



## **50 years of the NEOPLAN Skyliner: On tour with the Kellys**

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**When the Kelly Family finally got their big break in 1994, they had already been making music for two decades, performing in concerts all over Europe. Previously, they spent their journey time in spartan double-decker London buses – with their success, they switched to an articulated NEOPLAN Skyliner.**

**MAN Truck & Bus**  
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- **Articulated NEOPLAN Skyliner – jumbo-tour bus since 1996**
- **18 metres long with room to sleep 28**
- **Club room and motorbike bay in the rear segment**

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By the end of the 1990s, the Kelly Family's tour bus was as big as they themselves were in Germany. The troupe, made up of members of a musical extended family, toured Europe in an unmissable NEOPLAN Jumbocruiser Type N 138/4. The articulated Skyliner – 18 metres long, four metres high, two-and-a-half metres wide, and weighing 18 tonnes in total – was already pushing the limits of what was allowed even when it originally presented at the IAA trade show in 1975. Customers were able to choose between three layout variants for the lower deck of the rear segment: bar/toilet/luggage compartment, club room/toilet/luggage compartment, or just an extended luggage compartment. In 1996, Joey Kelly bought the bus (with the club room layout) directly from its first owner, a tour operator in Dortmund. Of the 11 that were ever built, Kelly's bus was number two.

Originally, the four-axle behemoth could seat 99 passengers – which was of limited use in its new life as a tour bus. Therefore, the king-sized NEOPLAN Skyliner was modified, eventually settling on a princely 28 sleeping berths. And that was only on the upper deck – the lower-deck seating was preserved. "The fact that it was six metres longer than other buses was naturally very interesting for a band the size of ours. We christened it the 'Lindworm'," Joey Kelly recalls – a reference to a legendary wingless dragon. "If you go and stand in front it, it does look like quite a monster." The 'Lindworm' was powered, as ever, by a V12 engine, which produced more than 500 hp with a turbocharger. The engine is

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located at the back of the front segment – where most articulated buses have their articulation hub. The designers of the NEOPLAN moved this to the area in between the two decks, which makes the rear segment very stable and means no rolling movements occur between the powered segment and the trailing rear section. Joey Kelly is still always impressed by the performance of their family vehicle: “It went like a train. Most other buses have to shift to third gear when you’re going uphill. Not this one.”

The Kelly Family used the bus for about four years. It served them well as a tour bus, but also as a private touring coach. The Skyliner carried them reliably around Europe – Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Eastern Europe – for their 180 to 200 concerts per year. It even went with them on a ferry to Ireland. Joey Kelly used the enormous luggage compartment for, amongst other things, his BMW motorbike: “I built a ramp, so I was able to put the motorbike in the back and secure it with tensioning straps. Then when we stopped somewhere, I could take it out and tear around a bit.”

It’s been some 17 years since the bus was licensed, but it has lost none of its fascination. It first spent five years on loan to a museum in Sinsheim, Germany, right next to the Kellys’ houseboat. When the museum ran low on space, Joey took the bus back into his care. “It really is a weird bus, but that’s that what makes it so unique. They were really on to something, sticking another six metres on the back,” says the musician. And despite its age, the double decker still runs like a charm. So – will it be headed back out on tour? Joey Kelly chuckles to himself: “The bus is 40 years old. It’s reliable, but my sister’s standards of comfort are even higher than they used to be. Even if mine aren’t.” In any case, there is no way he wants to sell his ‘Lindworm’.