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mastering joker wild video poker how to play as an

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Mastering Joker Wild Video Poker: How to Play as an Expert

Video poker has long been a favorite pastime for casino enthusiasts and home gamblers alike. Its blend of skill, strategy, and the thrill of a potential big win makes it a standout choice among casino games. Among the many variants, **Joker Wild video poker** stands out for its unique twist: the Joker acts as a wildcard, dramatically altering hand potentials and strategy. This guide is designed to help you **master Joker Wild video poker: how to play as an expert**. Whether you're a seasoned player looking to refine your tactics or a newcomer eager to understand the basics, this comprehensive article will walk you through everything you need to know.

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What Is Joker Wild Video Poker?

Joker Wild is a popular variant of video poker that incorporates a Joker card as a wildcard, meaning it can substitute for any other card to complete a hand. This feature creates a higher probability of hitting strong hands like a Royal Flush or a Full House, but it also introduces unique strategic considerations.

The game is played on a standard 52-card deck plus an additional Joker, giving players 53 cards to draw from. When you receive a Joker in your initial hand, you can immediately choose to keep it or discard it, depending on your strategy.

Basic Rules and Gameplay

1. The Initial Deal

At the start, you place your bet and receive a five-card hand. Each card is dealt face-up on the screen.

2. Holding or Discarding

You have the option to hold any number of cards (from zero to five) and discard the rest. This decision is crucial and forms the core of your strategy.

3. The Re-Deal

After making your selections, the machine deals new cards to replace the discarded ones. The final hand is

evaluated for payout based on the paytable.

4. Payouts

Payouts vary depending on the paytable you choose. Common paytables include 9/6, 8/5, and 7/4. A 9/6 paytable offers a 9:1 payout for a Royal Flush and a 6:1 payout for a Straight Flush.

Understanding Hand Rankings in Joker Wild

The presence of the Joker changes how hands are evaluated. Below is a typical hand ranking for Joker Wild, but always check the specific paytable of the machine you're playing on.

- Royal Flush (Joker Wild) – 9:1 (or 6:1 on 8/5 paytable)
- Straight Flush (Joker Wild) – 6:1
- Four of a Kind – 4:1
- Full House – 3:1
- Flush – 3:1
- Straight – 3:1
- Three of a Kind – 2:1
- Two Pair – 1:1
- Joker Wild (Joker + Any Three of a Kind) – 1:1
- Joker Wild (Joker + Any Two Pair) – 1:1

Strategic Overview

Mastering Joker Wild video poker requires a blend of probability calculation, risk assessment, and disciplined play. Below are the key strategic elements:

- Paytable Selection – Choose a paytable that maximizes your expected return. 9/6 offers the best theoretical return (approximately 99.5% RTP) when played correctly.
- Joker Handling – Deciding whether to keep the Joker depends on the other cards in your hand. A Joker can transform a weak hand into a winning one, but sometimes discarding it is the better move.
- Card Counting (Not Traditional) – While you can"t track cards like in blackjack, you can keep mental notes of which high cards are missing to gauge the likelihood of hitting certain hands.
- Probability Tables – Use a probability chart to determine the best hold for each possible initial hand.

Play-by-Play: How to Play as an Expert

1. Start with the 9/6 Paytable

Before you even place a bet, confirm that the machine uses the 9/6 paytable. This paytable offers the highest return for Joker Wild and is essential for mastering the game.

2. Analyze Your Initial Hand

Immediately after the deal, evaluate the hand in the context of Joker Wild. Consider the following scenarios:

- Hand Contains a Joker – If you receive a Joker, decide whether it's beneficial to keep it. For example, a Joker + a pair of Aces gives you a chance at a Four of a Kind.
- No Joker, but a Pair – Keep the pair and discard the other three cards. The probability of drawing a Three of a Kind or better is high.
- Two Pairs – Keep both pairs. A Joker could complete a Full House or Three of a Kind.
- Straight or Flush Potential – If you have four cards in a row or four cards of the same suit, keep them. The

Joker can complete the straight or flush.

- High Card – If you have a high card like Ace, King, or Queen, consider holding it if it's part of a potential straight or flush.

3. Make Your Holds

Use a strategy chart to decide which cards to keep. For example:

1. Joker + Pair – Keep both.
2. Joker + Three of a Kind – Keep all five cards; you already have a strong hand.
3. Four Cards to a Flush – Keep all four; draw one.
4. Four Cards to a Straight – Keep all four; draw one.
5. No Strong Combination – Keep high cards that could form a straight or flush.

4. Evaluate the Re-Deal

After discarding, the machine will draw new cards. Pay attention to the outcome and compare it with your expected probabilities. Over time, this will help you refine your hold decisions.

5. Repeat and Refine

Play multiple hands to gain experience. The more you play, the better you'll understand the nuances of Joker Wild and the effectiveness of different holds.

Advanced Tactics and Variations

1. Joker Wild vs. Joker Wild (Joker + Any Three of a Kind)

When you have a Joker and three cards of the same rank, you already have a winning hand. However, you might still consider discarding a card if you suspect a higher payout is possible.

2. Joker Wild (Joker + Any Two Pair)

In this scenario, you can hold the Joker and the two pairs, giving you a chance at a Full House or a Three of a Kind. The decision to hold or discard depends on the specific cards.

3. Using the Joker as a Wild for Straights

Some players prefer to keep the Joker only if it can help complete a straight. For instance, a hand of 7&` 8&f 9&c 10&` + Joker can become a Straight if the Joker is treated as an Ace or King.

4. Paytable Variations

While 9/6 is the most common, some machines offer 8/5 or 7/4 paytables. In these cases, adjust your strategy accordingly. For example, on an 8/5 paytable, a Royal Flush pays 8:1, and a Straight Flush pays 5:1.

Bankroll Management and Betting Tips

Even the best strategy can be undermined by poor bankroll management. Here are key principles:

- Set a Budget – Decide how much you're willing to lose before you start playing.
- Bet Size – Keep your bets between 1–5% of your total bankroll. For example, if your bankroll is $1,000, bet between $10 and $50 per hand.
- Track Your Results – Maintain a log of wins, losses, and streaks. This helps identify patterns and adjust your strategy.
- Take Breaks – Avoid fatigue. Short breaks improve focus and decision-making.
- Know When to Walk Away – Set win and loss limits. If you hit either, stop playing for the session.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Ignoring the Paytable – Playing a 9/6 machine with an 8/5 paytable reduces your expected return.
2. Discarding the Joker Too Often – The Joker can dramatically improve weak hands. Use it wisely.
3. Holding Low Cards – Holding low cards with no potential for a straight or flush is rarely profitable.
4. Overcomplicating Decisions – Stick to proven strategy charts. Overthinking can lead to suboptimal holds.
5. Chasing Losses – Raising your bet to recover losses increases risk and can lead to larger losses.

Online vs. Physical Machines

Both online and physical Joker Wild video poker offer similar gameplay, but there are subtle differences that can affect your experience:

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