like a museum with no funding,” says Joby. “We try to present the rides as close to how they were when they were new.”

