

Crawl



Flip for joy

A survey of the bar scene's pinball options

BY REBECCA ZISCH

One of the great things about pinball is it crosses the intimidating cultural barriers of going into a new bar. It's true anyone can look cool playing a pinball machine and nobody's going to question you when you've got your game on. The leaning in, the bending down and the generally serious posture that one takes indicates this is a person who belongs in this bar. She has a purpose beyond alcohol. He has a thing going on with that machine.

Unfortunately, pinball machines don't bring in as much money as, say, video poker, and they require a lot more upkeep than Golden Tee or pool tables. So, these days, finding cool, working pinball in Las Vegas requires a dedicated, mindful eye. But if this is your goal, make the effort, take the drive and patronize these places that place your pinball needs as their priorities.

One of my favorite local machines is at the Rumrunner (1801 E. Tropicana; 739-7702). The Rumrunner is known for Midwestern sports enthusiasm and quick, cheap and delicious bar food. On a Saturday night, the place is full of pool, football and darts players. But if you look closely, you will see a fast, entertaining *Addams' Family* pinball machine featuring a double set of flippers beckoning you

with its TV theme song. And in case you forgot to give at the office, all proceeds from this game go to support a non-profit organization.

In fact, that money supports the Pinball Hall of Fame (3330 E. Tropicana; www.pinballmuseum.org). The newly opened not-for-profit features 150 vintage and current machines running from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. every day. Admission is free; machine play is 25 or 50 cents. Unfortunately, as this is a family place, there's no alcohol. But when you absolutely have to have a drink, you're right across the street from a bar with two of the best machines in town.

Finding a pair of memorable and working machines right next to each other is a rarity, but they have them at the Eagle (3430 E. Tropicana; 458-8662). For a little fun with Keanu Reeves, there is the *Johnny Mnemonic* game with gigabyte and cyberpunk references, and a bonus game involving a mechanical claw. However, I recommend starting with "Scared Stiff" - Elvira, Mistress of the Dark." It is definitely an R-rated machine with its bonus rounds and audio double-entendres from Elvira. At the beginning, the free game score is a very achievable 3,600,000 (although the better you get, the higher it goes); notably, this is the only pinball machine I have witnessed someone actually match the score at the end for the free game.

While you're still on the east side of town, stop in to the friendly Sportsman's

Royal Manor Lounge (5600 Boulder Highway; 458-7071), part of a medieval castle-themed hotel/mini-mart complex. Inside you'll find brass lions, antique weaponry, suits of armor and one three-flipped "Indianapolis 500" pinball machine welcoming you with, "Gentleman, start your engines." And if you're questioning the class of a bar attached to a mini-mart on Boulder Highway, take note: My Coke came in a cut-glass high ball with a cherry.

If you require a microbrew with your pinball, I recommend trying the *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* game at Barley's Casino and Brewing Company (4500 E. Sunset Road; 458-2739). The game includes audio of all of Arnold's *Terminator* catchphrases and, thankfully, is located on the upper bar level away from most of the gaming.

Does a 28-inch pizza and pinball sound like your kind of night? Then try Madison Avenue (855 E. Twain Ave.; 735-4535). "Sharkey's Shootout" - Featuring Jeannette Lee, the Black Widow" isn't the easiest game to play - probably why the machine takes dollar bills. But the bar has an affable staff, a cast of regulars, a decent jukebox and \$6 pitchers.

For downtown hipsters, look no further than Art Bar (1511 S. Main Street; 437-2787). Not only is this place owned by an Elvis impersonator, it also features an "Elvis" pinball machine with an impressive selection of extra flippers. Unfortunately, the machine is way too close to the pool table to be able to play it with the kind of physicality it needs for its tricky bonus features. Also, if there's any live music in the bar, you can't hear the machine. I think when I hit the "Heartbreak Hotel" bonus, Elvis sang to me, but I can't be sure.

If your pinball urges require a wide array of games, then your only choice is Gameworks (3785 Las Vegas Blvd. South, Suite 010; 432-4263). Personally, I was wary of the type of rug-rat mischief and overpriced drinks I would find there, but I was honestly surprised. The bar features \$2 drafts and \$3 shot specials, and management assured me that adults can drink throughout the venue. The pinball area currently features eight machines. Sadly, *Twister* was out of order and *South Park* had a broken left flipper. But even if the venue only had *The Sopranos*, it would be worth the trip. And, as long as you're there, *The Lost World* and "High Roller Casino" both had novel elements and strong play action.

Now that Las Vegas is home to the Pinball Hall of Fame, hopefully it will mean an increase of pinball everywhere. But until then, put your money where the flippers are and save your quarters for the machines. **CL**

Pinball: Cheaper than video poker.