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This Week at the Great Park: Numbers of balloon riders set records

Numbers of riders for week, day set records

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The Great Park balloon ride is closed for one week while the gondola's tires are replaced.

Strong gusts of wind banged the gondola around early Friday morning, damaging its tires, said Rod Cooper, manager of operations for the Orange County Great Park. Replacement tires are difficult to find because the tires are an odd size. The replacements will be ordered from New York, but the holidays are expected to delay the shipment.

The balloon itself was not damaged.

The tethered helium balloon on the old El Toro Marine Corps base has given free rides to the public since July. The balloon's visitor center at Marine Way and Sand Canyon Avenue will be open during repairs.

Balloon attendance soars

The big orange balloon took 2,631 passengers above the Great Park during the week of Dec. 13-16, breaking the record for most passengers in a week. The previous record for most passengers in a week was 2,489 passengers the week of Sept. 13-16.

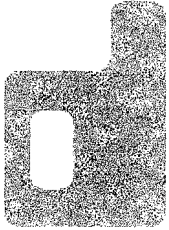
And on Saturday, Dec. 15, the number of passengers broke the daily record. That day, 1,154 people rode the attraction, which was open for six hours, taking groups of about 30 people into the sky. The day's total beat the previous record of 973 people who rode in the balloon on a Sunday, Aug. 12.

The attraction is open Thursdays through Sundays.

Thursdays are the attraction's group days, and on Dec. 13 five different groups went up in the balloon.


Laura Kirchner, program specialist for operations, speculated that the Great Park open house Dec. 1 and 2 and the City

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