

## The Letná Carousel

The Letná Carousel is one of the oldest extant floor carousels in Europe. This immovable cultural monument is in the care of the National Technical Museum, which made it operational after demanding repairs on July 11, 2022. The National Technical Museum would like to thank the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, the Prague 7 municipality, its sponsors and the public for their support in its efforts to save the carousel.

The carousel was commissioned by Josef Nebeský and built by carpenter Matěj Bílek probably for the summer season of 1892. It originally stood in Královské Vinohrady, from where it was moved in 1894 to its current and very popular location in Letenské sady, not far from the top station of the funicular, next to the boarding station of the first Prague tram. Here, the carousel provided entertainment to children and adults from its acceptance inspection on July 11, 1984, until the 1990s. In the 1990s, the carousel's original organ and bell were stolen. In 2004, the National Technical Museum bought the carousel in critical condition with financial support from the Ministry of Culture. An initiative to save the carousel and restore it to an operational condition was launched in 2014 as a cooperation between the National Technical Museum and the Prague 7 municipality, accompanied by a public fundraiser. After a lengthy effort to save the landmark, the fully repaired carousel can finally start spinning for the public in the summer season of 2022.

The carousel is housed in an original Neo-Renaissance wooden pavilion with a 12-metre regular dodecagon ground plan, timber framing filled with wooden planks and a pyramid roof topped with a lantern reaching the height of 7.7 meters. The interior of the carousel consists of two parts. The first is a turning support column – an axle – in the center of the structure, to which the turntable is affixed. The turntable is 7 meters in diameter and the figurines for riding – horses – are attached to it. The second, smaller part consists of a fixed floor in the shape of an outer ring. The bottom of the central column is connected to a metal pin which moves in a bearing enclosed in a wall 1,8 meters below the floor itself. The non-rotating roof structure rests on a pin at the top of the column. Since 1894, the carousel has been powered by a motor, replacing the original man-powered drive used in Královské Vinohrady. The repairs of the carousel structure and technologies were very challenging as it revealed many hidden defects of the original construction. They were further complicated by the necessity to find a company able to successfully complete the works. All the surviving decorative elements of the structure were also restored.

One of its unique attractions is the carousel equipment. Catering to both children and adults, the carousel was equipped with 19 non-articulated horse figures in various sizes with glass eyes, covered in real horsehide and filled with straw. The column of the central turntable is decorated with the original statues of three knights in papier-mâché armor painted in silver. The demanding restoration of the horses and interior fittings, including the knights, was completed in 2018. Original saddles and bridles can be seen on four horses: Poly, Flora, Blesk

(Lightning) and Šemík. In the 1930s, four benches were probably replaced with cars. As of 2022, the youngest children can ride in cars made especially for the carousel as replicas of 1930s pedal cars.