

MACH 2

Concorde magazine

Concorde adventures
Charter flights

Stormy weather
*Overcoming the challenges
of winter*

Concorde Watch
*News from Manchester,
Duxford and Filton*

Issue 38
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INTRODUCTION

In this issue we look back at the achievements – and the challenges – involved in running some of the more demanding Concorde operations.

BA flight engineer David Macdonald recalls Concorde easily overcoming the difficulties posed by adverse winter weather. This leads in to our main feature, on the charter operations. How do you set about taking Concorde to a small airfield, or one that the aircraft has never visited before? How do you manage the aircraft in the remotest regions of the world? How do you find an airfield with a long enough runway to let a fully laden Concorde take off for a flight to New York? Some of the people who organised these services tell their stories here, and give us a glimpse of Concorde as she was rarely seen in everyday life.

Our Concorde Watch report into the work being done with the aircraft includes news from Manchester and Duxford. We also hear from Filton, where the former “Concorde at Filton” volunteers take their place again as guides to the last flying Concorde, Alpha Foxtrot.

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Cover photo: Concorde taking off from Bournemouth after a charter organised by Bath Travel to christen the new runway. Photo courtesy of the Bournemouth Daily Echo: <https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk>

The best seat in the house

David Macdonald, former *British Airways flight engineer on Concorde*, looks back from his garden chair to a seat in a much more exciting environment – Concorde’s flight deck. He gives his unparalleled view of the aircraft’s performance in unfamiliar airports and adverse weather conditions.

THE BACK GARDEN with a balmy temperature in the high sixties Fahrenheit is perhaps hardly the time to reminisce about winters gone by. Who knows where inspiration comes from, but not too many weeks ago I read a short article commenting on delays at London Heathrow during the last knockings of winter. We were hit with freezing fog, one of the more insidious forms of weather an airman can face.

Every aircraft’s Operations Manual will instruct that the aircraft must be de-iced before take-off when outside air temperature is +3 degrees Centigrade or below and visibility is below 1,000 metres (visible moisture in the air). The de-icing is usually accomplished by either a ‘drive-through’ fixed gantry or, more often in my experience, from a mobile tanker and spray hoses.

The term ‘de-icing’ is joined by ‘anti-icing’, which involves using a more sticky fluid that will adhere to an aircraft’s surface long enough to allow the plane to taxi to the runway and take off. This elapsed period is known as the ‘hold-over time’, and can be up to about 15 minutes. Freezing rain has the lowest hold-over time.

De-icing, Concorde style

There was a winter, probably in the 1980s, when we combined the Washington service with one of the New Yorks: thus just a brief stop at JFK, long enough to disembark the New York passengers and take on a little fuel. I think the motor racing crowd call it ‘splash and dash’. Throughout the 40 minutes or so on the ground it snowed – heavily. Armed with our new knowledge we



Winter at JFK

A snow-covered Alpha Fox at New York. During the 40-minute turnaround, however, Concorde’s airframe retained enough heat to dispel snow. Photo: David Macdonald

Ice protection system

The airframe built up heat during flight. In addition, the visor, cabin windows, and the black areas seen here at the wing root, under the wing leading edge, and around the engine intakes were electrically heated. Photo: Craig Sunter / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)

now know that at some point the question of de-icing would arise. In Concorde’s case, however, it had been noted that nothing was sticking to the aircraft; a steady run of water from the wings, but no wintry build-ups.

A good friend from BA’s New York Tech Staff and I boarded the aircraft and opened the centre doors, stepping out gingerly to inspect the wings. All we found were perfectly clear surfaces with only a light cover of pleasantly warm water.

Many readers will already know that Concorde’s skin temperature would rise to the limiting value of



+127° Centigrade (400 Kelvin) during a north Atlantic crossing. Thus, a positive emerged from Concorde’s deep heat.

Boiling away rain

As an illustration of Concorde’s skin temperature becoming hotter than the boiling point of water, then I offer the following . . .

I recall a Certificate of Airworthiness renewal test flight where the aircraft had been refuelled and left

outside ready for an early morning get-away. It had rained heavily overnight, resulting in my first 'snag' of the day: there was about two inches of water in the interspace of one of the flight deck windows.

Two hours later at around Mach 1.6 to 1.7, on our way up to Mach 2, peripheral vision picked up a suspicion of movement to the left – bubbles were rising through that entrapped rain water. Within minutes the bubbles developed into a full rolling boil, and shortly after acquisition of Mach 2 the water was gone completely, leaving only a light spatter such as may be found on kitchen equipment. The aircraft concerned was G-BOAA (Alpha Alpha), and for years afterwards I would glance at the window and recall the event. She now lives in peace at East Fortune near Edinburgh; I wonder if the staining is still there.

Overcoming fog

"Fog up the river ... fog down the river ... Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish Heights."

A quote from the introduction to my favourite Charles Dickens – *Bleak House*: pertinent because on one of my morning New York services, at Flight Planning, it was clear that the whole of the North American east coast from Halifax Nova Scotia down to Baltimore and Washington was swathed in fog, the likes of which Dickens himself may have navigated in the 19th century!

In my early Flight Engineer years we would probably have cancelled the flight. The Comet 4 had a single fairly rudimentary autopilot; automatic landing was still some years away. My beloved Super VC10 had a dual autopilot installation and was retro-fitted with an Autoland system, but this was unreliable; it never worked properly and in due course it was removed.

But Concorde was different altogether; dual autopilots that could do everything an airman could wish for, equally at home in Dickensian fog

as at Mach 2 and 50,000 feet. So we took full tanks and made the flight – what else would we do?

One of the Flight Engineer's routines is to garner up-to-date weather reports for any airfield that would be of interest to us. Over the three-hour flight nothing had changed, thus it was no surprise to be sent into a holding pattern just to the south of JFK. Generally, being in the hold is a quiet time, but with lots of thinking and planning. For every destination there will be at least two other 'alternates' – airfields that we could get to if needed. Along that part of the east coast most of the other airfields would have been pretty busy in their own rights, so it would be good for us to have somewhere a little less busy. A scan of our charts came up with Atlantic City, New Jersey – a good long runway and all modern facilities. It was also close by, on a clear day one could probably see it, and the really good news was that they could take us off the hold, number one for landing.

Now we felt good, more comfortable – but not for long!

Less than five minutes later JFK air traffic control made the following broadcast, "all stations, all stations, New York Kennedy closed indefinitely due runway subsidence".

Just imagine the consternation on all the aircraft droning round the 'holds' – but we were on a promise, number one into Atlantic City. The quiet became a flurry of activity: a shout to cabin crew, "10 minutes to landing", a call to company office at JFK to tell them where we were going, a call to the handling agent,

who had never seen a Concorde before, to tell them what we need, then set-up for an autoland.

Autoland is not complex, but it has to be precise. Tune-in the Instrument Landing System guidance (ILS), select LAND mode, engage second autopilot and calm returns; we've done this many times before. Automation has lined us up with the runway and descent begins following glide slope guidance. I begin my height call-outs, read from the radio altimeter. Between 800 feet and 500 feet I glance up but there is nothing to see – just a dense grey curtain at some indeterminate distance ahead, but we never get any closer to it; it seems to travel with us.

The height calls continue: 400 feet; 300 feet, at which point the co-pilot confirms autoland system satisfactory; 200 feet; 100 feet (it's getting lighter); 50 feet, and the windscreens become ablaze with diffused white and red light; then 15 feet: decision height.

Captain confirms, "landing" – just time to sit back into my seat, tighten my belts and we're down!

Now for the difficult bit. We've never been to Atlantic City before, can't see a thing. An understanding Air Traffic Control asks if we'd like a 'follow me' truck – you bet!

We park; Butler Aviation handling agents turn out mob-handed. They've never handled a Concorde before, but ground electrics, fuel, start trucks, everything a crew would want was there waiting.

An hour and a half later we start engines to make a short flight to JFK; subsidence problem resolved.

Welcome guidance

A 'follow-me' truck seen from Concorde's flight deck as it guides the aircraft to the terminal. This one is at Rovaniemi in Finland.

Photo: David Macdonald



CONCORDE CHARTERS

Concorde was best known for ferrying businessmen and VIPs between London or Paris and New York. Yet Concorde also undertook charter flights, which travelled to more far-flung places or carried passengers on round trips just for the joy of supersonic flight. In this feature we recall some of the most notable of these flights.

AS SCHEDULED CONCORDE SERVICES became routine, in the late 1970s, the aircraft attracted increasing admiration from the general public. The idea of charter flights arose as a way to bring the Concorde experience to a wider range of people.

The first charters

The first person to charter Concorde was British Airways Captain Brian Calvert, with a group from his local pub: the Bell Inn at Aldworth in Berkshire. He was in the pub one night when the landlord said to him, "I think it's about time we had a go on the old girl".

"I think it's about time we had a go on the old girl"

Brian Calvert passed on the request to BA. At first the airline was not keen, the feeling being "This aircraft was not made for joyrides!" – but eventually they agreed to what would be the first supersonic round trip over the Bay of Biscay, a 2.5-hour flight that took place on 19 September 1978. Flights were priced at £100, with an extra £5 for the coach trip to the airport. There were also certificates and souvenirs produced for the passengers. Captain Calvert and the Bell's landlord and landlady managed to fill the chosen Concorde. The passengers were very unlike Concorde's usual patrons – they included a surgeon, a tractor driver, a gamekeeper, people from the Bell's brewery, and families including grandparents and young children. As the aircraft carried no luggage, they were treated to a very lively take-off, then a journey through the sound barrier and on to Mach 2. The passengers enjoyed themselves

The Bell, Aldworth

This Berkshire pub was the starting point for the first charter flight, enjoyed by the Bell's landlord and landlady, the regulars, and their families. Photo: Mark Percy / [geograph.org.uk](https://www.geograph.org.uk/) / [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mark_Percy_-_The_Bell_-_Aldworth_-_Berkshire_-_England_-_UK_-_2012-08-10_10.00.jpg) (CC BY-SA 2.0)

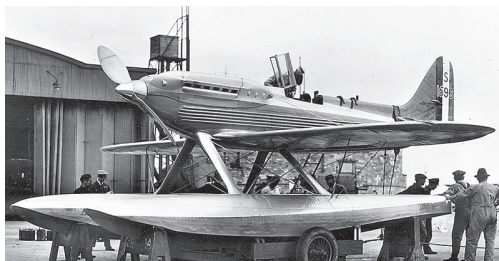
immensely; as Captain Calvert noted in his book *Flying Concorde*, "It was, I think, the most purely happy flight I have ever done".

Another early charter was organised by BA Concorde stewardess Jeannette Hartley. Jeannette asked BA how much it would cost to charter an aircraft for herself and some friends, "just with a slice of gateau and a glass of champagne". BA told her a 1-hour flight would cost £20,000, or £200 per passenger. At first only 11 people expressed an interest – but three days later, Jeannette was interviewed for a women's magazine and for the national press. After that, she filled her Concorde in just three weeks, at a final price of £175 per passenger. She received messages from all over the country; one cheque arrived in an envelope simply addressed "Jeanette Hartley, Concorde Stewardess, Wexham, Bucks" – and it still reached her the next day!

Jeannette ended up doing two charter flights – one on a Saturday and one on the Sunday – and compiling her own seating plan as well as checking in the passengers herself.

Another flight was organised by Concorde pilot Christopher Orlebar, with his wife, in 1981. This flight was to mark the 50th





Supermarine S6.B

This seaplane's record-breaking flight in 1931 would be emulated 50 years later by the supersonic Concorde.

Photo: public domain

anniversary of his cousin A.H. Orlebar's participation in the RAF team that won the 1931 Schneider Trophy (also setting a world air speed record of 610 km/h [380 mph]) with their Supermarine S6.B seaplane. The 1931 race had been flown over the Solent, between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. Christopher Orlebar's Concorde followed the same route, at the same speed – almost 1,000 mph slower than her normal cruising speed. She also carried two of the original Schneider trophy contestants.

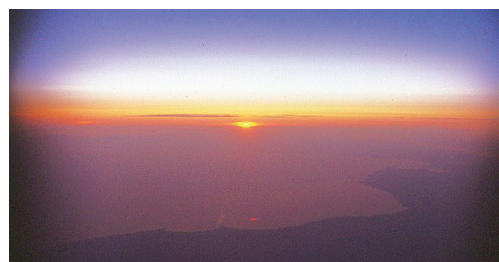
Travelling further afield

British Airways was soon joined by Air France, which also launched charters to exotic destinations as well as supersonic round trips over the Bay of Biscay. Travel agents began including special Concorde flights in their tours to sites such as the Pyramids in Egypt and Petra in Jordan, or visiting Santa Claus in Lapland (see Mach 2, February 2018), or as part of luxury holidays in which passengers might, for example, take Concorde one way across the Atlantic and return on the ocean liner *QE2*.

The flights ranged from the 90-minute round-the-bay trips, which were well within many people's budgets, to round-the-world journeys costing thousands of pounds or dollars. Concorde might also carry passengers to air shows, or to participate in displays for special occasions. Some flights set air speed records – most spectacularly, the round-the-world trips that Air France did with Concorde F-BTSD, which set the world record for the fastest circumnavigation of the Earth by an airliner (see Mach 2, August 2020). Those records still stand today.

By the late 1990s BA was operating about 300 Concorde charter flights per year, and Air France almost as many. It was at this point, though, that both BA and Air France began to consider limiting the charters, as the aircraft were ageing and the airlines wanted to preserve them for the scheduled services. However, both British and French charter flights continued right up to Concorde's retirement in 2003.

During Concorde's life in service, the British and French aircraft would visit more than 300 airports around the world – from the luxury destinations of the Caribbean, Acapulco and the south of France, to remote Pacific islands and some of the most distant and inhospitable places on Earth. The charters were not major money-spinners for the airlines; for British Airways, they accounted for only around 10% of the revenue from Concorde. However, they greatly enhanced the aircraft's popularity in the UK and France, and further afield. They gave the lie to the prevailing idea that Concorde was a perk just for the rich and powerful; and they ensured that Concorde won admirers around the globe.



A double sunset

Left: holidaymakers board Concorde at sunset, on their return from Cairo to London.

Above: Concorde's westward flight allows passengers to see the sun rise again in the west.

Photos: M. McBey / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)

Attending EPCOT

On 18 October 1982, a British and a French Concorde made a simultaneous landing at Orlando in Florida, bringing passengers to an inaugural event at Disney's EPCOT Center. The following description of the event has been provided courtesy of Greater Orlando Aviation Authority.



A flight down memory lane at MCO: the simultaneous dual landing of Air France and British Airways Concorde aircraft occurred on October 18th, 1982. The airlines landed their supersonic airplanes in front of 35,000 spectators who gathered at the airport for this historic moment.

This special event was held to celebrate the Grand Opening of the France and U.K. pavilions at EPCOT's World Showcase at Walt Disney World Resort.

Fun fact: the passengers that arrived on those planes had paid US\$1800 per person for the one-way flight.

Simultaneous landing

Concordes G-BOAE from British Airways, flown by Captain Jeremy Rendal, and F-BVFC from Air France, commanded by Captain Jacques Schwartz, touch down simultaneously at Orlando Airport.

Photo: Greater Orlando Aviation Authority



Photo finish

The two Concordes finish their display by coming in to halt nose to nose.

Photo: Steve Cruey

Concorde on safari

Concorde's round-the-world charters (see Mach 2, August 2020) involved stops in some remarkable places. On one layover at Nairobi, Concorde G-BOAG's passengers visited a game park – while a cheetah took the Captain's seat!

While Alpha Golf stayed in Nairobi for a few days, passengers were taken to visit a game park. Meanwhile, British Airways photographer Simon Watts took some publicity shots with a group of Maasai men watching the aircraft take off – and also with a semi-tame cheetah.

Simon Watts gives a fuller account of the experience on the website "betteronacamel.com":

<http://betteronacamel.com/Kenya-Concorde-and-other-big-beasts-by-Simon-Watts-1986-90>

You have control ...

A Maasai man in traditional dress, and the cheetah, pose on the flight deck.

Photo: Simon Watts



A full-power take-off

A group of Maasai men were asked to stand by the runway and brave the noise of Concorde landing and then taking off; the men took their fingers out of their ears just in time for the photographs to be taken.

Photo: Simon Watts



Access all areas

The cheetah, with its Maasai handler, looks out of the DV window (above left) and poses on Alpha Golf's wing (above), as well as sitting with two female British Airways staff members (left).

Photos: Simon Watts

Watching the take-off

An artistic shot of the three Maasai men as they watch Alpha Golf take off – another incredibly noisy experience.

Photo: Simon Watts



Journey to the end of the Earth

The British and French Concorde charter flights visited almost every part of the world apart from Antarctica. One of the most remote destinations was the “lunar landscape” of Greenland. Colin Mitchell, former Director of travel firm Goodwood Travel, describes how his firm set up this extraordinary Concorde experience.

DURING THE 1980s, Goodwood Travel had the somewhat crazy idea, as many thought at the time, to charter a Concorde for a day return flight to Finnish Lapland to “visit Santa Claus”. (See Mach 2, February 2018.) The first trip, to Rovaniemi, on Christmas Day 1984, was a resounding success. We then operated at least one flight each year, supplementing them briefly with midsummer flights to view the midnight Sun, until 1999.

Unlike with the “Santa” flights, though, we felt the midsummer flights lacked that ‘hook’ that would attract people to combine an exciting supersonic flight aboard Concorde with an exotic destination and experience. Sightseeing by float plane and folk dancing and champagne at midnight by a river in the wilderness just wasn’t enough. Sadly, we discontinued them.

The germ of a new idea

The fact that “we put Lapland on the map” did not go unnoticed by other northern destinations. We were contacted one day by the Greenland Tourist Board, who were interested in setting up a similar “Santa” operation there, albeit that at the time there was no suitable airport where Concorde could land ...

We could not promote two separate Christmas destinations – after all everyone knows, there is only one Santa Claus! Thoughts of our discontinued midsummer tours to Finland re-emerged; maybe we could do something similar with Greenland? After all, they had icebergs. We agreed that “Icebergs in the Midnight Sun” could well be a success. But how?

We decided to start our initial tours by operating via Iceland. The trip comprised a 2-hour Concorde supersonic flight to and from Keflavik, with a locally chartered Boeing 737 day return flight to Narsarsuaq, a small airport in southern Greenland located close to a fjord, where some very small icebergs could be seen and there was a local village to visit – but that was it. In addition, the weather here was always a risk. Combined with Iceland, it was popular. But could we find a way to fly Concorde direct to Greenland?

The only regular way to reach Greenland at the time was a two-day journey from London to Keflavik with an overnight in Copenhagen, followed by a turbo-prop flight from there to Nuuk, the capital. An exploratory visit was made, flying SAS from Copenhagen – the steward donning chef’s whites and very generously serving drinks all the way! After a night in a hotel in Iceland and a meeting with our very hospitable local agent to discuss our plans (and be introduced to the local schnapps, “Black Death”), we flew on by Dash-7, heading for Nuuk.

The flight was an experience: a 40-odd-seat plane, half-full of local Inuit passengers, seemingly all of whom smoked heavily. Under netting, through the haze, the rear part of the aircraft was piled with cargo, even caged chickens! The weather forecast, we were told, was not good, but off we went.

We were crossing the coast of Greenland when the Captain made his first announcement. The weather

An intriguing destination

A whalebone arch in the Arctic fishing village of Ilulissat.

Photo: Colin Mitchell

at our destination was off limits, so we were diverting to Kulusuk, on the east coast, to await improvement. After some circling, it was announced that Kulusuk had also closed, while a small American plane could also not land and was low on fuel, expecting to make an emergency landing on the ice cap below. “Could we all look out for this plane?”, we were asked, so that its position could be reported. “We would go down and look for him ourselves, but we don’t have much fuel either!” continued the Captain.

The perfect destination

We eventually landed at Sondre Stromfjord (SFJ), a former US military base and transatlantic refuelling point on the west coast, with, we learned, a very good weather record – and a very long runway. Imagine our surprise to see a freighter aircraft there that had just flown fresh produce directly from Manston Airport in Kent, a few miles from Canterbury, from whence we had departed two days before! We were in luck ... In 1992 the Greenland government had bought this air base for one US dollar, renamed it Kangerlussuaq, and had built a basic passenger terminal for domestic flights.

Thanks to our hosts, a helicopter trip revealed the wonderful small fishing village of Ilulissat, on a major



ice fjord 250 km north of the Arctic Circle. The Ilulissat Ice Fjord hosts one of the fastest and most active glaciers in the world; one of the massive icebergs that calved from it was rumoured to have sunk the *Titanic*. There was a tiny airport, suitable only for the short take-off and landing (STOL) Dash-7 and helicopters. There were small fishing boats already insured for commercial sightseeing, and two hotels with a view of the fjord, that could just comfortably accommodate 100 people. This had to be our destination!

There was an Inuit choir that performed in the evenings to the hotel guests. Dare I say, as it stood, the usual tourist offering. The catering was superb, fresh fish – incredible fresh halibut I remember – and, to excite the palate, local specialities such as seal and whale meat. Greenlandair could schedule a Dash-7 aircraft to meet our Concorde and fly our guests there and back, and provide a King-Air turbo-prop to take most of the luggage. (The pilots loved this arrangement; they would race each other as we flew north.) We were so lucky to meet a wonderfully enthusiastic local operator, Paetur, who on hearing my madcap ideas helped us put it all together and especially the last night's event. Goodwood's regular clients always expected a spectacular surprise!

There were, however, some operational issues as far as the Concorde was concerned, when operating so far from land masses. British Airways had to research alternate airports carefully in case of difficulty. Eventually solutions were found, and we were given the go-ahead. The time difference, three hours before BST, and the complex scheduling of the Greenlandair Dash-7 aircraft meant that a "back-to-back" operation would need

Pressed into action

An "almost naked" Alpha Fox, still awaiting her new Chatham Dockyard livery, joins her sister in Greenland. Photo: Colin Mitchell

First arrivals

June 1996: the first passengers arrive in the bare wilderness of Kangerlussuaq. Photo: Colin Mitchell



two Concorde aircraft – could BA provide this? Additionally, we were governed by nature. The midnight Sun only stayed above the horizon from around 25 May, while the local mosquitos – as big as house flies and vicious – would regularly emerge at the end of the first week of June. We thus had a very limited window of operation.

The plan comes together

It all came together, though. Our first flight was in June 1996 (see Mach 2, October 2017 for a description of the technical challenges of this trip), our last being in 2000. Those who were not on Concorde for the first arrival at SFJ were in tears watching it land, a sight never seen there before. Immigration was non-existent. While half the group flew on north to Ilulissat on the Dash-7, the other half were entertained to a barbecue at a local boat club by a mountain-fringed lake nearby while they awaited its

return. The Concorde would lay over at Kangerlussuaq. After 3 days, a second Concorde would land with our next group of guests. Briefly, the two would be together in this most barren of places, an almost lunar landscape, before the first Concorde returned the first group to LHR.

In 1997 BA had difficulty providing the second aircraft, so Alpha Fox, having been painted all over white in preparation for the launch of the new Chatham livery, was dragged from its hangar and – uniquely, almost 'naked' – put into service. I was lucky enough to get a shot of these Concordes together in the brilliant Arctic sunshine.

Accommodation was at a premium. We could put our guests in the hotels in Ilulissat, while the crew would overnight at the airport transit hotel at Kangerlussuaq; it just about worked. (One keen first officer, who was desperate to travel north to see the icebergs, managed to cadge a lift from the local crew on





Icebergs in the Midnight Sun

One of the fishing boats among the icebergs – the breathtaking setting for the trip's finale.

Photo: Colin Mitchell

the flight deck of a Dash-7, to end up spending the night on a make-shift bed in the lounge of one of the hotels, under the billiard table, with his return strapped to the toilet on the King-Air baggage flight.)

All the ingredients were now there, but we needed a bit of theatre. The last night's event had to be spectacular. The guests were assembled at around 10 p.m. Minibuses would take them to the harbour, where they would board the fishing boats, to set off in formation into the ice fjord, where they would be closely surrounded by icebergs. By midnight, in the full sun of the Arctic night, the boats would form a circle with their engines off. In the ensuing silence, punctured only by seabirds and the odd crackling of ice breaking off from nearby icebergs, the distant angelic sounds of an invisible Inuit choir would be heard...

The choir was on a separate boat, hidden behind a berg, with instructions to emerge at midnight, sail into the circle of boats, and perform for 40 minutes while champagne and whisky was served (cooled by 250-million-year-old black ice scooped from the fjord). People were in tears. It was so beautiful.

Once the performance had ended, the choir would be dissipated by the sea mist as their boat headed off towards the Sun. Our boats

re-started their engines and raced each other at maximum speed back to port, much to the enthusiasm of the crews and passengers. It was an unforgettable experience.

We had some hiccups. On one flight the local ground agents managed to puncture the nose wheel tyre of an aircraft with an improvised tow bar; fortunately, a spare was carried. BA made no profit from that one. On another aircraft battery failed, and the crew and guests had an extra overnight in the airport hotel while a replacement was flown out by Lear Jet from New York – nearer than Heathrow!

Some last memories

On one departure I was fortunate to be on the flight deck when the Captain announced that, rather than head straight back south to Heathrow, he was to head north to do a low overflight of tiny Ilulissat, at the request of the local air traffic controllers. Apparently, the whole village turned out to watch us. After this diversion he put the power on, climbing to altitude rapidly in the cold air. As we hurtled skywards, he announced "The maximum I am permitted is 60,000 feet... But I am allowed an error of one per cent". We duly rose to 60,600 feet. I wish I had a photo of the Machmeter reading! We were at the highest possible

height that anyone – other than a US SR-71 Blackbird pilot, or an astronaut or cosmonaut in a pressure suit – could fly at, while we were sipping our champagne. He told me later that he was quizzed back at base as to why he had loaded and used 10 tons of fuel more than had been calculated.

As an aside, we once took a travel editor of a major national newspaper on our Concorde flights there and back in a day, laying on a helicopter and a husky sleigh to a champagne reception set up on the ice cap. Our PR agent thought we would get wonderful publicity from it. The resulting coverage, a page and a half, headlined the nauseating smell of the husky dogs, with the majority of the text copied straight from the Greenlandair in-flight brochure. It cost us a fortune and we benefitted from four enquiries and no bookings. Lesson learned!

Having set our unique plan up with Paetur, in full knowledge that my idea could not be protected from others copying our "intellectual property", I asked him never to do it for any other tour operator. Several years later when I saw him again, I asked him: did you? "Yes", he sheepishly replied, "For the Queen of Denmark". I let him off and he remains a good friend to this day, as is his English wife, a former restaurant manager from Canterbury who became one of our tour managers. They now live happily in the Faroe Islands, where Paetur is a manager at the national airline.

A final word needs to come from one of our illustrious guests, a very successful businessman, who introduced himself to me, saying, "Colin, I have travelled all over the world, been to many places you would never have heard of, but these have been the best three days of my life".

A flying visit to New Orleans

Bob Bailey worked for the *British Overseas Airways Company (BOAC)* and then *British Airways (BA)* for about 20 years. Here, he remembers the catering and cabin care that went into the passengers' enjoyment for the first charter flight organised by the airline.

I started work with BOAC/BA in the Catering Department, transferred to BA Cargo, then moved back to Catering. I then worked for Trusthouse Forte as Manager of Customer services, handling BA as well as other international airlines. In addition, I worked the ramp at New York (JFK) and also handled Air France Concorde's ramp services for a while.

The scheduled British Airways Concorde service from London Heathrow to New York (LHR/JFK), taking place twice a day, was a very well-orchestrated operation. When it arrived, baggage and the little cargo it may have carried were all dealt with in a very efficient, smooth and expedited manner; so too was the cabin cleaning and the catering as well as any maintenance issues and fuelling requirements. It was all a product of repetition and familiarity. Charter flights, though, were a different matter.

Planning and set-up

A charter was scheduled from New Orleans, USA to Cologne, Germany on 13 December 1984. As this was

"an offline destination where the aircraft had never operated or even been seen before"

the first BA charter to be operated specifically by the airline, and it was at an offline destination where the aircraft had never operated or even been seen before, it required personnel that had experience and knowledge of Concorde such as

A typical in-flight meal

For charter passengers no less than regular passengers, the food had to be of top quality and presented immaculately, with all of the trays identical.

Photo courtesy of Heritage Concorde



maintenance staff, and someone who knew the interior operations such as cleaning, cabin set-up and catering needs. The latter included the menu, what equipment to use, how to present food on the correct plates, and tray set-ups with utensils, glassware, napkins, etc.

As the flight was being sent to New Orleans from JFK, I packed 25% extra glasses, plates, and silverware (breakable items plus extra for loss); the extra items might have been needed and could not be obtained at the destination. I flew into New Orleans two days prior to Concorde's arrival to brief the flight, kitchen and ground staff as to what would be needed to service the aircraft for arrival and departure.

Concorde would be a turnaround operation – meaning that upon arrival all the catering equipment would need to be removed from the plane, taken back to the flight kitchen, washed, and set up to be used for the next lot of food to be plated, packed out and then loaded back onto the departure flight. I had to monitor every aspect of the equipment handling, from offload to the delivery of equipment to the

dishwashing area, to ensure all was handled carefully and keep damage to a minimum.

A tight schedule

When the Concorde from JFK landed and arrived at the gate, US Customs were waiting (as Concorde had arrived from JFK it was already cleared, so they were not needed). They did a search (more to just look the plane over), which delayed the timetable for this operation, so the servicing of this charter was delayed a half hour right from the start.

While the dishes were being washed, I met with chefs and kitchen staff to ensure that the food prep and presentation was all strictly monitored and carried out properly. Every plate had to be prepared and presented correctly, and all had to look the same. This applied to every part of the menu: salad, appetizer, hot entrées and dessert. (I do not remember the actual menu.)

The clean dishes, silverware and glassware all had to be immediately brought into the kitchen to be set up for the departure food. Once all of the food was laid out on the trays, these were loaded into the trolleys



Only the best

Dom Pérignon champagne was a feature of the BA Concorde menus for both scheduled and charter flights.

Photo: Giulio Nepi / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)

and transported to the plane, about two miles away. However, the catering truck used could not rise high enough to reach Concorde's cabin door – it was about 5 feet too short. As a result, we had to hand-lift each piece of equipment up to the door very carefully, as not to jostle

the contents and to keep the well-presented food in place! This was a delicate but at the same time hurried operation due to our tight schedule.

Once this job was done, the cabin crew needed to be briefed as to what food was on board and where it was loaded.

Attracting attention

The passengers were boarded and at the last minute, prior to closing the door, one of the flight engineers, John Stanbridge, told me to get on board as I was going to be flying with them to Washington Dulles (IAD) – even though I had been scheduled to fly back on another airline. I of course did as I was told and was seated in the tunnel just behind the flight deck.

I could not sit behind the Captain as there was an extra tech crew on board to provide the commentary for the flight, as this was not your everyday regular aircraft flight and Concorde was most definitely more exciting than most other planes. As we taxied out, I saw lots of flashing

and asked what it was; Captain Colin Morris told me that it was flashbulbs from all the people watching us take off on the sides of the runway.

Everything seemed to go well with the food service on board, with the exception that no one oversaw the servicing of the water tanks so no potable water was loaded, and as a result no tea or coffee was available on this leg of the flight.

As the flight was over land we could not go supersonic, but at Mach 0.96 we were still flying faster than most commercial planes, and we covered the 1,100 miles into Dulles in just 1.55 hours.

Flight crew

Captain: Colin Morris
First Officer: Kit Green
Engineering Officers: Peter Ling (at the E/O seat), John Stanbridge E/O (providing PR commentary)



Not your everyday flight

The New Orleans flight was carried out by G-BOAB, seen here in the "British" livery of the early 1980s. The aircraft attracted a great deal of attention and admiration from spectators during her visit to New Orleans. *Photo © Steve Fitzgerald*

From Wiltshire to New York

Stephen Bath, *Managing Director of Bath Travel in Bournemouth – Concorde Charterer from Bournemouth, Exeter and Salisbury 1996–2000*

BOURNEMOUTH AIRPORT had always had a fairly short runway: at 1,831 metres in length, just over a mile. But in 1995 the runway was extended by 440 metres, bringing it up to 2,271 metres. This meant it was now possible to operate a Concorde from the new runway, as the aircraft had a minimum requirement of 2,000 metres for runway length. Even half-full of fuel a Concorde weighs 150 tons, and to accelerate to 160 knots takes time, so runway length is all-important to get safely off the ground.

Organising the charter

I chartered the aircraft in the name of Bath Travel. We had held the necessary Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL) since 1958, when we started chartering propeller planes to fly to Majorca. We now operated our own airline from Bournemouth, using a single BAe 146 Whisperjet with 110 seats in the livery of our subsidiary Palmair.

Concorde would have to position from Heathrow airport, a 20-minute subsonic flight. The main charter would be a 1 hour 45 minute supersonic flight out over the Atlantic, reaching Mach 2 at 60,000 feet for a champagne lunch, and arriving back at London Heathrow.



A thrilling arrival

Concorde's first arrival at Bournemouth is greeted by a media helicopter. *Photo courtesy of Bournemouth Daily Echo*



Pulling in the crowds

Above and right: as Concorde landed and taxied to the terminal, a crowd of 25,000 people turned out to enjoy the scene. There were marquees everywhere for local companies at the airport to entertain their guests.

Photos courtesy of Bournemouth Daily Echo



To help pay for the positioning flight to Bournemouth, we had the idea of taking 100 people up to Heathrow by coach early in the morning, to fly back into Bournemouth, at a ticket price of just £200 including the coach trip. The supersonic flight would be £650, to include the champagne lunch.

But would the project sell? Our company had a policy to operate all advertised flights, even if it meant losing money if they did not sell well. The trust of our travelling public was essential. You can only lose that once. But it turned out not to be a problem. A small piece of editorial was published in the local paper to announce that Concorde would be coming to Bournemouth later in the year, and all 200 seats sold out in just three hours. It seemed that everyone wanted a ride in the world's fastest and most iconic passenger plane.

Christening the new runway

Bournemouth Airport management was keen to use our Concorde flight

as the grand opening of the new runway, and spectacular it turned out to be. The publicity launch for the airport upgrade was all important.

On Sunday 21st April 1996, mid-morning, the famous aircraft appeared over the airport at 3,000 feet, banking steeply. A crowd estimated at 25,000 had turned out that sunny morning, and the Chief Pilot of the BA Concorde fleet, Captain Mike Bannister, was at the controls. Clearly he was going to enjoy himself and put on a good show for his passengers and ground audience alike. Mike had learned to fly at Bournemouth many years before, and had a home in the area, so there was no way anyone else would command this flight.

By the time the aircraft landed, after making a few more circuits of Poole Bay, the 19-minute flight had extended to 33 minutes – delighting the passengers from Heathrow, who were able to gaze down on their home town from an actual Concorde.

As the aircraft landed at Bournemouth with a massive white cloud of dense smoke from the tyres, the crowd cheered their appreciation. Every business around the airport, from the flying clubs, maintenance hangars, factories, to the Aircraft Museum and airline bases, had put up hospitality marquees to entertain their best customers on the big day. A traffic queue six miles long resulted in congestion right back to Bournemouth town centre.

It was a beautiful sunny Sunday morning. The new runway was well and truly christened.

Later that year we operated a second supersonic flight to Paris and back from Bournemouth, with passengers enjoying three nights in the city, flying the other way in Palmar's own Whisperjet. Together with the two subsonic sectors, 400 passengers flew on the aircraft that day. It was a forerunner of many similar trips to come, always to a new destination.

Adding destinations

Over the next 4 years Bath Travel operated similar flights to Nice, Pisa, Venice, Tenerife, and Lanzarote, carrying some 4,400 passengers over four years. All destinations included a section of the flight where the aircraft could accelerate to 1,350 miles per hour, Mach 2, at 60,000 feet. At that height the air was thin enough for that incredible speed to be reached. At a lower level the air would be just too thick, and the range of the aircraft greatly reduced.

In 1997, we operated a flight eastbound from New York direct to Bournemouth, the passengers having sailed out on Cunard's *Queen Mary 2*. Again, this event drew large crowds to see the first transatlantic Concorde flight arrive after just 3 hours and 15 minutes.

Pushing the boundaries

Each year we needed to put on a new Concorde 'spectacular'. A new boundary pushed with this extraordinary plane. For myself, the

A unique offer

A publicity montage for Bath Travel's Concorde flight from Boscombe Down to New York, and back into Bournemouth. Passengers would sail out or back on the *Queen Mary 2*.
Image: Stephen Bath

holy grail was a double transatlantic flight from Bournemouth to New York and back in a day. Then we would have done everything possible. But it was simply not feasible.

A Concorde weighs roughly 95 tons. It then needs almost 95 tons of fuel to reach New York safely. The aircraft burns 25 tons an hour flying supersonically, over twice as much as a 747 jumbo jet. So a 3 hour 20 minute flight would need 80 tons, with 15 tons in reserve for delays or diversions. Safety was imperative, and could never be compromised. But even the extended runway at Bournemouth would still be half a mile too short to take off with such a heavy fuel load. Our maximum range from Bournemouth was Tenerife in the Canary Islands, some 1,500 miles closer than New York.

Of course I could charter the plane out of Heathrow and back into Bournemouth, but what was the point? We wanted to fly from our own 'patch', a familiar local airport, without the aggravation of travelling up to London. Then I had an idea. I was aware from my experience of flying light aircraft that there was a

*"Boscombe Down
was a top-secret
government air base"*

long airstrip on Salisbury plain in Wiltshire, which was very much on Bath Travel's patch. Our 60 branches surrounded not just Bournemouth and Southampton, but Salisbury, Amesbury, Andover and right up to Marlborough; so Wiltshire was our area too. But this runway, almost as long as Heathrow, had no airport terminal. Boscombe Down was a top-secret government air base used for testing military fighter aircraft,



developing experimental designs on weapons systems. Could I possibly get permission to fly a Concorde from there?

The first conversation did not go well. Yes, the runway was long enough at 3,100 metres to reach New York with a full fuel load. Yes, the fire service was adequate. Yes, we love Concorde. But the general public were banned from the whole area. Even light planes could not come within 10 miles of the mysterious Boscombe Down.

But two weeks after the first refusal, I had a phone call back from the base commander. Yes, we could use the runway, but we had to find our own check-in area away from the base, and deliver the passengers in sealed coaches direct to the steps of the plane. No cameras, no photography. That or nothing.

For the next three days I drove around the Salisbury plain area, looking for a large pub with decent parking. Maybe a hotel? It had to be pretty close to be worthwhile. There were many refusals. Or sometimes enthusiasm, but no room to park 60 cars and still keep the pub running while my passengers were abroad. But on the third day I found what I needed. A pub called The Inn at High Post could help. It was located near Amesbury, three miles from the runway, with a large car park and 30 bedrooms. We were on! We had our own temporary airport terminal. But could we sell all the seats? Would the public be happy to fly from a runway without an airport?

I had a long discussion with my father, Peter Bath. He was used

to taking risks. We both enjoyed a challenge. If we had to cancel such a courageous operation, would the public forgive us? The Concorde flight cost there and back was over £300,000: a lot of money to gamble in those days. And it would be in less than eight months' time. Could we find 400 passengers that quickly? We agreed to give it a try.

The Salisbury flight was set to take place in July 1997. The holidays would involve flying to New York supersonically, staying three nights at The Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Manhattan, and sailing home to Southampton on Cunard's fabulous *Queen Mary 2*. The other hundred passengers would sail out to New York on the ship, then fly home into Bournemouth, with the reverse itinerary. Both aircraft and ship were famous for the same reason: crossing the Atlantic Ocean to New York and back, albeit at very different speeds.

The work involved in setting up this flight and finding my own check-in terminal was such that I decided to go on the first flight from the new 'Salisbury International' myself, a rare treat.

A great spectacle

On the big day we had a lot to cope with. This was a good story for the media, and both the BBC and ITV had camera crews to broadcast live the take-off from the unconventional airport. Then there were quite a number of local radio stations and newspapers covering the flight as well. Plus 100 passengers and their friends and relatives.

Bath Travel had a small army of uniformed staff to help with greeting, parking, check-in, baggage, and directing passengers to their sealed coaches. One extraordinary sight was seeing uniformed BA girls behind the beer pumps doing the check-in. It made a great spectacle for the media, and the passengers felt they were truly getting the full red carpet treatment.

Again, it was a beautiful, warm, sunny day, which nearly caused a big problem. Concorde flew in on time from London, and the subsonic passengers were collected from the aircraft. But as the morning wore on to noon there was an anxious message from the captain on the runway. The temperature was rising fast, and if it reached 24° Celsius we would not be able to take off. Jet engines like air coming in fast, and the colder the better. Warm air has less mass, so there is less thrust from the engines. So we had to accelerate check-in and boarding as the temperature slowly rose to the critical level. In the end all was well with 1° Celsius to go. After taking off the aircraft turned low over the hotel at full power with afterburners, which delighted the TV crews.

After staying for one night in New York, the aircraft flew back into Bournemouth the next day, with the passengers who had already sailed to New York on *Queen Mary 2*. That was my flight home too, and for that sector I was invited to sit on the flight deck in the jump seat behind the Captain for take-off from New

York's Kennedy airport. Of course, this was over four years before the September 11, 2001 atrocities that banned all but flight crew from the cockpit of aircraft worldwide.

We took off over Jamaica Bay, heading direct for Bournemouth. Once we reached 1,000 miles per hour I headed back to my seat in the cabin for breakfast, which was itself an extraordinary experience. There are six cabin crew members on Concorde, so a ratio of about 16 passengers per stewardess. The service was stupendous, with a glass or two of champagne on boarding at 10 a.m. Then blueberry granola with white wine, followed by steak and quail eggs with red wine. After a delicious dessert came cognac for those that still had space. All before noon! A majority of the passengers were on the holiday mainly for the experience of flying from New York supersonic to Bournemouth, with the fabulous cruise and stay in New York as a mere bonus. So most of the passengers lapped up the entire experience, literally.

On arrival into Bournemouth the crowds were out to greet us



The red carpet treatment

Liz and Peter Bath (bottom left) brought out Palmair's famous red carpet to greet the passengers who had just arrived on the first Concorde from New York to Bournemouth. Stephen Bath is on the staircase. *Photo: John James*

again, this time around 5,000 people, to see the supersonic flight inbound from New York. My father, Peter Bath, and mother Liz came out onto the runway to greet the company's five-star passengers. The Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes were held aloft at the bottom of the tall disembarkation staircase. Dad had bought along his famous Palmair red carpet for the passengers to step on to. Many passengers had to be assisted down the staircase, having partaken a little too generously of the famous British Airways on-board hospitality. But they were happy. And had just crossed the Atlantic in just 3 hours and 8 minutes airborne – the first human beings ever to get from New York to Bournemouth in such a short time.

The flight was repeated the following year from Salisbury. In just four years we had operated every one of the seven BA Concorde in and out of Bournemouth, Exeter, Salisbury, and Boscombe Down. We had carried 4,400 passengers without one empty seat. However, in July 2000, the tragic crash of an Air France Concorde in Paris brought such charter flights to an end, and the aircraft never came to Bournemouth again.

This was the end of the most exciting era of air travel. And the first example of reverse progress in passenger aviation.

As I tell my grandson, "In my day, a long time ago, we were able to fly around the world at twice the speed of sound, 1,350 miles per hour. Nowadays, we can only go at about 550 miles per hour".

"Why is that, Granddad?"

Well, Albie, it's a very long story...

A five-star service

Like everything else about Concorde, the British Airways Charter Division provided a five-star service.

Each Concorde charter started with a call to the personal mobile phone of BA charter manager Graham Butler. Only one person handled all communications at BA, and that was Graham. He would answer almost 24 hours a day, and I could normally reach him in seconds. He carried the Concorde diary with him all the times so I could get an instant answer. The price quote would arrive the following day without fail.

Paperwork was minimal. Once you had chartered once, you were in 'The Club' (i.e., not a timewaster), and administration was fast and trouble-free.

As soon as the deposit was paid, things happened fast. Contacts with the departure and arrival airports to make sure they could receive a Concorde at all. Approximate flight timings. Catering requirements.

Local companies at Bournemouth would also do everything possible to help. FR Aviation (now Draken) even had a massively powerful ground power unit at their base opposite the terminal that could start the Concorde engines before taxi. One time the aircraft had to stay overnight at Bournemouth. Could FR supply a hangar to fit a Concorde? You bet they could! If there was a supersonic jetliner coming to town, everyone wanted a piece of the action.

The airport would fall over themselves doing everything they could to make the operation go smoothly. It really helped put Bournemouth's old Hurn airport on the map.

British Airways' Charter Division was the easiest company I have ever done business with. Mind you, with the five-star service came a five-star price to match. But our passengers always seemed happy to chip in!



Per Bournemouth ad astra

A BA publicity shot of G-BOAG in flight. Bath Travel operated charters using every one of BA's seven Concorde. Photo: Adrian Meredith



CONCORDE WATCH

Concorde G-AXDN British pre-production aircraft

Location: Imperial War Museum, Duxford, UK

Reporter: Graham Cahill **Date:** 7 March / 4 April 2023

The team was James Cullingham, John Dunlevy and myself. The plan for both visits was to continue with the investigation into issues with the nose action.

Although G-AXDN's nose is working, we have noticed since restoring other noses that the performance of this nose is slightly slower and noisier than others, and in particular is slightly slow in the 5 degrees to zero movement. This is an ongoing and lengthy task, which has been covered in previous issues of Mach 2.

The most recent visits saw completion of tests in all pipework running from the visor valve to the 5-degree jacks. The work has proved that the pipework and all valves are working correctly up to the nose actuators. We will continue the work in the coming months. For the visit on 4 April we performed several nose tests in the morning, but stopped working in the area due to the museum being busy for the school holidays. We then started work on a spill door actuator that the Duxford Aviation Society (DAS) use to demonstrate to visitors. The electric actuator had failed. Replacement of the actuator will take place on our next visit; however, in

the long term we will look at trying to locate an original spill door actuator and operate it hydraulically.

We also visited the DAS store to inspect the original ice camera for G-AXDN with a view to mounting it to the aircraft. Not much of a report this time, but nevertheless important work.

For details on the restoration work carried out by Heritage Concorde, please see their website:

<https://www.heritageconcorde.com>

For further information on G-AXDN and the other airliners at Duxford, please visit the Duxford Aviation Society website: <https://www.duxfordaviationsociety.org>



Work carried out on 4 April

Above: Engineer John Dunlevy examines the wiring for the spill door actuator (seen in its open position to his left). Above right and right: The top and side views of the ice camera that Heritage Concorde intend to fit to G-AXDN. Photos: Heritage Concorde



Concorde G-BOAC British production aircraft

Location: Runway Visitor Park, Manchester, UK

Reporter: Graham Cahill **Date:** 13 February / 21 March 2023

The team was just myself and John Hepple as a representative for the Runway Visitor Park (RVP). The task for these two visits was to replace the lighting in the rear cabin (having completed the lighting replacement in the forward cabin on a previous visit).

Back in 2003 the aircraft was decommissioned and handed over to Manchester, who then carried out further work to make the aircraft suitable for visitors. This included installing fluorescent lighting in both cabins, along with fire lighting. (The fire lighting has not been affected by our work.) The original fittings and tubes are becoming more difficult to find as LED

lighting takes over. Accordingly, our latest work involved removing the old 240-volt fluorescent tubes and chokes, and replacing them with LED low-voltage lighting in the same colour temperature as the originals in service.

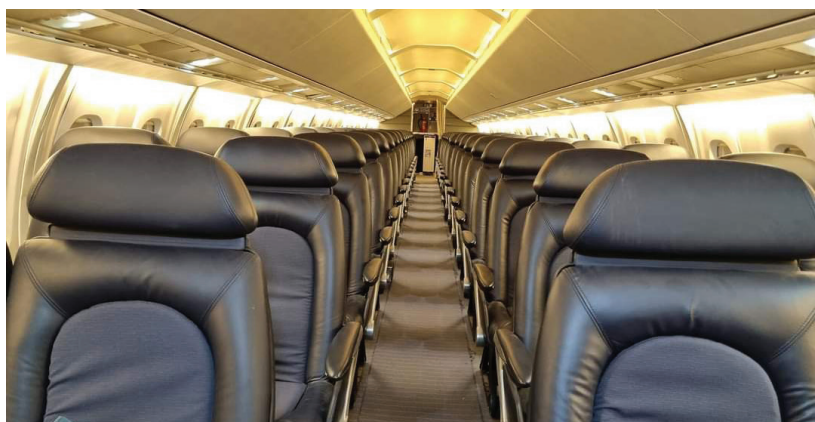
The rear cabin is not currently used on G-BOAC due to fire regulations, and maintenance of the old fluorescents was stopped some time ago due to difficulty in finding suitable tubes. Manchester now plan to start using the rear cabin in the not-too-distant future. It is possible that new access from a centre door will be set up, or rear steps added.

An additional job on these visits was reinstatement of the reading lights in the rear cabin. (During

the decommissioning process and preparing G-BOAC for display, back in 2003, someone had decided to cut all the wires instead of just disconnecting them. We deal with this type of thing all the time.)

We worked all day and completed the left-hand side on the first visit, then completed the right-hand side on the second visit. Work on the whole cabin has now been completed, with the exception of toilets and galleys, which will be tackled next time.

For further information on G-BOAC and to book a tour, please visit the Runway Visitor Park site: <https://www.runwayvisitorpark.co.uk/visit-us/explore-our-aircraft/>



Work on the cabin lighting

Above left and left: the lighting in the rear cabin before and after the fitting of the new LEDs.

Above: John Hepple disposes of the old fluorescent lights that were originally fitted in 2003.

Photos: Heritage Concorde

Concorde G-BOAF British production aircraft

Location: Aerospace Bristol, Filton, UK

Reporter: Paul Evans **Date:** 15 April 2023

ON 17 OCTOBER 2010 I closed the door of G-BOAF for the final time as a volunteer at “Concorde at Filton” (CAF) after more than six and a half years – the best years of my life. Our dear “supersonic” friend, Fred Finn, who had supported and visited us every November for the anniversary of Alpha Foxtrot’s last flight, had flown in especially from Ukraine to be with us on our final tour.

Driving home from Airbus, Filton that evening I never ever imagined it would take over 12 years for the former CAF volunteers and myself to finally conduct another tour of our beloved Foxye. Those years were frustrating and upsetting for all of us who had dedicated much of our lives to supporting Alpha Fox, Concorde at Filton, and the Bristol Aero Collection. Thankfully last year a new CEO, Sally Cordwell, took over running Aerospace Bristol and was very keen to reach out to all the former volunteers and to get them involved once again. After meeting with her in late December 2022 and running through what we could offer, the wheels were set in motion to begin new guided tours of G-BOAF in 2023.

Preparing for the tour

After several months – and many emails back and forth between myself, former volunteers from CAF and the management team at Aerospace Bristol – it was agreed the first tour would take place on Saturday 15 April at 4.30 pm, after the museum had closed, and would be limited to just 24 guests.

Former CAF volunteers Rosie Thompson, Colin Smith, Ken Ricketts, Bill Morgan, Nigel Ferris and myself agreed to meet at the museum beforehand to run through what we were going to do and “dress” the aircraft as she used to be whilst in our care all those years ago. We had all brought items with us to dress the rear cabin as if in service – Conran dinner services, blankets, menus, safety cards, seat instructions, even a duty-free catalogue to make it as authentic as possible. The museum had also placed a trolley in the rear cabin, complete with British Airways teapot and the obligatory champagne, along with placing authentic Molton Brown and Kiehl’s toiletries and a red rose in each of the bathrooms. After around an hour on board it was as if we had never been away all this time, and the aircraft was ready to welcome her guests.

Just one last touch was left, and that was to remove the cup and saucer from the forward vestibule and



The CAF team

Above, from left: Nigel Ferris, Rosie Thompson, Colin Smith, Bill Morgan, Ken Ricketts. Right: CAF team leader Paul Evans.

Photos: Paul Evans



replace them with a vase of fresh red roses (thank you to Rosie Thompson).

Welcoming the guests

Despite not a great deal of advanced advertising, we had 17 paying guests on our first tour, and we could not wait to begin. To be honest, I am not quite sure who was the more excited – the guests or ourselves!

We split the guests up into smaller groups, as we used to on our old CAF tours. Colin and Ken conducted the ground technical tour (complete with the open engine bay doors). Nigel conducted a flight-deck tour on the former Rolls Royce Training Simulator (as Aerospace Bristol would not grant any flight-deck access for the tour), and Rosie was back in her element conducting a cabin tour. Meanwhile, I was running around all sections of the tour trying to keep to the set 20-minute slots in each section, whilst also escorting the guests to view the rear cabin.

Excuse the pun, but the 90 minutes just flew by! All too soon it was time to gather our guests together for a final thank you and to hand out their reproduced British



Attention to detail

A place setting complete with menu is laid out just as it would have been when Concorde was in service. The crockery, cutlery, menu, napkins and other items were all supplied by the CAF volunteers.

Photo: Paul Evans

Airways Concorde Flight Certificates before wishing them a safe onward journey. We all then gathered back on board the aircraft to start packing all our things away and to discuss how we felt the tour had gone, and how we could improve the next time. All of us agreed that after over 12 years it had not gone too badly at all. In addition, we had raised over £500 for the museum from just one 90-minute tour.

Our sincere hope is that Aerospace Bristol will continue with these tours, increase their frequency to every month, and enhance and improve them as we approach the 20th anniversary of retirement from commercial service on 24 October this year – and, of course, of the final flight on 26 November.

To all of you who attended this first guided tour, thank you for supporting us and thank you for your wonderful comments and feedback; it really does mean a lot to us. On behalf of all the former CAF team and myself, thank you for all your well wishes and support over the years. We hope to welcome you aboard again soon. Finally, thank you to Sally and the team at the museum for allowing us to introduce and conduct this tour.

For further information on Aerospace Bristol, and to request details of future guided tours, please visit their website:

<https://aerospacebristol.org/last-concorde>

A tour guide's experience

Nigel Ferris, former tour guide for Concorde at Filton

After 13 years of guided tours not being available for Concorde G-BOAF, Aerospace Bristol agreed to start private guided tours of Foxie in her hangar. This was achieved by a lot of hard work, primarily by Paul Evans. So on 15 April 2023, a small group of ex-Concorde at Filton volunteers met at Filton.

Present were Paul Evans, Ken Ricketts, Colin Smith, Rosie Thompson and myself. Paul acted as MC, Ken and Colin handled the ground tours, with Rosie in the cabin and me at the Rolls-Royce flight deck simulator. (We were not permitted by Aerospace Bristol to take guests into the actual cockpit, although we had done just this for 6 years when she was outside, and never had any damage or breakages to the equipment, etc. This was due to vigilant control by us, regarding where the guests could stand and look, and timekeeping.)

Paul has written an excellent piece on the preceding pages, fully

describing the activities, so I will restrict my comments to my part on the day. Suffice it to say, my role in the simulator was hugely enjoyable – albeit trying to dredge up descriptions and explanations from years ago. But we all managed, getting back into the swing of things very quickly. I was very pleased that Paul allocated me to the sim – indeed, it is a continuing point of humour among my colleagues (along with a certain burger incident in Toulouse!) that while doing the tours when she was outside, the comment was that they could never get me out of the cockpit!

We had a total of 17 guests, who seemed to fully enjoy the private and personal experience given to them by us. Many questions were asked by the guests, which we all tried to answer as best that we could. We all have a wealth of knowledge, and if one did not know the answer then another would.

We hope that Aerospace Bristol make this a regular event, as

Concorde deserves to be explained in detail to people. Us guides are also keen to continue the legend, and help to inspire young people to get involved in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths). There are some wrinkles to iron out, but with continued enthusiasm and drive we will get it right.



Flight deck knowledge

Nigel Ferris (in the yellow hi-vis gilet), on his knees at his “second home”, paying homage to the Great White Bird as he talks to the guests.

Photo: Paul Evans