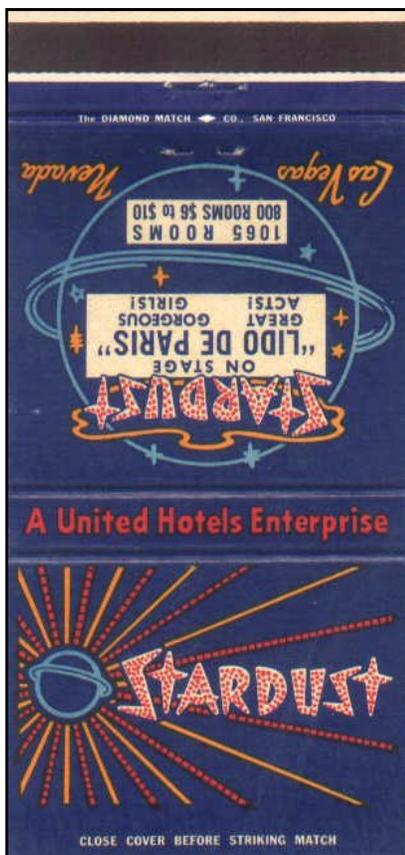


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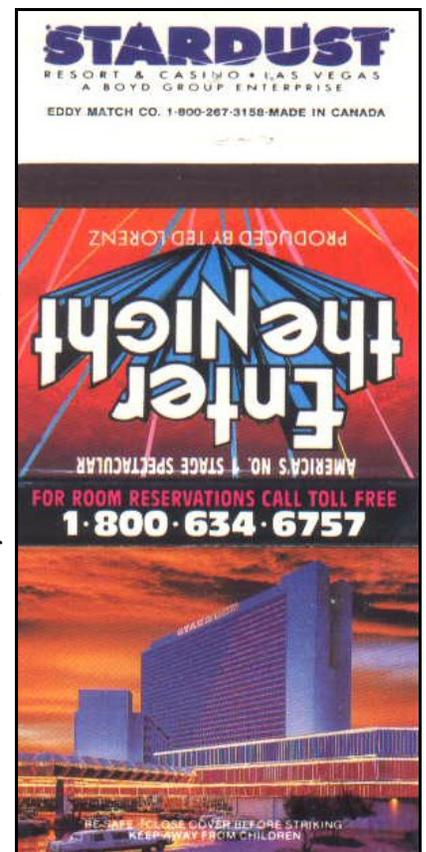
Goodbye, Stardust!

by
Mike Prero

The Stardust was one of the oldest hotels on the strip and opened at 12:00pm on July 2, 1958. The attendees of the opening included Governors, Senators, city and county officials and Hollywood celebrities. The entertainment registry started with the spectacular French production show *Lido de Paris*.



Billy Daniels became the first entertainer to sign a long-term residency contract in Las Vegas when he agreed to appear for 40 weeks per year for three years. Tony Cornero's dream became a \$10 million, 1,065 room reality with what was little more than a warehouse, charging just \$6.00 a day. The resort contained the *Big Dipper* swimming pool measuring 105 feet in length, a 13,500 square foot lobby, 16,500 square foot casino, and a rich decor. The Stardust sign was the largest in the world at the time. The Stardust gave visitors a panorama view of the solar system that exploded beyond the edges of the building. At the sign's center sat a plastic earth which was 16 feet in diameter, formed in slices three feet across, taken from the Sputnik which was off the front pages of the newspaper. Cosmic rays of neon and electric light bulbs pulled out from behind the earth in



all direction. Three-dimensional acrylic glass planets spun alongside 20 scintillating neon starbursts. Across the universe was a jagged galaxy of electric lettering spelling out "Stardust". The sign utilized 7,100 feet of neon tubing with over 11,000 bulbs along its 216 foot front. The neon constellation was reportedly visible 60 miles away.

The Stardust also held Las Vegas' only first run a drive-in theatre in the rear of the resort. The Stardust took over the closed Royal Nevada hotel-casino, and remodeled the showroom and made it the exhibition and convention center. A half circle was added to the Royal Nevada's roofline but the fountain of neon tubing marking the entry was saved. From 1959 to 1964, this wing was for the exclusive use of "high roller" guests who could stay in luxury two-story suites and share the use of the private pool with The Stardust showgirls who also lived in the Royal Nevada wing. The olympic size pool area was opened to the general public with the 1964 addition of the 9-story Stardust Tower that replaced half of the bungalow rooms.

In 1960, the resort added a new 4,800 square foot screen surface to its drive-in theatre. They also installed a new speaker system which carried practically stereophonic type sound. The same year, the Aku Aku Polynesian Restaurant is opened, complete with a Tiki Bar, and a large stone Tiki head marking the entrance from the outside. The Stardust was the leader in rooms until 1969 when The International opened. In 1964, the landmark façade was updated, expanding out into the parking lot by the highway. In 1965, a spectacular new roadside sign replaced the old circular sign at a cost of \$500,000. Its form was blurred by a scatter of star shapes, a shower of stardust. At night, incorporating neon and incandescent bulbs in the animation sequence, light fell from the stars, sprinkling from the top of the 188 foot tall sign down over the Stardust name, igniting a frenzy and then snowing down onto the fortunate people below.

In 1966, Howard Hughes attempted to buy the Stardust for \$30.5 million but the antitrust division blocked his takeover on the grounds of possibly violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. In 1977, the Stardust went through another remodeling. The bombastic galactic theme was abandoned, though the roadside sign remained, and the façade was covered with animated neon tubing and trimmed with mirrored finish facets. The new porte cochere sparkled with 1,000 small incandescent bulbs. The encrustation of bulbs turned solid mass into ethereal form. In 1980, the Aku Aku Polynesian Restaurant closed. The giant stone Tiki head at the entrance was later moved to an island in an artificial lake at Sunset Park in Las Vegas. In 1984, the Nevada Gaming Commission gave the highest fine ever issued in Nevada with the \$3 million fine against the resort for skimming. Suspicions, accusations and controversy about the Stardust's hidden ownership over the years was finally squelched when Sam Boyd's locally-based, squeaky-clean gaming company purchased the Stardust in March of 1985.

Siegfried & Roy got their Las Vegas start at the Stardust with the help of mob associate Frank Rosenthal after he gave them Allen Glick's Rolls Royce. Wayne Newton signed a ten-year deal with the Stardust in 1999, for a reported \$25,000,000 per year, the largest entertainment contract in Las Vegas at the time. After five and half years, Newton ended his run in late April 2005, and George Carlin moved into his theater. Magician Rick Thomas premiered at the hotel on March 25, 2005. The Stardust Theater was booked with legendary stars during its last month of operation including Tim Conway and Harvey Korman. The last act to perform in the Stardust Theater were Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme on October 28, 2006.

The Stardust officially closed at 12:00pm (Pacific Time) on November 1, 2006. In 2007, construction will begin on Echelon Place, which will replace The Stardust. The Neon Museum and Boyd Gaming have arranged to preserve the world famous Stardust Sign, moving it to the Neon Museum. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stardust_Resort_&_Casino]