

The double-decker as a symbol of London



Considered as an iconic symbol of England and Great Britain, double decker buses have dominated English transport for over a century, following its introduction in 1847 by Adams & Co of Fairfield in the UK.

Miss Phyllis Thompson was the first licensed female to drive a double-decker in 1941.

Transport carriages were initially drawn by horses, before the production of fuel-driven transport.



Traditionally red in colour, these buses have two decks, and the earliest models did not have a roof on the second level.

They were, therefore, used by travel agencies to allow tourists to view the many attractions of the country, through time-saving city tours. These models were, however, abandoned in general public transport for safety reasons.

The accepted length of a double-decker bus in the UK is 9.5 metres (31 ft 2 in) to 11.1 metres (36 ft 5 in).

The maximum length allowed is 18.75 metres (61 ft 6 in). There aren't any restrictions on height, but the accepted height is 4.38 metres (14 ft 4 in).

“Highbridge” buses may be about 8 inches taller.



The shorter length, with larger seating capacity and the efficient use of road area, has made these buses popular among public transport operators.

The 'Routemaster' model of 1956 was the most widely used and was in operation for over half a century, but it presented difficulties in accommodation of physically challenged passengers since the staircase led to the second floor.

Although discontinued from general service in 2005, they were used on heritage route 15H by 'Transport for London' as vintage buses, but that too ceased in 2014 due to the massive operational costs and low benefaction.



A hybrid-powered double-decker bus was manufactured in 2007 and more of this entered the service in London starting from 2008.

During the 2012 Summer Olympics, a new 'Routemaster' was also introduced. It was designed by 'Aston Martin' and architects 'Foster & Partners' and was made more suitable for physically challenged users.

It was built using modern green technology which includes solar panels costing up to £300,000 (\$492,000 U.S.) each.

This model presents 15% more fuel efficiency than the previous hybrid design and is 40% more cost effective than the diesel driven double-deckers.



Under an environmental conservation project located around London, five, all-electric emission-free double-decker buses were developed in China by BYD and released for public use in March 2016, in routes around London where pollution is a major issue. London's "Environment and Energy Unit" was glad to welcome these new instalments to London transport, where its iconic double-deckers were now in use under a greener and cost efficient design.



Big red buses are recognized - and even found - all over the world, and people recognize them as symbols of London. Visitors climb into London buses to go and see the Niagara Falls.

London busses can be seen driving round Europe to advertise big department stores, or British events.

They don't need to have the words "London Transport" on the side of them: they are instantly recognized by millions of people!



It was over 100 years ago, on October 25th 1911, that the London General Omnibus Company ran their last horse-drawn omnibus through the streets of the capital.

Since then the big red motor bus has been London's "king of the road". Today, every day, thousands of Londoners use the big red buses to move - often slowly - around town; and lots of tourists know that a one-day London bus pass, valid on all regular bus routes, offers a wonderful way to see Britain's capital city.



The most famous London buses, however, are not those that filled the Capital's streets in the 1930's, but the powerful "Routemasters" which date from the 1950's and 60's.

These are the buses that have been taken all over the world, the buses that you can see in the tourist brochures, and the ones which have been sold, in miniature, to millions of visitors and souvenir hunters.



The Routemaster is an icon in itself!

With its open platform at the back end, the Routemaster was the most popular bus in London, because passengers could climb on and off anywhere, even if the bus was moving (though this was not recommended!)

These buses were designed specially for London, by people who knew what London needed, and they served their purpose well, and did so for half a century!



Still, it's not too late to enjoy travelling on one of these historic buses. Some of the old buses have been preserved, and were used on two "heritage routes" through the center of London, specially for tourists. Route 9 went from the Royal Albert Hall to Aldwych, via Piccadilly circus and Trafalgar Square; but the last Routmasters were used on this route in 2014. The only route left is Route 15, which goes from Trafalgar Square to the Tower of London, via St. Paul's Cathedral. But other old Routemasters are used by the tourist bus companies, which offer trips round the center of London.



Ever wondered why London buses are red, or where the idea for a double-decker originated from?

Discover the fascinating history behind the capital's famous bus fleet.

Resplendent in bright red, the Routemaster bus first appeared on London's streets in the mid-'50s and quickly became as much a part of the city's identity as Beefeaters and the [Tower of London](#).

For half a century, they lent a certain informality to city life, courtesy of a rear platform that allowed passengers to hop on and off at will.



The Routemaster was a cutting-edge design by Douglas Scott, whose only notable prior work was that bastion of the upper-middle class, the AGA cooker. While the Routemaster was for the masses, Scott brought some of this aspirational sensibility to the bus's design.

The interior was more luxurious than the average family car of the era and it came with all the mod cons – power steering, properly padded seats and decent ventilation.

Riding the bus suddenly became special. Passengers were rewarded with unparalleled views of the capital from the top deck, whether passing the roaring lions of Trafalgar Square on Route 9 or taking the scenic Route 15 to capture the majesty of [St Paul's Cathedral](#).

You can still enjoy the 15H 'heritage route' today, despite the fact the Routemaster was taken out of service in 2005, almost half a century after its debut in 1956.



But the double-decker bus wasn't a London invention. It was stolen from an enterprising Parisian in the 19th century who created a horse-drawn double-decker vehicle then known as an omnibus.

Coachbuilder George Shillibeer transported the idea back to the capital in 1829, setting up the first London bus route between Paddington and Bank.

Travelling by bus became a social occasion as well as a newfangled way to get from A to B – it was a chance to catch up on the latest gossip.

“On smooth roads people frequently get prosy and tell long stories, and even those who don't talk may have very unpleasant predilections,” said [Charles Dickens](#).



A FEW FUN FACTS

- For any BC readers, here's a fun fact for you: did you know that the first North American city to integrate a double-decker bus into their public transit system was Victoria, British Columbia?
- England's first licensed female driver of a double-decker bus was Phyllis Thompson in 1941.
- The buses' external appearance was updated again in 2012. This new look pays tribute to the Routemaster design but also includes handicap accessibility and green technology.

