

MACH 2

Concorde
magazine

Concorde displays
*The British fleet shown at
their most dazzling*



Christmas issue
December 2015

SEASON'S GREETINGS

In this special issue we feature two stunning historic events centred on Concorde, both of which took place over Christmas.

On Christmas Eve 1985 British Airways marked the 10th anniversary of their Concorde service with a spectacular aerial display, as four of the Concorde fleet took to the sky for a formation flight over south-western England. We have the great pleasure of including an account of this flight from one of the actual participants – Captain John Hutchinson, who flew with the crew of Concorde G-BOAG. In addition, we are delighted to feature an eyewitness view and some of the fabulous mid-air photographs taken during the flight by renowned aviation photographer Adrian Meredith.

A few years later, on Boxing Day 1989, the British Concorde fleet was gathered for another dazzling photo opportunity. We end with engineer Pete Comport's account of his work in bringing the fleet together for this event.

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Cover and main photographs by kind
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A UNIQUE FORMATION

The photographs and videos of four British Concorde's flying in formation still enthrall viewers today. BA Concorde captain John Hutchinson recalls his role in making this epic flight.

CHRISTMAS EVE 1985 was a very special day in the history of Concorde; it was the day when four Concorde's flew in formation for the first and last time. This unique formation was flown to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the first commercial service to Bahrain on the 21st January 1976.

At that time I was a part time presenter for BBC television airshow programmes and I flew in the #4 aircraft under the command of Captain Dave Leney. The formation lead aircraft was under the command of Captain Brian Walpole, the #2 under the command of Captain John Eames and the #3 under the command of Captain John Cook.

It was a rather dank and dismal day at Heathrow as the four aircraft taxied out for take-off. Once the formation had arrived at the holding point for the departure runway and all checks had been completed, the aircraft were given clearance to line up and take off at 15-second intervals. It must have been quite a shock for all the communities in the Heathrow area to witness and hear the sound of four Concorde's roaring off one after the other!

Once airborne, the aircraft climbed to 13,000 feet at a speed of 270 knots in clear airspace between layers of cloud and formed up in echelon starboard. My role sitting in the right-hand seat was as a commentator for

an airshow programme due to be shown by the BBC later in the year. We flew two other formations on that day; one was inspired by the Red Arrows "Concorde" formation and the other was a diamond formation.

Dave Leney very kindly allowed me to fly for a while and it was striking how easy it was to fly that wonderful aircraft in formation. Literally, with the aircraft properly trimmed and with her superb handling qualities, you could fly her quite effortlessly in the correct position. As far as keeping station longitudinally was concerned I decided that the simplest thing to do was to set the outboard engines at a fixed power setting and use the inboard engines only to adjust position forwards or backwards; the reason being that small movements of the throttles created significant power changes in the Olympus engines and by using the inboards only I was able to mitigate the effect of those power changes and so lessen the chances of over correcting. It worked very well.

At the end of it all, the four aircraft did a 5-second break from echelon starboard and returned to Heathrow for a stream landing, bringing to an end an epic day's flying. I feel very privileged to have been a part of that extraordinary day and the memories will always remain etched in my mind. Thank you Concorde for so many wonderful memories!



Awaiting passengers

BA wanted to share the anniversary with as many of their staff as possible, so they allocated 65 seats on each aircraft.

*Photo:
Baz Glenister*

Preparing for take-off

Sixteen Olympus engines roar as the Concorde "display team" head out to the runway.

Photo: Baz Glenister



Aircraft and flight crews

G-BOAA

CAPTAIN Brian Walpole
SENIOR FIRST OFFICER Dave Rowland
ENGINEERING OFFICER Ian Smith

G-BOAF

CAPTAIN John Cook
SENIOR FIRST OFFICER Jock Lowe
ENGINEERING OFFICER Bill Brown

G-BOAC

CAPTAIN John Eames
SENIOR FIRST OFFICER Peter Horton
ENGINEERING OFFICER Roger Bricknell

G-BOAG

CAPTAIN David Leney
SENIOR FIRST OFFICER John White
ENGINEERING OFFICER Dave MacDonald



Ready to go

The aircraft gather before taking off just seconds apart.

Photo: source unknown

Planning the flight

Adrian Meredith, official Concorde photographer for British Airways

THIS WAS ONE of the most important and exciting photographic assignments I have ever undertaken, and very prestigious for Concorde. The date was Christmas Eve 1985; this was the only day possible that we could photograph four of the Concordes together, as they were not flying commercially that day. The photography was to promote and commemorate the 10-year anniversary of Concorde's commercial service.

We had a meeting three months before the shoot, with Captain Brian Walpole and BA PR manager John Silver. I had the original idea, which was to put all seven Concordes in the air. Brian Walpole said this would be impossible as there are always two in the hangers being serviced, and one aircraft would possibly be in the paint shop because British Airways were just putting the Concordes into the new Landor livery. However, with some manoeuvring we could possibly put four in the air. The estimated commercial cost for the photography was around £1 million.

Many hours were spent at the briefing sessions, to ensure the formations were tidy to military precision. Different formations were discussed; the pilots finally decided upon the swan, the diamond, and the echelon.

Nothing like this had ever been done before commercially. Concorde Senior Captains Brian Walpole and John Cook were experienced pilots and had a wealth of experience of flying in formation, from their days in the RAF. My task was to capture in essence the group formations. The flight plan was to take off from Heathrow, then fly to Filton in Bristol, the home of Concorde, down the Bristol Channel, and return to London, flying at a height of around 18,000 feet.

The Lear Jet had to be fitted with optically corrective glass in the windows, which wouldn't distort the camera's image. We were first to take off in the Lear Jet, from Heathrow, and special permission had to be granted for each Concorde to take off every 30 seconds, in succession. This had never been done before.

The weather was very dark and gloomy as it was December; the sun was low and watery. We rose above, and circled over the clouds to brighter skies, and as we looked down, we saw each Concorde pop through the clouds like a fired bullet. After the fourth aircraft had emerged we quickly descended and took chase at full throttle to try and catch them up. They steadily started to manoeuvre into position for the first formation.

The weather was very poor, and every time they set up for a different formation, a bank of cloud would roll in, and the Concordes would have to break off their positioning for safety. This gave me a brief chance to liaise

with the pilots, in between the shooting. As soon as they were back in formation, I knew the photography had to be very fast; on one occasion we banked steeply, sweeping over the top of the formation to get the perfect overhead shots. Other shots were taken side on, during one stage of a particular formation; the Concorde wing tips were only 70ft apart.

The entire exercise took one hour and 45 minutes, and all of the Concordes returned safely home. Thankfully, I had all the shots in the can.

Film of this historic flight can be seen on YouTube at: [TheConcordeChannel](#).

Keeping the Concorde dream alive

Faster than a rifle bullet, chasing the sun, ten miles high at the edge of space – life offered few greater thrills than flying supersonic Concorde.

To feel the unbelievable surge of power on take-off.

To see the sky turn deep blue with the view of the world's curvature.

To sense the nudge in the back when the re-heats were lit to send her through the sound barrier and well beyond.

To enjoy first-class-plus service, champagne and exclusively created cuisine as one travelled a mile every 2 1/2 seconds!

She was sheer charisma and her stunning shape exuded spectacular, breath-taking grace and power – a shape that turned all heads skywards wherever she flew, the world over.

That she no longer flies is a matter of great sadness.

Everything we do with Concorde is dedicated to all whose work and lives were encompassed by the supersonic phenomenon that is Concorde – to the pioneer designers, engineers and aviators; to those who skilfully flew and maintained her during 27 years of airline service; to the passengers who benefitted from, or were simply thrilled by supersonic flight; to the countless millions who admired her.

Concorde is the jewel in the crown of aviation. She and all those people will remain unforgettable.



“Concorde” formation

Perfectly poised, the four aircraft come into the classic, swan-like “Concorde” formation over Land’s End.
Photo: Adrian Meredith





Line of beauty

The four aircraft line up in “echelon starboard” formation. The aircraft originally flew in Landor livery, but photographer Adrian Meredith later altered the shot to show the most recent “Chatham Dockyard” livery.

Photo: Adrian Meredith





Dazzling contrast

The four Concordes, bathed in light, stand out against the thick grey cloud that hides them from being seen on the ground.

Photo: Adrian Meredith





A gathering of the fleet

Pete Comport, former Concorde engineer with British Airways

THE CHANCE to create this photograph arose on Boxing Day 1989. Our small Christmas working team wanted to get all the fleet serviceable ready for operations later in the week. I had a good working arrangement with Alan Holland Avery, BA Engineering's official photographer, so earlier in the week we planned that IF our team workload allowed I would call Alan from his Boxing Day tea and we would take some photos of all six aircraft.

Martin Maddison and I discussed how to lay out the aircraft on the tarmac (Concorde is not an easy aircraft to manoeuvre in tight spaces). I asked if we could do "chevron squadron" formation. I expected Martin to say it would be too difficult and take too long. Martin, however, said "OK" – he could fit the six aircraft around the floodlights.

We started to position the fleet, taking them out of the hangar and

lining up the nose of each aircraft. Our team helped by moving steps and other equipment to get clean shots. The man lift we used to take the shots was manoeuvred around the aircraft to get different views.

All the BA fleet except G-BOAC are in the photograph; OAC had flown out that morning on the 001 to New York. (During the Christmas break the scheduled operation scaled down to just the BA001; the same aircraft flew back the next day as the BA002, so OAC was staying over in JFK.) The two aircraft in the foreground had returned from JFK and a charter flight (I think it might have been a Lapland Father Christmas trip).

I remember vividly how from the ground the aircraft looked spectacular – the stunning curves, the angles of the wings, nose cone and landing gear all casting shadows, light and shade on the tarmac.

Alan asked for more light so Martin opened the hangar doors; light seeping through the mist of a December evening added a palpable atmosphere as we realised the spectacle was something special.

The tarmac we used is adjacent to the A4. There wasn't much traffic that evening, and I noticed headlights slowing down. It wasn't unusual to see people behind the wire mesh getting a few shots of the aircraft – it was a daily occurrence throughout the year. We spent around 30 minutes taking photos. Our session came to a halt only when Security rang me to say that the A4 had become effectively gridlocked by cars slowing down and stopping to see the fleet lit like a huge Christmas illumination!

One of the photographs was later published in the BA Engineering magazine, and Alan kindly gave me a copy.

A dazzling shot

The Christmas 1989 BA Engineering team pose in front of the British Concorde fleet (minus only G-BOAC). Pete Comport (front row, left) and Martin Maddison (back row, left) created this opportunity.

Photo: Alan Holland Avery

