

Lunar Poker Hits the USA

(35% Hold Percentage with a 2.7% House Advantage)

By Steve Karoul

The term “Lunar Poker” conjures up an array of visions in one’s imagination, ranging from our NASA Astronauts going “all in” in a round against the Russians on the International Space Station, to passengers onboard a Virgin Galactic flight competing in the world’s first “Universal Poker Championship” above the stratosphere!

Imaginations can run wild at times but there actually is a new casino Table Game called Lunar Poker that is rapidly gaining in popularity around the world and it’s destined to create quite a stir throughout the casino industry. Lunar Poker recently made its debut in the US and has Casino Managers scratching their heads as to why it’s taken so long to make an appearance here, given the quality and attractiveness of the game.

Rumor has it, that a Team of Casino Executives originally took a number of different versions of the base game from Eastern Block European and Russian casinos and then further developed this already powerful product with some very unique features to compete with the best in the American market. The game math was initially verified by the renown poker wiz, Stanley Ko, from Las Vegas and has subsequently been fully reviewed and certified by GLI. All this has taken approximately five years to complete and now this so called “Caribbean Stud Poker on steroids” type game is about to roll out across the United States. Industry experts believe that Lunar Poker will leave most existing poker variants in its wake.

The developers and licensors of Lunar Poker are based in Macau. They have recently established a new development team conveniently located in the United States. Prior to entering the US market, the game developers thought it best to test the market in Australasia first. Australasian Casino Executives in Macau, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand were very excited about the new game and rushed to file the game for approval with their respective local Gaming Boards. Overall acceptance has been almost immediate after experienced gaming personnel were able to view and participate in an actual demo of the new game. The feedback has been universally positive and the product seems to be in a class of its own. It is still early but this new game may be viewed as a good opportunity for many casinos wishing to improve and increase both their table game revenue and the numbers of table game players. The base game is very attractive but it becomes even more exciting and appealing to players due to some of the unique side bet features as well as an added progressive jackpot option.

The basic table game, along with a progressive jackpot, was installed in a South African casino called “Carnivale” more than 3 years ago on four tables which have flourished and are still going strong today. The game was also tested in the US market at Cache Creek Casino in California with two units of the basic felt game but with none of the new features nor the progressive jackpot system. These games are

still in action after 8 months. This makes one wonder what a full-fledged product like Lunar Poker would do in many casinos across the country that are looking to increase their table games revenues.

The base game has proven to hold approximately 35% of cash drop and the side bets provide a strong house advantage of over 2.7% for the casino. This occurs innocuously while the players are engrossed in a “real” game of poker. It’s no wonder that the gaming industry is starting to take a much closer look at this new game.

Lunar Poker is the only true game of draw poker played against a dealer currently available in today’s market place and was developed with the poker player’s every desire in mind. One can only speculate as to how much migration casinos may see from carnival poker variants and actual Texas Hold’em tables that offer low yields for the casino. One would have to guess that this conversion could be quite significant and beneficial to a casino operator. It is a really easy and fun game to play.

Even though Lunar Poker is loaded with several different options for the player to better compete against the dealer’s hand, the game itself is still relatively straight forward and very enjoyable to play which is one of the reasons why play acceptance of this new game is so high.

For example, once the Ante bets are placed, the players and dealer each receive 5 cards with the dealer’s 5th card exposed just like in Caribbean Stud Poker. Then the real fun begins with the players having the option to buy a 6th card or exchange 2-5 cards in hope of improving their hand before they decide to play or fold against the dealer. The dealer basically sits on their original 5 cards and just like in Caribbean Stud Poker must qualify with Ace-King to pay out on the players raise bets.

However, if the dealer doesn’t qualify with Ace-King, the players with high paying combinations can chose to force the dealer to change their highest value card with the next card from the deck in a second attempt for the dealer to qualify.

Each of these options attracts a fee equivalent to the player’s original Ante bet which is immediately locked away as casino revenue. Henceforth, we have the basic game of Lunar Poker .

Lunar Poker goes a step further by offering a number of additional highly competitive and very popular features which include:

- “Instant Cash Payout” Feature: If the player lands a Royal or Straight Flush in the initial 5 card deal, they will automatically be paid out at least 600 to 1 or 200 to 1 respectively on their Ante bet. Casino operators may offer even higher odds if they elect to do so. We’re told that the math stacks up for this option.
- “SUPER Side Bet” Feature: The player has the option of participating in the “SUPER Side Bet” feature at the beginning of each round, where they can win at generous odds if they strike any one of 8 “SUPER” combinations within their initial 5 card hand. The pay table for this feature appears to outdo the competition and is very appealing to most players.

Layered on top of all this, the Casino Operator also has the option to offer a progressive jackpot where we must assume that jackpot totals will match or surpass those of the carnival game poker variants as the popularity of Lunar Poker increases among players and casinos.

One can see why people would say that this poker game seems just too good to be true. Many are still struggling to find the catch but there isn't one. The game is very transparent and straight forward. For now, all we can do is wait and watch to see how Lunar Poker will develop in the United States and if the pumped up version will thrive here. Based upon initial results and history abroad, one can only speculate that the boys from Macau will be here for many years to come. There are many new games introduced each year but only a very few ever gain optimal success. Lunar Poker definitely has all of the attributes to be one of them.

Steve Karoul is a recognized casino consultant with 35 years of hands-on experience with the best casinos both within the United States and internationally. He is also an authority on all aspects of casino marketing. Steve has lived in numerous countries and has conducted casino marketing activities in well over 100 countries around the world. He also monitors Poker, online Poker and online Gaming around the world. He is an author, a lecturer and an educator who often injects his own hands on experiences and openly shares his ideas and thoughts with fellow industry executives. Telephone + (1-860) 536-1828 or skaroul@comcast.net or see www.euroasiacasino.com