

1927 - Prohibition and Hollywood Give Birth to the “Midnight Limited”

Thanks to the resounding success of the Mojave Limited route, in 1927, when the [Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad acquired fifteen “Berkshire”](#) type locomotives from Baldwin Locomotive Works, AT&SF saw fit to assign one of these brand new Berkshires to pull a newly repainted consist of [heavyweight Pullman cars](#). This revamped service was christened the “Midnight Limited,” a moniker initially coined by Oasis Palms passengers who would listen for the train’s midnight whistle, as it approached the Oasis Palms plateau above town. That whistle served as a 30-minute warning, signaling passengers to wrap up their activities and avoid missing their ride home.

The [Los Angeles Herald & Express](#), in one of its most tantalizing editorials, rhapsodized about the captivating nocturnal journey into the desert:

Step aboard the rolling Midnight Party in the Desert! Santa Fe and Oasis Palms have joined forces to offer you the ultimate getaway. Departing from Los Angeles at 5 PM, you'll be treated to a sumptuous dinner in the elegant Midnight Limited Club car, where you can socialize with fellow travelers in the rear-facing Observation car. As the sun sets in the west, you'll roll down the tracks to the night of your life, arriving at the enchanting Oasis Palms at or before 9:30 PM. During your 3-hour layover in this desert oasis, you can immerse yourself in the exotic desert nightlife of Oasis Palms, with multiple venues offering dancing, games, and live entertainment. Just after the stroke of midnight, the return journey to Los Angeles commences at 12:30 AM, where the festivities continue aboard with your newfound friends well into the early morning hours. After a night of exhilarating activities, you can unwind in the brand-new, comfortable Midnight Limited reclining seats and arrive back in Los Angeles at 5 AM, rejuvenated and ready to embrace a new day."

The fleet of Pullman cars underwent a dramatic

transformation, donning a striking satin and gloss black tuxedo paint scheme. Designed by none other than the famed Hollywood costumer [Gilbert Adrian](#), these cars sported satin black exteriors adorned with bold yellow lettering, complemented by glossy black, yellow, and red stripes running along their sides. To add an extra touch of flair, Adrian specified that the roofs be painted silver—a feature that not only heightened the cars' aesthetics but also helped deflect the Mojave desert sun, keeping the interiors cool during the day. Another distinctive element of the Midnight Limited's design was the use of one-way frosted windows, allowing passengers to peer outside at night while maintaining their privacy from curious onlookers and paparazzi as the train left the station.

The dramatic paint scheme received widespread acclaim from both the press and the public, and it's often regarded as a precursor to the iconic Santa Fe "Warbonnet" silver/red/yellow design that would later adorn the railroad's new fleet of transcontinental streamliners.



Midnight Limited

Designed by famed Hollywood costume designer Gilbert Adrian, the Midnight Limited cars were satin black with dramatic yellow lettering and gloss black, yellow, and red stripes adorning the sides of the cars contrasting silver roofs. The Santa Fe 4501 Berkshire and tender were painted to match.

The dramatic paint scheme is often thought to be the precursor to the infamous Santa Fe "Warbonnet" silver/red/yellow design used on the Santa Fe Super Chief and El Capitan.



The Midnight Limited was a marvel of luxury and efficiency, boasting a seven-car consist, each named after a town on its schedule. Leading the way was the baggage car (3200 Los Angeles), its primary duty to carry parcels for the Railway Express Agency. Following closely was the combination car (3201 Pasadena), a vehicle that held not only crew quarters but also a Railway Post Office responsible for the crucial task of shuttling mail bags from the California border to Los Angeles each morning. It was here that the heartbeats of communities were exchanged in the form of letters, news, and correspondence, keeping the spirit of connection alive.

First in line among the passenger cars was a private car, a testament to opulence, owned by none other than studio executive, Louis B.

Mayer. His custom passenger car (3202 Hollywood) was a world unto itself, featuring a stateroom adorned with elegance, sleeping quarters for eight to 12 people, a spacious living room resplendent with comfort, and a private dining area for exclusive indulgence. The car was staffed by a team of three people, including a steward, a chef, and a personal assistant all on the MGM payroll. Within its confines, Meyer's exclusive guests included studio executives, movie stars, politicians, and the crème de la crème of Los Angeles society. Hollywood was the only car in the Midnight Limited not named after a stop on the Midnight Limited schedule.

Beyond the private car, the Midnight Limited continued to pamper its passengers with its lavish club/dining car (3203 San Bernardino), a rolling oasis of luxury with a well-appointed bar and elegant white-clothed dining tables. It was here that travelers could savor not just the flavors of the journey but also the camaraderie of fellow passengers.

Further along, the gleaming rails were two deluxe passenger cars (3204 Barstow, 3205 Oasis Palms). Both featured plush reclining seats

that cradled passengers in comfort, making the four-hour journey home feel like a dreamy interlude. These cars were designed to cocoon travelers in luxury, offering them an escape from the mundane.

At the tail end of this splendid ensemble was the rear-facing observation car (3206 Needles), where seating was arranged around the car's perimeter, encouraging social interaction among passengers. Here, travelers could gaze out upon the ever-changing desert landscape and share stories, forging connections that would last a lifetime.

The Midnight Limited embarked on its nightly journey from Los Angeles to Oasis Palms and back, faithfully serving this route for 15 years from 1927-1942. After the outbreak of World War II, the train was transitioned to primarily transporting troops and equipment to Patton's Camp Goffs army base that was established in nearby Goffs, California.