



50 Years of NEOPLAN Skyliner: Shuttle to the Jackpot

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What bus would make a finer shuttle to Las Vegas or Atlantic City than the NEOPLAN Skyliner? The double-decker has combined flexibility, glamour and comfort since the rubber first met the road 50 years ago, capturing hearts along the way in the USA's gambling centres and beyond.

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- **42 NEOPLAN Skyliners used as shuttle buses to Golden Nugget hotels' casinos**
- **Gold-coated windows and high-performance air conditioning system with extra motor for cool interior temperatures**
- **NEOPLAN has sold around 15,000 coaches in US market, including gas-powered double-deckers**

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The attraction of gambling lies in its unpredictability, and a place like Las Vegas depends on this thrill. But while luck is king in the casinos, the Golden Nugget hotels played it safe with their shuttle service in the 1980s, opting for the NEOPLAN Skyliner. Ultimately, this bus has continued like no other to stand for exclusive quality, offering wide freedom of choice in custom request fulfilment.

Two NEOPLAN Skyliner series were used as shuttles to transport enthusiastic punters from the city to the Golden Nugget Casinos. 20 vehicles have run the transfer route from Los Angeles to Las Vegas since 1981, with 22 more starting shuttle services between New York and Atlantic City from 1983 onwards. The first six-wheel series drew on black paintwork with golden lettering and hubcaps for its look. The buses for the East Coast route were in fact based on the same model, but given an update. To live up to their name, these Golden Nugget buses' window panes were gold

MAN Truck & Bus is one of Europe's leading commercial vehicle manufacturers and transport solution providers, with an annual revenue of some 9 billion euros (2016). The company's product portfolio includes vans, trucks, buses/coaches and diesel and gas engines along with services related to passenger and cargo transport. MAN Truck & Bus is a company of Volkswagen Truck & Bus GmbH and employs more than 35,000 people worldwide.



vacuum-coated. But an impressive appearance was not the only factor at play. Windows coated this way dimmed the intense sunlight and reduced heating levels in the interior. In any case, there was also an especially large air-conditioning system on board, which was not powered in the usual way by the vehicle engine but had its own motor.

Another of the second series' innovations was its use of Nirosta (stainless steel) on the body. A neat instance of this was the wide strip of Nirosta that separated the two decks and underlined the Golden Nugget lettering, for instance. The strip was gold-anodised, which makes the surface especially scratch-resistant, adding a long-lasting lustre. The interior equipment was also impressive across the board. A Swiss company produced a custom range of exclusive seat covers specially for these vehicles. These were – what else? – golden in colour, ringed by bands of red and black. Detroit V8 engines and Allison automatic gearboxes provided the power.

A journey of roughly 200 km separated New York from Atlantic City. The concept was straightforward: a return trip cost \$20 and each passenger could redeem \$10 aboard the bus in the form of chips. In a similar vein, the order for the buses itself was simple yet spectacular. Steve Wynn, then owner of the Golden Nugget hotels in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, personally took the time to select the buses in the second series. On a trip to Europe, he spent a few weeks in Nice. There was already a large-scale shuttle bus system in place in Atlantic City to bring in potential casino guests from the New York area. An underground bus station at the Golden Nugget hotel was under construction by that time. Only the buses for it were lacking. So, in the course of an excursion to Vienna, he also made his way to the NEOPLAN plant in Stuttgart. Wynn was deeply impressed by the flexibility in production, which provided a wide range of options to meet custom requests like no other manufacturer could offer. Afterwards, he promptly invited NEOPLAN's senior management team to Nice. Bob Lee, a former director of the Stuttgart-based bus manufacturer, recalls that "the talks were held in his hotel suite around 12 noon. The ideal time to also reach banks in New York." The bus makers must have made the right impression. "We only believed our success the next day when Else Auwärter, then in charge of finances, came running downstairs and asked what we had been up to.



Such and such a sum had landed in the account. It was a down payment far beyond what we were used to," Lee adds.

Despite Las Vegas and Atlantic City being far apart in the West and on the East Coast, the latter city was unable in the long run to hold its own as a major gambling location. Regardless, NEOPLAN's presence in the US market has still been a full-fledged success. Between 1981 and 1995, the company sold 15,000 buses manufactured at a dedicated plant in Lamar, Colorado. Some 1,300 went to the City of Los Angeles for service on routes, 700 of them gas-powered. Even at that time, mass-production alternatives to diesel existed. Bob Lee reflects that "today, I sometimes think today of how we have truly managed to sell our double-deckers all around the world. That happened because we created a combination no-one else could offer the same way: flexibility in executing ideas, efficiency and cost-effectiveness."