



MATTHEW FORTNER PHOTO

Paul Brock, who fixes old rides from amusement parks and carnivals, stands with his pride and joy, a merry-go-round from the 1921 World's Fair that he has restored.

Cranking new life into old carnival rides

By **REGINALD FIELDS**
Staff Writer

COWPENS — Paul Brock wants to take the Upstate for a ride.

When amusement parks and carnivals junk their old midway rides, the Cowpens man is there to take in the rundown wrecks and turn them into glittering gems.

For more than 30 years, Brock has bought, rebuilt, and resold second- and third-hand midway rides.

Though he considers his Poor Paul's fireworks business his livelihood, Brock says reconditioning rides has been a profitable hobby.

"They don't look like much now, but when we get them set

up and painted they'll be real nice," he says of the folded up and rusted rides.

Brock, 63, has no special training in how to repair the machines, but he is one the most recognized players in the rebuilt midway ride business.

He chalks it all up to experience. "I have been doing this for three decades, and you just kind

of know what to look for now. Every ride is a different ball game."

Brock has purchased rides from theme parks up and down the East Coast — including Carowinds near Charlotte — and he advertises in major trade magazines drawing inquiries from across the country as well as overseas.

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He has a junk yard of 40 rides behind his fireworks store on the I-85 Frontage Road near Highway 110. All the rides have some sort of hitch -- from mechanical problems to old age. Normally, Brock rebuilds the machines and puts them back out on the market where likely buyers include collectors and state fairs.

But when most of the rides he has now are fixed up -- screws tightened, seats washed and paint freshened -- he plans to keep them and open a mini-theme park this fall.

It's a new endeavor for Brock, who figures he can make more money by selling three-minute rides on his roller coaster and Ferris wheel. He still plans to sell the rides right off of his lot but acknowledges his hobby has become a tougher ticket to sell in an increasingly competitive trade.

One of his rides is in working order and cheerfully painted. It's Brock's prize possession, a merry-

go-round from the 1921 World's Fair -- a ride that Brock says he will never sell.

"But money changes everything," he quickly added.

It's not authentic. Its original wooden-carved horses and lights are gone, and the paint job is different than it was 70 years ago. But no matter. Brock says merry-go-rounds are a rare and hot commodity in the midway ride business and could make him a rich man.

"I can sell this merry-go-round before you can get to your car," he says. "Everyone wants a merry-go-round. I have had many calls on this one. There just aren't too many left out there that are worth anything."

Just last week a Super Twister and a fun house were trucked in after Brock purchased them from East Coast theme parks to give them new life at his own amusement park.

Brock still is skeptical about the potential for success in running a ride park. But either way, old relics have given him a fun ride.