

Harry Potter Pinball

In the summer of 2002, Harry Potter had emerged as a world-wide pop phenomenon, and was still gaining momentum. Four of the seven books portraying the teenage wizard had been written and released, and Warner Brothers film adaptation of the first book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, was on its way to grossing nearly one billion dollars. That is a lot of money and that was just the first film. The second film, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, was about to be released and would go on to gross nearly 880 million dollars. Clearly, Harry Potter was an immensely popular theme and that looked to continue for many years with 3 more books to come and likely films to accompany all of them. (We now know the 7th book was split into two separate movies, so there were 7 more movies to come).

My passion for pinball was also growing in the fall of 2002. Growing up with pinball in the 70's & 80's impacted my adult life, and being blessed with a good paying job, I had the opportunity to buy some machines. (I use the word 'some' loosely as my collection consisted of IJ, STTNG, JY, Shadow, LAH, R911, MB, NGG, CV, WCS94, R&B&F, TOM, and TAF Gold at the time). A trip to the Chicago Pinball Expo for the first time in 1997 (touring Williams/Bally factory) helped ignite this enthusiasm that would last for many years to come. Having two boys aged 8 and 9 at the time who were interested in both Harry Potter and pinball lead to many conversations on both topics. One night I was thinking about how great it would be to have a Harry Potter themed pinball machine and how it should prove monetarily wise for Stern Pinball, the only producer of pinball machines at the time. I continued to think about what a Harry Potter themed machine might look like and at some point I had an epiphany as all the playfield elements came together (at least in my mind) during a nearly sleepless night.

I do not consider myself an artist nor am I especially good with my hands. My day to day job consists of looking at a computer screen (reading e-mails, doing statistical analysis, and learning about the orthopaedic world). But, this revelation, in my mind, seemed so innovative to me that I felt the need to find a way to create this playfield. If I was successful, maybe I could somehow get it in front of Gary Stern, and perhaps he would be interested in building it!! How exciting!

So, off I went, doing the best I could. I knew it would not be perfect, but I just needed to get the idea across. My deadline was the 2002 Pinball Expo. My thought was that I could also enter it into the art contest for some exposure. But, I was really hopeful that I could get someone at the Stern Pinball company to look at it. Hopefully, Gary Stern himself! After many late nights, I was successful at completing it! And, Gary Stern did agree to take a look at it after the Pinball Expo factory tour. Things were really coming together! I was quite excited! Before I tell you how things went with Gary Stern, let's explore the playfield.

Below, is a picture of the entire playfield. Before starting the tour, please note there are some features I was unable to complete on the machine that are explained in the text. We will start at the castle above the left slingshot and progress clockwise to tour the playfield. The castle is, of course, Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry. The idea was to have 4 doors each representing the houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. I was only able to fit 3 but perhaps

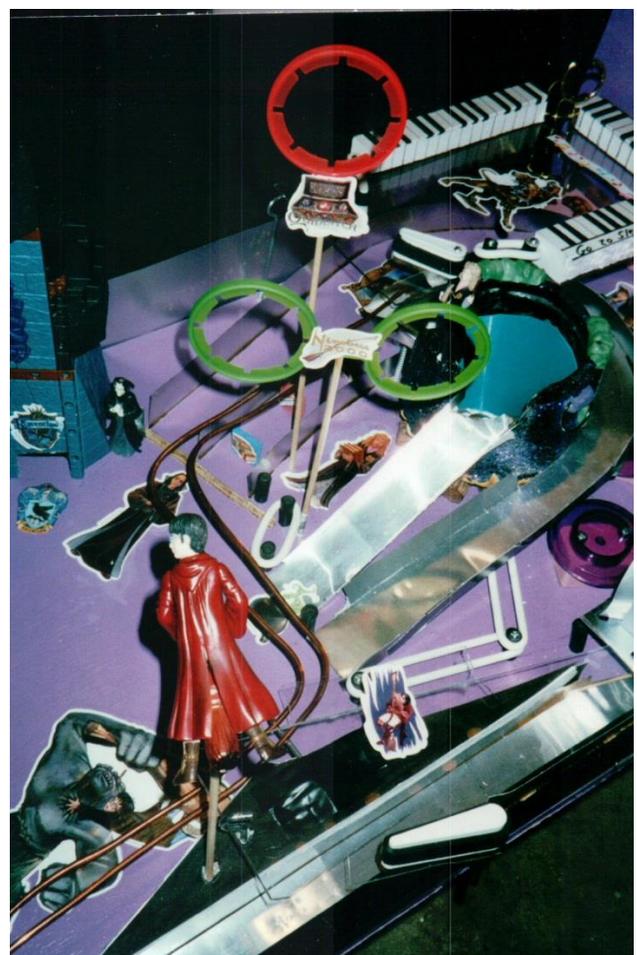


expanding this standard sized playfield into a wide body could accommodate. Moving up the playfield we find a slotted track where Hogwarts teacher and head of Slytherin house Severus Snape can move right and left much like the Drac Attack on Williams Monster Bash. Snape isn't exactly a favorite teacher of Harry's (at least at this time) so enabling the player to bash him with the ball should prove satisfying. Snape hides behind the castle when inactive. Next, we have the left orbit which loops around to the top rollover lanes, to the upper right playfield (explained later), or all the way around to return to the right flipper. To the right of the left orbit is the 'Back to School Shopping' lane featuring in-line drop targets. Each drop target features such necessities as books, wands, owl cages, and (of course) every flavor jelly beans. In the back left corner of the playfield is an upper playfield accessed from a ball popper wireform similar to the one used to get to the Battlefield on Bally's The Shadow. The upper playfield features two mini flippers and piano keys. The idea here is to play the piano long enough to lure the 3-headed dog Fluffy to sleep so the trap door [not shown] opens up allowing Harry and his two friends to move closer in finding the sorcerer's stone. If the player loses the ball before Fluffy is lured to sleep, the dog will likely attack. Not fun! In the upper right of the playfield we have two standard rollover lanes marked with Harry's initials, H and P, that lead to 3 pop bumpers. This area is reminiscent to Williams Medieval Madness. In the center of the playfield is a large cauldron adorned with Harry's female friend Hermione Granger. A ramp leads to the cauldron similar to the toilet shot on Williams Junkyard. Strong shots should provide enough oomph for strong potions! To the right of the cauldron ramp is a standard ramp that loops to the left around the cauldron and returns to the right inlane via a lightning bolt shaped wireform

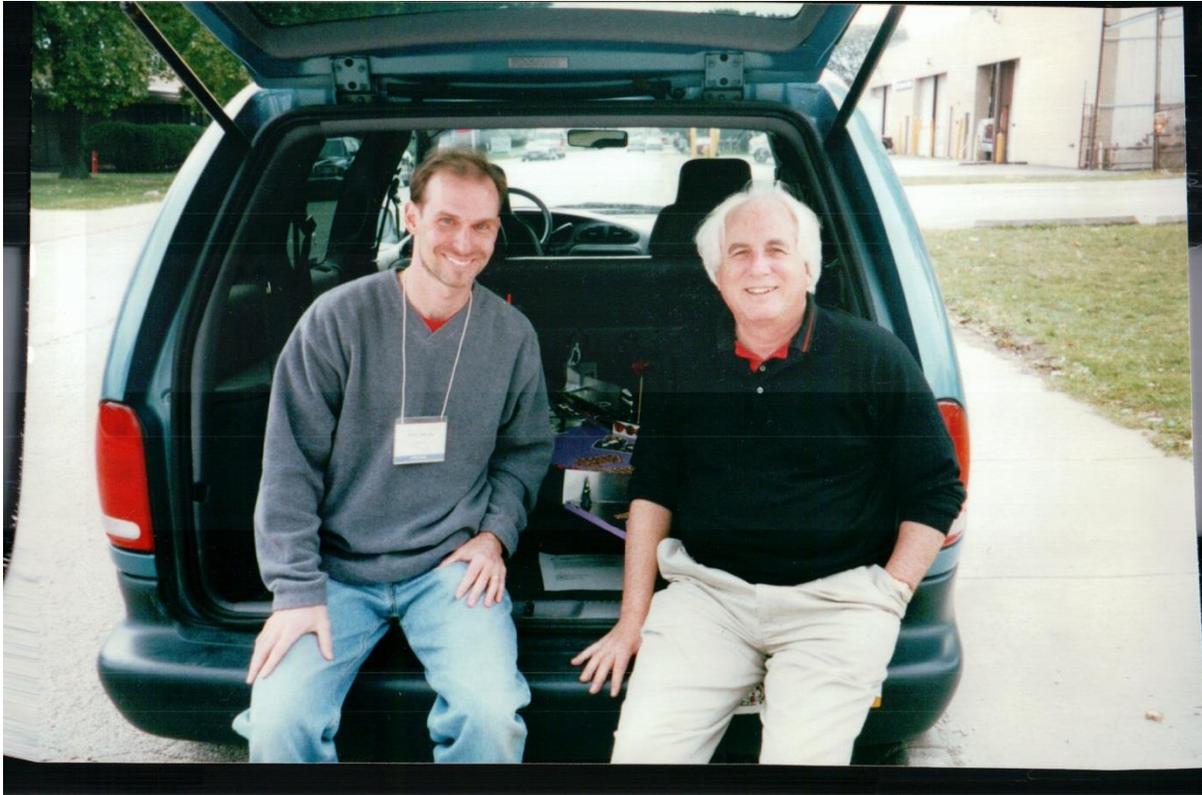


habitrail. Harry Potter fans know Harry's forehead features a lightning bolt shaped scar where Lord Voldemort's killing curse bounced off Harry and back onto the dark Lord nearly killing him. To the

right of the ramp is the right orbit that leads to either the top rollover lanes, the piano upper playfield ball popper, or back to the flippers. To the right of the right orbit is another upper playfield featuring a single full size flipper. This playfield is accessed with shots to the left orbit when the access hinge is activated. Shots with this upper right flipper lead to 3 jackpot shots represented by the quidditch goals. Quidditch is a popular sport somewhat similar to soccer, but played on broomsticks high above the ground. These 3 goals are reached by aiming the ball at the end of the curved end of the clear Lexan playfield. This feature may remind players of Jumps shot on Williams No Fear or the Hole in One Shot of No Good Gophers. Obviously, there needs to be something that will guide the ball back to the playfield after these shots (more clear Lexan, perhaps). If the player does not activate the flipper, the ball will join the lightning bolt shaped habitrail ramp return [not shown]. Below this upper playfield are five stationary 'TROLL' targets. The slingshots, outlanes, and shooter lane are standard. Another additional feature not shown is a return wireform from underground areas resulting in shots to the castle, completed 'back to school shopping', and cauldron. I envisioned this being similar to Bally's Creature from the Black Lagoon vertical up-kicker except being on the left side, coming out of the castle and leading to the left inlane, instead of the right. This ends the playfield tour.



Details of the upper left and upper right playfields.



Jeff Murphy and Gary Stern at Stern Pinball factory, Pinball Expo 2002.

When I showed Gary Stern the Harry Potter pinball playfield, he commented that the in-line drop targets were coming off patent. He then said they have considered using Harry Potter as a theme but felt it was too juvenile. He referenced games like Rocky & Bullwinkle & Friends and Bugs Bunny Birthday Bash and how they were aimed at the younger audience and did not do well. (I owned Rocky & Bullwinkle & Friends at the time and think it is a very fun game!). He stated that they were targeting the adult market (e.g. Playboy pinball) and Harry Potter did not fit their business model. I was disappointed, but also knew that there were many obstacles in the way of actually getting this machine produced. First, J.K. Rowling would need to agree to let a pinball machine be produced using the Harry Potter theme. Her refusal, or a high cost of the license would halt the entire idea. I also know there were many pinball designers around (with real design experience) and not very many machines to be designed each year. I also knew my game was far from perfect in the way it was designed. It would need lots of input from the pinball designers who knew a great deal more about the art than I did. Were some of the shots too narrow? Would it flow well? How would the rules affect the layout? As an avid player, I knew all of these things needed to be delicately combined for an awesome playing game to result.

Do you think it was a mistake to not pursue this theme? Do you like my design? I wonder if Jersey Jack has any interest. Is it too late to have a Harry Potter themed pinball machine? I would love to hear your comments. Feel free to e-mail (jeffmurphy1985@comcast.net) or text me (574-453-7364).