

Bring 'em on!

Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free welcomes this development. Our coalition called for double-deckers in our [alternatives](#) report and throughout the process.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/09/nyregion/09double.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin

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With Nostalgia in Overdrive, Double-Decker Bus Gets a Trial Run

David Goldman for The New York Times

When Darrayle Williams drove a new double-decker bus on Monday, he got looks from pedestrians. "They're aghast," he said.

By APRIL DEMBOSKY

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At 6-foot-7 and 400 pounds, Darrayle Williams might just be the perfect man to drive New York City's newest bus.

On Monday, Mr. Williams slid behind the wheel of a double-decker coach, the first two-story public bus in New York since it made a brief and ill-fated return in the 1970s. It was impossible to be subtle about the moment, and Mr. Williams did not even try. “Big guy, big bus,” he said.

He proved himself adept at maneuvering the king-size vehicle.

“It’s a very solid, steady ride,” Mr. Williams said. As the air-conditioning beat down through individual vents over each upholstered seat, the bus took the corner at 34th Street with minimal tipping sensation, giving riders upstairs a privileged view of the skyscrapers down 34th, then Fifth Avenue, and a sense of majesty, mixed with mild dissociation, above the street-level world scurrying below.

Because of increased ridership and higher gas costs, the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) is thinking of bringing back the double-decker, which until now had been the sole province of tour bus companies.

Beginning on Thursday, the authority will rotate the bus through designated routes for 30 days. The authority will solicit opinions from passengers as well as Mr. Williams, to gauge how the bus handles in city traffic.

The bus drew a fair number of stares during a demonstration on Monday, with reporters on board (most of whom chose to sit on top). But Howard H. Roberts, Jr., the president of NYC Transit, said, “This is not just a show.”

He added, “It’s not a movement to titillate the public.”

If the trial goes well, the authority will buy an unspecified number of double-deckers for an expanded test. The bus now being used is on loan from the ABC Bus Company, a partner with the Belgian manufacturer Van Hool. Each double-decker costs roughly \$650,000, said Elliot G. Sander, the executive director and chief executive of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The agency is also considering a hybrid low-floor “articulated” bus — with an accordion-like middle — that costs \$920,000.

The test double-decker bus has a lavatory, but the authority intends to have it removed if it decides to purchase the buses. Once it is taken out, the bus will seat 83 passengers, 21 more than the New Flyer, the articulated buses now in use. The new two-level bus also has a low floor, eliminating the need for a wheelchair lift. Mr. Sander said the new buses, which would use ultralow sulfur diesel, are expected to run more efficiently and help the authority reduce its carbon footprint.

“There is a very real chance that New Yorkers will see this in the future,” Mr. Sander said at a press conference on Monday. “We hope it passes the test.”

Double-decker buses were taken out of service in the 1950s, Mr. Roberts said, in part because there were not enough manufacturers in the United States to update and improve the mechanics and keep costs reasonable.

“Unless you build your own bus, you’re a victim of the market,” Mr. Roberts said.

If things go well, the authority hopes other manufacturers will make competing models that can handle the city’s harsh operating conditions.

Monday’s unveiling of the new bus revealed some nostalgia for the double-decker. The authority brought along the Queen Mary, a double-decker that operated along Fifth Avenue from 1938 to 1953. The ripped vinyl seats, sloping aisles and old-house smell offered a stark contrast to the sleek modern version. The two were parked by Madison Square Park.

The newer edition is deep blue with gold trim, its seats upholstered in blue synthetic fabric, accented in canary yellow. Besides an air vent, each has its own seat belt and reading light. TV screens hang over the seats every few rows on the top level.

“It’s very well put together,” Floyd Codrington, 40, a bus maintainer for the authority who drove the Queen Mary to the event, said of the new double-decker. “I love sitting up high and looking down on the world.”

For the next month, the 13-foot-tall, 45-foot-long bus will alternate on local and express routes: the BxM3 from Yonkers to Manhattan, the X 17J between Staten Island and Manhattan, and the M5 on Fifth Avenue, provided the trees have been pruned enough to let the bus pass. If not, the M15 Limited, on First and Second Avenues, will substitute.

As Mr. Williams took the bus for a spin on Monday, some pedestrians looked up in puzzlement. A group of red-vested Gray Line tour representatives on the corner of 34th Street and Fifth Avenue pointed accusingly at the double-decker.

For all his practice driving the double-decker through the streets, Mr. Williams is used to the befuddled expressions. “They’re aghast,” he said. “They’re like, ‘Is this the bus of the future?’ ”