

# MACH 2

Concorde magazine



50th anniversary  
celebrations

*Concorde honoured in  
France and the UK*

*A memory of the future  
21 January 1976: the  
inaugural passenger flights*

*Concorde watch  
The latest from Manchester*



Issue 49

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# INTRODUCTION

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*Fifty years ago, on 21 January 1976, British Airways and Air France simultaneously began their Concorde passenger services. This was the culmination of 14 years of work to reach an as yet unequalled technological achievement. We have accounts of the flight from those who were there. In particular, Mach 2 is honoured to hear from a member of the original British Airways cabin crew.*

*Bringing the story up to date, Mach 2 reports on the 50th anniversary celebrations here and in France, and ends with a Concorde Watch report from Manchester.*

*I have chosen this high point as an appropriate time to bring Mach 2 to a close. There will be at least one special edition in the future, but this is the last regular issue. My thanks go to the wonderful contributors who have shared such a wealth of fascinating memories and expertise over almost 50 issues. Thank you also to Mach 2's dedicated readers and supporters, and to all those who still look after Concorde today. While there are still so many people who love, remember and care for the aircraft, her story will go on.*

*Katie John, Editor, Mach 2*

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Editor: Katie John

Cover: G-BOAA lifts off from Heathrow to begin the inaugural Concorde passenger flight for British Airways.  
Photo: Ken Alexander

# A MEMORY OF THE FUTURE

At 11.40am on 21 January 1976, 50 years ago, the future of civil aviation arrived. British Airways (BA) Concorde G-BOAA and Air France Concorde F-BVFA lifted off at the same instant to inaugurate commercial Concorde services for their respective airlines.

**A**FTER NEARLY 14 YEARS of planning, design, and rigorous flight testing, Concorde finally gained its Certificate of Airworthiness in December 1975. However, the Americans had not yet permitted Concorde to start commercial flights to the USA – the route for which the aircraft had primarily been intended – so alternative destinations were selected. Air France opted for a two-stage route from Paris to Dakar, the capital of Senegal on the coast of West Africa, and then across the South Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro; this route was sufficiently busy at the time to justify the choice. BA, looking to set up Concorde flights to Singapore and then Australia, chose Bahrain as a first stop on that route.

The months before the inaugural flights saw intense work on both sides of the Channel to prepare the aircraft and plan the day. On page 12, British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) engineer Richard Harris shares his reminiscences of this work – from arriving at Bahrain several weeks beforehand, to seeing Alpha Alpha's first touchdown and then being involved in the first months of service.

## The aircraft

Both aircraft were the first of their fleets to enter commercial service. F-BVFA had made his maiden flight on 27 October 1975 and had been delivered to Air France on 19 December of that year. G-BOAA had made her maiden flight on 5 November 1975 and was delivered to BA on 14 January 1976.

## The flights

Concorde personnel from the two airlines worked together to co-ordinate the departures so that the aircraft would take off simultaneously. A telephone link was set up between the control towers at Paris Charles de Gaulle and London Heathrow, and the air traffic controllers would give a 30-second countdown over a special frequency.

While the flight crews carried out their pre-departure checks, the passengers assembled in the departure lounges. Francine Carville



### Perfect coordination

The simultaneous take-offs of F-BVFA and G-BOAA were captured by global media. One such broadcast is preserved by the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA); see link at the end of this article.

*Photo courtesy of APCOS*



### The supersonic era begins

Take-off was watched by spectators at the airports as well as those in other aircraft, such as the Boeing 707 just behind G-BOAA.

*Photo © Adrian Meredith / Speedbird Promotions*

[www.concordephotos.com](http://www.concordephotos.com)

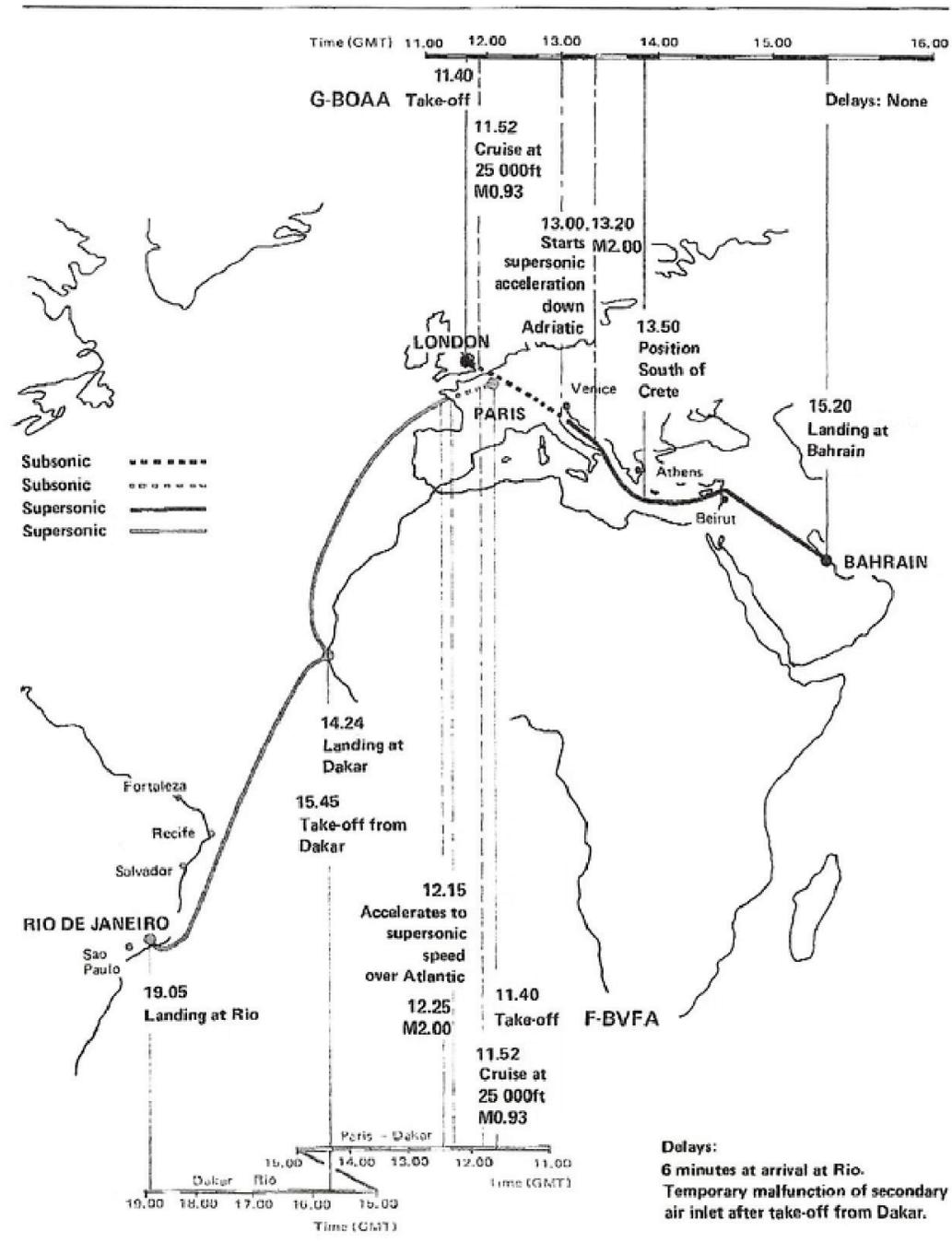
was one of the cabin crew members on the BA flight; on page 6 she recalls the excitement of the day, and the range of passengers on board, as well as the reception that the BA crew received on their return to the UK.

**The journeys**

This map shows the routes, timings, and main events for each of the inaugural passenger flights.

Source: Heritage Concorde

**21st. January 1976 - AF025/BA 300  
Flight details**



G-BOAA (flight BA300), with Norman Todd as Captain, and F-BVFA (AF025), commanded by Pierre Chanoine, would release their brakes at the same instant to start their take-off roll, and the flight crews would stay in touch as their aircraft were pushed back. The take-offs would be broadcast simultaneously, and interviews would be broadcast from the aeroplanes during the flights.

At Heathrow, the roads around the airport were jammed with cars and a crowd of people gathered on the Queen's Building to watch G-BOAA depart. John Tye, a sixth-form schoolboy who had bunked off Double Geography with his friend to watch the take-off, vividly recalled the day; he shares his memories in his article on page 18. That day, watching Alpha Alpha take to the sky, he

would never have imagined that one day he would be a pilot on that same aircraft.

Both aircraft executed flawless take-offs. According to BA First Officer Brian Calvert, in his book *Flying Concorde: The Full Story*, "It was estimated later that 250 million people watched the simultaneous take-off on television sets around the world." (p.153)

G-BOAA arrived at Bahrain at 15:17 GMT, 3 hours and 37 minutes after starting the take-off roll. Meanwhile, Air France Concorde F-BVFA completed his much longer flight, from Paris to Dakar and then across the Atlantic Ocean to Rio de Janeiro. The aircraft arrived shortly after 19:00 GMT. Pierre Grange,

President of APCOS, recounts the challenges and final success of that flight on page 10.

That day would usher in a new era in which supersonic travel became an everyday marvel – an age still remembered with admiration. The 50th anniversary saw celebrations in the UK and in France (see page 16), and Concorde's continuing popularity both in real life and in cyberspace attests to its lasting allure.

The film of the take-offs, preserved by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA), can be seen here: [www.ina.fr/ina-eclairage-actu/video/caa7600435201/envols-simultanes-concorde-21-janvier-1976](http://www.ina.fr/ina-eclairage-actu/video/caa7600435201/envols-simultanes-concorde-21-janvier-1976)

## The two Concordes: where are they now?



### F-BVFA

Fox Alpha would launch Air France Concorde services to the USA, flying to Washington Dulles on 24 May 1976. He made a round-the-world flight in January 1998, taking 41 hours and 27 minutes. The aircraft continued service until Concorde's retirement in 2003, then made his last flight, as AF4386, from Charles de Gaulle to Washington Dulles on 12 June 2003. F-BVFA is now on display at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C. Photo: Alex Jolivet



### G-BOAA

Alpha Alpha was the centrepiece of several highlights in the BA fleet's history. She inaugurated the Concorde services to New York on 22 November 1977 (see Mach 2, December 2017). In 1990 she performed a display flight with a Spitfire over the White Cliffs of Dover to mark the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain (see Mach 2, June 2020), and in 1996 she overflew Heathrow with the Red Arrows to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the airport's opening (see Mach 2, November 2025).

Grounded after the Paris crash in 2000, she was never brought back into service. In 2004 she was dismantled and moved by road and sea to the National Museum of Flight in Scotland, where she was reassembled and is now on display. Photo: Katie John

## A day of national prestige

Francine Carville was one of the cabin crew on the inaugural British Airways (BA) Concorde service. She worked on three Concorde flights before becoming one of BA's first female Cabin Service Officers, but has always remembered that first supersonic flight. She recalls the pride and excitement of the day, for both nations, in an interview with Mach 2 editor Katie John.

**KJ:** What preparations did you have to go through before the inaugural flight?

● **FC:** In early January we were called in – just 14 of us – to go on a training course for service on Concorde. We had to keep total silence about this and were not allowed to talk to the press.

None of us had ever flown on Concorde or knew anything about it. The first time we saw the aircraft was the night before the first flight.

**What are your recollections of the day of the flight?**

● As we left our hotel and took the bus to join the aircraft, I couldn't believe the sight – the roads were lined with people. I said, "What are all these people doing here?" Some-



### The BA cabin crew

The cabin crew gather just before they leave the hotel on the day of the flight; Francine Carville is in the centre, with the hotel manager on the left.

Photo: Francine Carville

### BA300: crew

#### Flight deck

Norman Todd (Captain)  
Brian Calvert (First Officer)  
John Lidiard (Engineer Officer)

Brian Trubshaw (Observer for Civil Aviation Authority)

#### Cabin

David Bracley  
Francine Carville  
Sue Graham  
Jack Hawkins  
John Hitchcock  
John Lyth (*positioned to Bahrain; replaced Jack Hawkins on return flight to London*)  
Ken Taylor

one else said, "They're all here to see Concorde, of course!"

As we boarded the aircraft, half of BA's employees were out on the tarmac. There was also a band playing [the Dagenham Girl Pipers]. I heard the tune they were playing: "Will Ye No Come Back Again?" We laughed!

Our captain, Norman Todd, spoke to us all before the flight. He said, "Boys and girls, I know you haven't flown supersonic yet. But what I want you to know is that I know this aircraft inside out. Don't be nervous – your job is just to take care of the passengers." His briefing was lovely and made us feel great.

Then the passengers boarded. There was a tremendous mix of people; of the 100 passengers, only about 55 were commercial passen-



### A beautiful moment

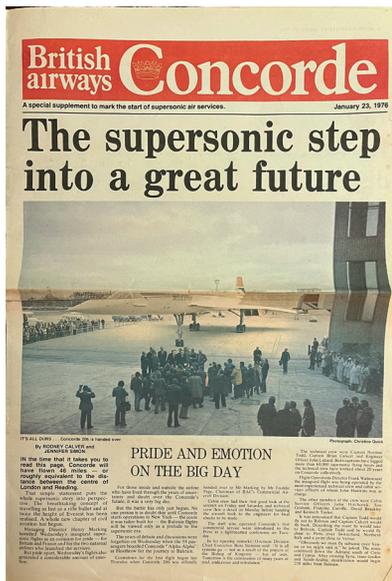
Alpha Alpha just after take-off.

Photo: Ken Alexander

gers, and the rest were foreign representatives and newspaper people.

The passengers were just brilliant – so many interesting people. There were also two TV cameramen working on the aircraft. We had to serve everyone a delicious lunch in the midst of all this.

The take-off was beautiful. When we went through Mach 2, everybody stood up cheering, with



**A supersonic step into a great future for BA**

The front cover and a double page from the special issue of BA's in-house newspaper, published to mark the inaugural flights. Photos on the double page include G-BOAA being prepared for the flight; notable passengers such as the Duke of Kent (centre left) and the "Starman" (centre); and Captain Norman Todd with members of the crew (bottom right).  
*Images courtesy of Francine Carville*

champagne. We also got every passenger to go up to the cockpit.

There was a man who boarded dressed as a "Starman". [This was Bob "Razz" Ingham, of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, whose story is told in Mach 2, December 2023.]

There was also the Duke of Kent. He asked me to autograph his menu for his children; I replied, "They all say that!" Unfortunately, a colleague of mine spilled a bottle of red wine over him – just as I was talking to my mother on the phone, from the galley, during the supersonic flight – and one of the BA bosses came to me and asked me to go and take over service. The Duke was charming about it, though. My colleague was very experienced, but she was quite nervous. However, I wasn't in the least bit nervous, because they were just passengers. I was also a trained nurse, so in many ways I was not nervous or overawed by people.

There was also the Duchess of Argyll, Lord Beaverbrook (who had paid for the Duchess's ticket, because for five years she had been wanting to fly on Concorde), Peter Shore MP, and David Ennals MP.

Another eminent passenger was Group Captain Leonard Cheshire. He was there as a guest of BA. He was very quiet. He'd been a representative of the UK when the USA dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and later on he and his wife set up care homes in the UK. I asked him how he was enjoying the flight. He just looked at me and said, "This aircraft flies itself".

There was also one man at the back – he was so quiet, just sitting there. I recognised his Northern Ireland accent, because that's where I was from. I asked him, "How did you get onto Concorde?" He replied, "I work for a factory in Northern Ireland, and we produced all the life jackets for the plane." He had won a prize from the factory, and that was how he had got there.

The meal that we served ended with coffee and brandy, and cigars. We actually had a bet with our friends in the Air France Concorde crew about who would get to serve coffee first. Our aircraft had both taken off at exactly the same time, and the British and French crews were in touch constantly during the

flight. We won! Air France landed in Dakar, but they hadn't had time to serve their coffee. We also found out that one of the pilots on that day was being checked out for his role as a Concorde captain. (See article on page 10.) So a huge amount of pressure on him!

Brian Trubshaw was on the flight deck with the pilots as an observer for the Civil Aviation Authority. In addition, there was Sir George Edwards, and Mr Henry Marking of British Airways.

We actually arrived in Bahrain 20 minutes early – it was really a very successful flight and very, very happy. Everybody was thrilled.

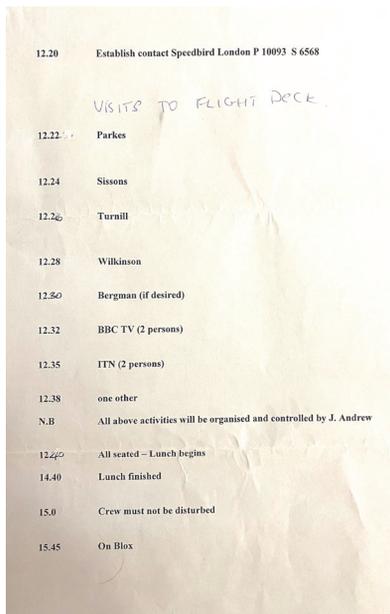
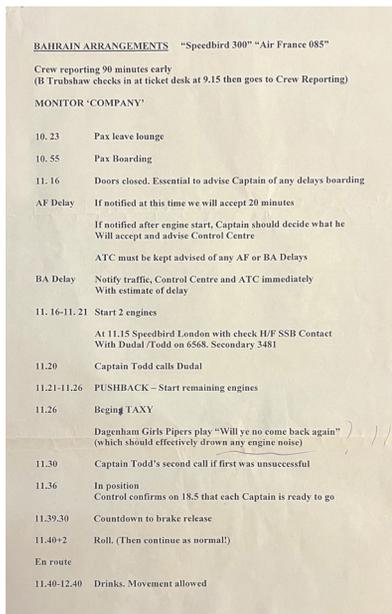
**What happened once you arrived at Bahrain?**

● We had to go directly to a reception with the King of Bahrain, and a wonderful ball.

**Did you work on the return flight?**

● Brian Calvert took Concorde back to London. We were all so hungover on that flight!

Just as we were walking out towards the aircraft, though, the nose



**Order of events**

The crew were given a plan of the day, with each stage of the flight scheduled to the minute from arrival at the airport to the end of the flight. The plan also included blocks of time for TV crews and reporters to visit the flight deck. *Images courtesy of Francine Carville*

tipped up slightly, as the ground crew at Bahrain had not yet perfected their refuelling procedures. (See page 13.) However, someone came out and fixed the issue within about 10 minutes.

Coming back, there were only about 50 passengers. I was talking to the Duchess of Argyll – a charming and delightful woman.

**What happened after the flight?**

● As soon as we landed back in London, we had to go straight into a live press conference. Hundreds of reporters asking questions as we sat up on a big platform. We had all done a day's work by this time. One man with a Welsh accent asked me, "How old are you?" Well, that was a bit rude, wasn't it? So I, being Irish, said, "One of my fellow countrymen once said, 'If a woman told you her right age, she'd tell you anything!'" That shut him up. I was actually the youngest one in the crew.

The next day we were invited up to Parliament for lunch because there had been a couple of MPs on the flight. At the House

of Commons, everyone came and congratulated us. There was another big event for us at Lancaster House, with some of the royals – so we were feted when we got back.

I had to go to Northern Ireland to be interviewed on live television there, because I was from Belfast, so it was local interest. I was also inundated with phone calls to go to all sorts of events.

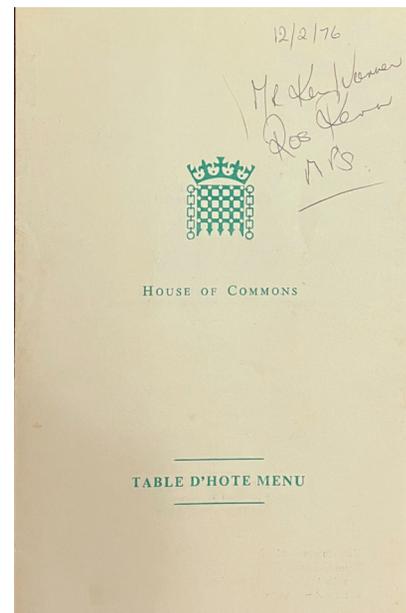
**What are your final thoughts about Concorde?**

● I remember the flight engineers. They were the most important people on the flight. Some days they didn't even stop to eat because they had to attend to every single thing. On my next Concorde flight, the flight engineer got me to put my hand in the gap beside his instrument panel to see how far the aircraft had stretched. I told him, "I don't want to know that!" They were a stewardess's best friend because if anything went wrong on the plane, something got stuck in a sink or a seat wouldn't work, it was the engineer who would sort it out. They

were amazing – I had such respect for the engineers. But they never got the girl – that was the captain's perk, wasn't it?

I did three Concorde flights. They were all lovely, because every person who stepped on to that aircraft was doing it for the first time. A couple of months later, I was in Hong Kong, having been promoted to become a manager for BA.

We paid for Concorde out of our tax money, and France paid for Concorde from their tax. But it was all about national prestige. However, commercial flying is all about business now – making money. It's a long time since I retired, but I still remember my time on Concorde so clearly – it was fantastic.



**Official recognition**

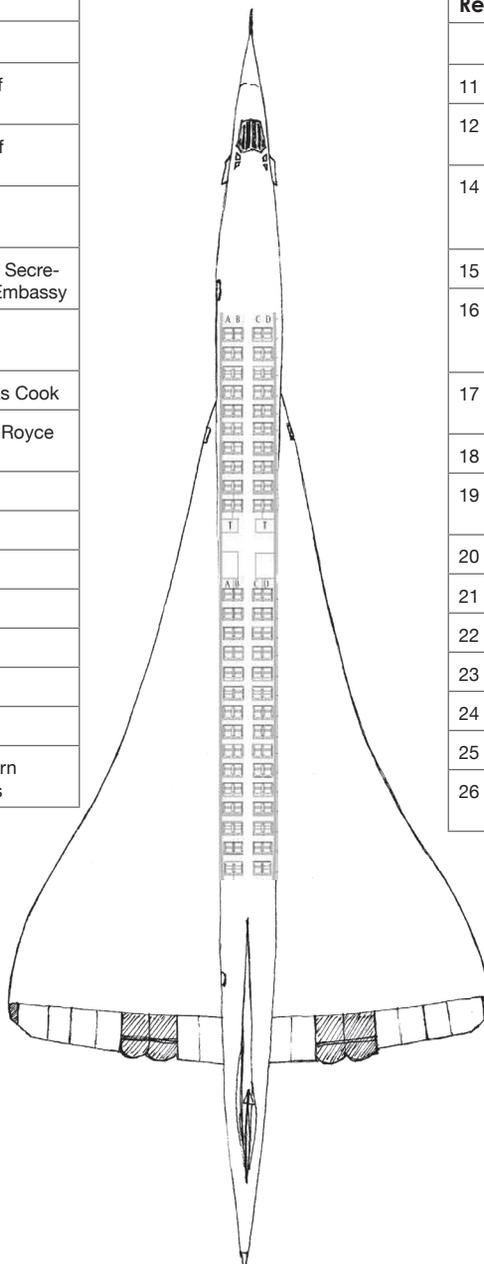
Mementoes of the BA crew's invitations to the House of Commons and to the royal event at Lancaster House. *Images courtesy of Francine Carville*

Forward cabin		
	A	B
1	Corbett: ITN	Moyses: ITN
2	[empty]	[empty]
3	Palmer: NBC	Callery: NBC
4	Hall: NBC	Bergman: ABC
5	Moxon: Press Association	Massey: Reuters
6	Donaldson: Daily Telegraph	Donne: Financial Times
7	Macpherson: Daily Mail	Reed: Times
8	Plaice: Mirror	Woosey: Sun
9	Banks: Economist	Coleman: Aviation Week
10	Ludeman: Deutsch Press	Lonroth: Veckams Affarer

Forward cabin		
	C	D
1	Andrew: BA	Turnill: BBC
2	Moss: ITN	Sissons: ITN
3	Ponsford: BA	Wilkinson: BBC
4	Parks: Independent Radio News	Barber: Mutual Radio
5	Stewart: BA	Morrison: Daily Express
6	Keeble: Evening News	Bray: Evening Standard
7	Davidson: BA	Ramsden: Flight
8	Barker: Guardian	Robson: Express
9	Witkin: New York Times	Nickel: Time-Life
10	Harbour: Australian Assoc. Press	Currie: Canadian Press

Rear cabin		
	A	B
11	Lee: Private Secretary	Shore: Dept of Transport
12	Michel: Private Secretary	Varley: Dept of Industry
14	Ennals: Minister of State, Foreign Office	Stainton: BA
15	Higgins: MP	Abraham: 2nd Secretary, Bahrain Embassy
16	Max Aitken: Beaverbrook	Granville: BA
17	Cheshire	Fisher: Thomas Cook
18	Boyd Carpenter: Civil Aviation Authority	Hooker: Rolls-Royce
19	Leathers	Leathers
20	Cavanna	Hopkins
21	Clifton	Clifton
22	Atkin	Head
23	Anderson Wright	Morris
24	Patton	Buckley
25	Lloyd Davies: BA	Wiggins: BA
26	Clivaz: BA	Monks: Western Morning Press

Rear cabin		
	C	D
11	Barking: BA	HRH Duke of Kent
12	Binning: Dept of Industry	Buckley: Private Secretary (HRH)
14	Edwards: British Aircraft Corporation (BAC)	Greenwood: BAC
15	Kerr: MP	Tudor Thomas: Apex
16	Warren: MP	Young: British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA)
17	Hawkins: Detective	James: BAC
18	Levien	Thorsen
19	Gaffin: Dept of Transport	Duchess of Argyll
20	Heaton	Jennings
21	Dorman	Dorman
22	Von Gunten	Hurcombe Blight
23	Croucher	Cooper
24	Pezaro	Ingham
25	Pearce	Lee
26	Cabin Service Officer: BA	Takesi Suda: Koyodo News Service



**List of passengers**

These tables, created from the original lists preserved by Francine Carville, show the mix of TV and newspaper representatives, senior British politicians, royalty and VIPs, aviation industry representatives, and commercial passengers on the inaugural BA flight. Note the lack of row 13 in the cabin!

Artwork: Katie John

## A tough day for the crew

*While G-BOAA enjoyed a trouble-free flight to Bahrain, things were rather different for her French counterpart. F-BVFA had a much longer and more challenging journey to Rio de Janeiro via Dakar. Pierre Grange, former Air France Concorde pilot and president of the Concorde professionals' association APCOS, tells the story. His article, originally entitled "Une rude journée pour l'équipage", is reproduced here by his kind permission, both in the original French and in an English translation.*

On peut dire que c'est à 12 heures 40 précises, heure de Paris, le mercredi 21 janvier 1976 que s'ouvre, pour le transport aérien, cette fameuse parenthèse supersonique qui ne se refermera qu'en 2003. Le top décollage des Concorde français et anglais est donné, à Roissy comme à Heathrow, par les tours de contrôle. L'envol simultané des 2 appareils reste visible encore aujourd'hui dans les archives de l'INA. Tandis que le Concorde anglais prend la route de Bahreïn, le Fox Alpha d'Air France part sur les traces de l'Aéropostale et file vers Dakar et Rio.

Il ne s'agit pas, ce jour-là pour Air France, d'un simple premier vol mais plutôt d'un vol inaugurant la première liaison supersonique régulière avec passagers à bord. Air France met les petits plats dans les grands. De nombreuses personnalités viennent sabler le champagne au satellite 5 de CDG 1, juste en face du Fox Alpha prêt au départ. Certains, comme Jacques Mitterrand président d'Aérospatiale, Marcel Cavaillé secrétaire d'état au transport, Pierre Giraudet président d'Air France ou Maurice Bellonte, font partie de l'envolée.

La composition de l'équipage technique est très particulière puisque l'un des pilotes va subir un examen de passage. En effet, Pierre Chanoine, qui a été qualifié Concorde à Toulouse, doit, conformément aux règles, subir un contrôle en ligne avant de pouvoir exercer la fonction de commandant de bord sur Concorde. Pierre Dudal, le chef de Division, est l'examineur. Avec le recul, on peut penser que les conditions n'étaient pas

It can be said that at precisely 12:40 Paris time, on Wednesday 21 January 1976, the era of supersonic air travel began – an era that would draw to a close only in 2003. The take-off signal for the French and British Concorde was given at the same instant by the control towers at Roissy Charles de Gaulle and London Heathrow. The simultaneous take-off of the two aircraft can still be seen today in the film archives of INA. While the British Concorde set off for Bahrain, Air France's Fox Alpha followed in the path of the old Aéropostale service and sped towards Dakar and then Rio.

That day, for Air France, it was not just a matter of a simple first flight, but rather of inaugurating the first ever regular supersonic passenger service. Air France laid on a premium service. Numerous dignitaries arrived to celebrate with champagne at satellite 5 of CDG 1, in front of Fox-Alpha as the aircraft stood ready to depart. Some – such as Jacques Mitterrand, president of Aérospatiale; Marcel Cavaillé, Secretary of State for Transport; Pierre Giraudet, president of Air France; and Maurice Bellonte – would be passengers on the flight.

The composition of the flight crew was very unusual, as one of the pilots was to undergo a qualifying flight during the journey. In fact, according to regulations, Pierre Chanoine, who had attained his qualification on Concorde in Toulouse, had to undergo a line check before being permitted to serve as Captain on Concorde. Pierre Dudal, the Division Chief, was the examiner. In hindsight, one might consider that the conditions that day were not ideal for submitting someone to such an examination; it is certainly why Chanoine wrote later, "the [inaugural Rio] flight was the worst of my career".

In addition to Pierre Dudal (in command of the flight) and Pierre Chanoine (Captain in training), the crew consisted of flight engineer André Blanc; Cabin Manager Daniel Blot; stewardesses Nicole Chabrier,



### L'équipage technique / The flight crew

De gauche à droite: Pierre Dudal, André Blanc (officier mécanicien navigant), Pierre Chanoine.

Left to right: Pierre Dudal, André Blanc (Engineer Officer), Pierre Chanoine.

Photo: © Collection Air France; reproduced by permission of APCOS



idéales ce jour-là pour subir un tel examen et c'est certainement pour cette raison que Pierre Chanoine écrit plus tard : « le vol [inaugural sur Rio] fut le plus mauvais de ma carrière ».

Outre Pierre Dudal commandant de bord contrôleur et Pierre Chanoine commandant de bord contrôlé, l'équipage comprend André Blanc officier mécanicien navigant, Daniel Blot chef de cabine, Nicole Chabrier, Elsa Drouet et Michèle Vallée hôtesse, Jean-Paul Boucher cadre PNC en fonction steward et Gérald Fortier steward. Pour tous, une rude journée s'annonce.

A la pression technico-commerciale liée à la recherche d'un sans-faute, s'ajoute la forte pression médiatique de TF1 qui a transformé ce vol inaugural en un vol spécial à son profit. L'horaire a été avancé d'une demi-heure pour que l'arrivée coïncide avec le JT de 20 heures à Paris. La synchronisation des décollages a été organisée pour donner aux caméras de TF1 des images exclusives. A bord, le journaliste Yves Mourousi et son équipe, occupent l'espace. Celui dont André Blanc disait qu'il avait un « formidable bagout », est installé sur le jump-seat au cockpit et commence à transmettre dès le lever des roues. Durant le vol, il se rend en cabine pour interviewer passagers et célébrités.

Après un départ à l'heure, la première étape se déroule normalement même si Concorde perd un peu de temps en arrivant très haut en vent arrière. L'escale technique tourne à la visite protocolaire et dure un peu plus que prévu.

C'est après le décollage de Dakar que la tension monte d'un cran dans l'étroit et encombré cockpit lorsque les vannes d'air secondaire refusent de s'ouvrir, interdisant ainsi le passage à vitesse supersonique. Il faudra tout le métier d'André Blanc pour arriver à déjouer cette panne. Ce retard à l'accélération coûtera une vingtaine de minutes de retard supplémentaire à l'arrivée à Rio. Yves Mourousi manquant ainsi son rendez-vous avec le 20 heures de TF1, claironne qu'il descendra avant tout le monde, ministre compris et c'est ce qu'il fait à 20 heures 20.

L'équipage disposera de 3 jours de repos pour se remettre de ses émotions avant de repartir vers Paris. Cette fois ce sera un vol régulier et sans histoire !

### Nouvelle livrée / New livery

F-BVFA en vol, 1976. Le 21 janvier, le Concorde étrenne la nouvelle livrée d'Air France.

F-BVFA in flight, 1976. On 21 January, Concorde appeared for the first time in the new Air France livery.

Photo: US National Archives / Science Photo Library

Elsa Drouet and Michèle Vallée; Jean-Paul Boucher (PNC; acting steward); and steward Gérald Fortier. For everyone, a tough day was in store.

To the technical and commercial pressures involved with ensuring a flawless flight was added intense media pressure from French TV channel TF1, which had made this inaugural flight into a special flight for its own benefit. The departure time had been moved forward by 30 minutes so that the arrival would coincide with the 8pm news broadcast in Paris. The synchronisation of the take-offs had been arranged to give the TF1 cameras exclusive film footage. On board, journalist Yves Mourousi and his team took up all of the space. Mourousi himself (who André Blanc described as having "a tremendous gift of the gab") seated himself on the jump seat in the cockpit and began broadcasting as soon as the wheels left the runway. During the flight, he would go out into the cabin to interview the passengers and celebrities.

After a take-off exactly on time, the first leg proceeded normally, although Concorde lost a little time due to arriving very high and with a tailwind. The technical stopover turned into a more formal inspection and lasted a little longer than expected.

After the take-off from Dakar, though, tension rose a few notches in the narrow and crowded cockpit, when the secondary air doors refused to open, thus preventing acceleration to supersonic speed. It took all of André Blanc's skill to resolve this problem. This delay in acceleration added about 20 minutes to the arrival time at Rio. Yves Mourousi, having thus missed his link-up with TF1 at 8.00pm, announced that he would disembark first, before everyone else including the Minister, and that is what he did at 8.20pm.

The crew would have three days of rest to recover from their ordeal before their return flight to Paris. That occasion would be a regular flight, without any drama!



### L'arrivée à Rio / Arrival at Rio

Photo: source unknown

## First commercial flight to Bahrain

*Behind the success of the inaugural Concorde passenger flights lay months of careful preparation on both sides of the Channel. Former British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) engineer Richard Harris remembers his role in those preceding weeks, the events of the day itself, and the transition into regular services.*

It was on 21st January 1976 that G-BOAA (Concorde 206) operated the inaugural commercial service to Bahrain, beginning a distinguished period of supersonic flight lasting until Concorde's withdrawal from service in 2003.

G-BOAA had its first flight from Filton to Fairford on 5th November 1975. Following a series of shake-down flights and flight test flights, the British Certificate of Airworthiness was awarded before the aircraft's delivery to British Airways (BA) on 14th January 1976, in time for the inaugural flight.

### Preparations in Bahrain

In September 1975, following my return from the Endurance Flying Programme with Concorde G-BOAC, I had embarked on my Approval Courses for three months. During this time I had been designated as the BAC Overseas Engineer (OSE) for the Bahrain service. Apart from watching G-BOAA take off for her first flight, this was the first time I had not worked as a test engineer on a Filton-built aircraft prior to first flight.

On 14th January a small ground support team of us deployed to Bahrain to train the BA local station staff in preparation for Concorde's arrival and the turnaround handling procedures, particularly for the subsequent departure the following day. This included checking the spares pack and ground support equipment that had arrived from London and

### Smooth operation

Concorde being efficiently managed after the first arrival at Bahrain, thanks to the work of the ground crew.

*Photo: BA Heritage Centre*

### Awaiting Concorde

The ground support team in Bahrain consisted of engineers from BAC and BA, together with representation for Rolls-Royce and SNECMA (responsible for the engine and powerplant).

*Photo: Richard Harris*



ensuring that it was stored and accessible if urgently needed.

The ground support team consisted of 2 BA OSEs, whom we knew well and had worked with at Fairford; 3 BA certified ground engineers; and a Rolls-Royce and SNECMA representative. Due to the continuing development of the digital intake control system, it was also considered necessary to position an intake system specialist to support the operation.

### Alpha Alpha arrives

The aircraft was crewed by Captain Norman Todd in command on the

outbound leg and Captain Brian Calvert on the return flight, with flight engineer John Lidiard. Also on board, keeping a low profile and almost unrecognisable in a BA Captain's uniform, was Brian Trubshaw, operating as Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Check Captain.

One can imagine the tension as the aircraft landed and taxied towards the terminal. The priorities were wheel chocks, ground electrical power and the air conditioning trucks, but each of the teams was well prepared and everything worked like clockwork.



Standing under the air bridge near the Crew Chief, the Station Maintenance Manager (Bill Jasper) watched with me as the bridge moved back and forwards; fearing a problem, he despatched me up onto the bridge, to ensure that the cabin door was correctly aligned. Once opened, the great and good deplaned and gave me a grandstand position by the bridge operator, as all the passengers and crew disembarked.

A quick conversation with the Engineer Officer indicated that there were no significant defects in the Aircraft Technical Log (ATL), and so it was back on to the ground to ensure that all of the baggage conveyors and galley servicing trucks were correctly positioned and unloading successfully.

Something that became routine, both in Bahrain and subsequently in Washington, with any recorded defects in the ATL (even those that we could defer back to London), was to take the BA ground engineers through a troubleshooting routine to give them a more in-depth understanding of the specific systems and hands-on fault finding, as we had the luxury of the aircraft being available to us overnight.

For a period, and if we had the spare parts available 'on station', with the agreement of the BA Managers,



### A pause in work

Richard Harris in the process of preparing Concorde for departure.

*Photo: Richard Harris*

### A timely departure

G-BOAA leaving Bahrain on time – after Richard and his team had resolved a technical hiccup.

*Photo: Richard Harris*



we would rectify even Acceptable Deferred Defect (ADD) problems, in order to give the departing crew a clean, defect-free log and the ground engineers the experience of diagnosing and rectifying faults.

### Dispatching the return flight

On the following morning, and with the aircraft 'on stand' really early, this was everybody's first experience of dispatching an aircraft in service from a line station with paying passengers and their baggage.

With fuelling taking place, and in the early stages of baggage loading, the front and rear galley trucks arrived. At this point, we had an indication of a weight and balance problem that impacted on fuelling!

The fuel load would be uplifted semi-automatically, managed by a ground engineer underneath the aircraft at the external refuel control panel. Typically, because the area at the rear of the aircraft was less congested with equipment etc., the baggage teams and the galley loaders would start to load those areas first.

However, depending on how far advanced the refuelling was, if there was insufficient fuel in the forward tanks, the balance of the aircraft would shift rearwards. This could cause the nose to rise. If the nosewheel weight switches sensed an unacceptable weight at the front of the aircraft, the weight switches on the nose leg would shut down the refuel control valves. As a result, the pressure of fuel from the refuelling truck would be trapped in the transfer galleries, and this then prevented the refuel control valve being

reopened, even when weight was redistributed towards the front of the aircraft. The only way in which this situation could then be retrieved was for somebody with experience of managing the flight engineer's fuel management panel to open the tank inlet valves, thus relieving the gallery pressure lock.

BA had initially positioned a Fleet Cabin Service Manager to Bahrain to supervise transit servicing. Following discussions and outlining of the problems, he was able to reschedule the galley loading sequence, particularly ensuring that the forward galley was the first to be loaded, and the forward baggage hold given priority for loading.

With loading complete and the flight deck pre-flight checks completed without any snags, the passengers embarked. Once the cabin door was closed, the go-ahead was given to start the engines and the aircraft was successfully pushed back on time. This had been an extremely successful first turnaround, with a team of whom the majority had not handled a Concorde on the ramp before.

### Settling into service

The following week we commenced with the four-day flight schedule: inbound on a Monday and Wednesday and outbound back to London on a Tuesday and Thursday.

The next four weeks passed with little drama. There were some minor snags – such as an anti-vibration warning, an engine anti-ice valve change, a radio altimeter change, a nacelle overheat warning, and our



### Resolving snags

Richard Harris (left) following a main wheel change on Concorde with Dave, our intake specialist.

*Photo: Richard Harris*

first main wheel change – but all of these departures were still achieved on time.

### Return to the UK

When I was designated to be the Bahrain BAC OSE for the inaugural flight, my wife was expecting our third child in March 1976. This obviously created huge pressures on us as a family, already having two boys under five. In my opinion, there were other colleagues perfectly capable of undertaking this role, but my management was adamant it had to be me! I later found out BA had insisted that I had been selected.

Having talked it through with my wife, I negotiated a compromise that I would be permitted regular telephone contact and return to the UK two weeks before her due date. At this time, telephone calls to the UK from Bahrain had to be booked, and typically there would be a four-hour wait to be connected!

Joyce was a champion throughout all of this period and agreed for me to return to Bahrain two weeks after our son was born, leaving her with three boys under five to cope with, and I will always love and respect her for doing this.

Being back in the UK enabled me to follow through on a number of problems with BA Engineering that had emerged during the early in-service operations, including compatibility of Ground Power Units, both electric and diesel;



### The shape of success

The culmination of all the hard work by engineers, flight crew, cabin crew, and ground crew – Concorde G-BOAA serenely in flight with her passengers.

*Photo: BA Heritage Centre*

Ground Power Protection Unit performance; and the emergency generator hydraulic motors.

Meeting with the Superintendent for Electrical Development, a number of his team representing both aircraft systems and ground equipment, and two BAC Senior Design Members, a number of other issues were also covered, including navigation lights, main landing lights, and electro-luminescent panel use, so this period proved extremely productive.

### A growing workload

Returning to Bahrain at the end of March, as confidence had grown in Concorde's performance and the station's ability to manage the aircraft, I found the team was significantly reduced. Also, by this time G-BOAC had joined the schedule, following its return from Filton for the modifications programme after carrying out the endurance flying the previous summer.

With preparations now well advanced for the inaugural Concorde service to Washington Dulles (IAD), planned for later in May, I returned briefly for a meeting in

Filton, to consider ongoing support for Bahrain whilst also resourcing the new station's support. By this time a number of BA OSEs had gained considerable experience of the aircraft, and so it was resolved that a small team would support Washington and that I would continue to support Bahrain together with a couple of the less experienced BA OSEs.

Looking ahead, and with there being a consideration about the number of weekly services to both Washington and Bahrain, it was decided, in conjunction with BA, that from June onwards I would fly with the aircraft on each of the Bahrain services, and thus would be available to provide ramp support at Heathrow for the departing and returning Washington flights.

With the way the aircraft were being scheduled, it was the inbound Washington service on a Sunday night that we then turned around to take to Bahrain the following morning.

Following my return to Bahrain, the next inbound Monday arrival was G-BOAC, which had experienced an 'engine vibration warning' in



**A second Concorde**

G-BOAC was delivered to BA on 13 February 1976 after being re-fitted for airline service. She would carry out the inaugural flight to Washington Dulles as well as serving the existing route to Bahrain.

*Photo: Plismo / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)*

defect. Having worked through the diagnostics, this defect required an engine ground run for confirmation. Prior to delivery of the aircraft to BA, all engine ground running during BAC operations had been undertaken by the flight engineers, but, once in service, that responsibility passed to Station Maintenance Managers and qualified OSEs. As

this was not a frequent occurrence on line stations, even the station staff needed support on these occasions to carry out ground running on chocks and brakes.

By the middle of May, a plan had been agreed with BA that I would return from being based in Bahrain and would then fly with the Bahrain service every week; when in

London, I would still be available to provide ramp support for Washington departures and arrivals.

On 24 May, G-BOAC operated the inaugural Washington service. Following its return to Heathrow, it was then prepared for a Bahrain return, with me in my new role on board. Seats 10A and B were assigned for us on each flight.

This arrangement then continued throughout the summer until the end of September. Returning to London with the Thursday service, I was then able to discuss with BA Development any problems that had been encountered, and if necessary, take these back to Filton on the Friday for action.

During October I was then brought into the Planning Group for the Far East sales tour that was being planned for November (see Mach 2, February 2022) – but by then I was able to look back on my nine months of involvement with Bahrain operations as having been extremely successful, with a high level of ‘on time’ departures.

**A lifetime of souvenirs**

Right: A selection of identity tags, ranging from Richard Harris's earliest days as a BAC OSE for Concorde, right up to the latest entry label for the 50th anniversary celebrations. Far right: A commemorative tie marking the inauguration of the service to Bahrain.

*Photos: Richard Harris*



## 50th anniversary celebrations

*The 50th anniversary of the inaugural passenger flights has been celebrated in various locations in the UK and France. Katie John looks at some of the highlights from the day itself and the following weekend.*

### **G-BOAF: Aerospace Bristol, 21 January**

Aerospace Bristol welcomed more than 30 former Concorde captains, first officers, flight engineers, and cabin crew, as well as some of the volunteers who have worked with G-BOAF, for a day of celebration.

The highlight was a nose droop at 11.40am, with commentary by Concorde Captain Les Brodie, to mark 50 years since the moment of the simultaneous Air France/British Airways take-offs. This was followed by a celebratory lunch. The event was featured on BBC Bristol and ITV News West Country.

Aerospace Bristol also saw the launch of Concorde coins and stamps to mark the occasion, and an auction of memorabilia organised by Speedbird Promotions.

Further information on the day and about Aerospace Bristol can be found here: [aerospacebristol.org/news/2026/1/23/aerospace-bristol-hosts-biggest-ever-gathering-of-concorde-crew-to-mark-50-years-since-iconic-first-commercial-flight](https://aerospacebristol.org/news/2026/1/23/aerospace-bristol-hosts-biggest-ever-gathering-of-concorde-crew-to-mark-50-years-since-iconic-first-commercial-flight)

#### **Honoured guests**

Concorde crew members and Aerospace Bristol supporters gather under G-BOAF for a commemorative photo.

*Photo: Barbara Evripidou for Aerospace Bristol*



### **G-BBDG: Brooklands Museum, 21 January**

A dinner was held at Brooklands Museum for former crew and others involved with Concorde. The event was hosted by Jen Tye, daughter of Concorde pilot John Tye (see also his article on page 18). It included a Q&A session with seven Concorde pilots and a display of memorabilia from Brooklands Museum and the British Airways Heritage Centre. Francine Carville, cabin crew member on the inaugural Concorde passenger flight, was a VIP guest (see also page 6). Further information on the event and Concorde at Brooklands can be seen here: [www.brooklandsmuseum.com/discover/concorde/](http://www.brooklandsmuseum.com/discover/concorde/)

*Photo: Dave Parkins at Brooklands Museum*



## G-AXDN: Duxford, 21 January

The day was organised by the Duxford Aviation Society (DAS), who own Concorde G-AXDN as part of the British Airliner Collection. Events began with Vice Chairman Peter Archer and Chairman Mike Smith being interviewed on TV; the day would be covered by Anglia TV and BBC East.

There were three nose droops, carried out by volunteer Simon Peachey: the first at 11:40am, exactly 50 years since G-BOAA and F-BVFA began their take-off roll; and then at 12:40 and 1:40 pm. Before each one, a raffle was held for one of the visitors to witness the nose and visor action from the flight deck. Mike Smith and Peter Archer provided commentary for each one, talking the visitors through the nose and visor movements that would have occurred in a typical flight.

The volunteers had also set up a “pop-up” bookshop just behind G-AXDN, with a selection of books and other memorabilia relating to Concorde and aviation.

Visitor numbers were not high, possibly due to the dreadful weather, but there were spectators of all ages, including families and school groups. The children

particularly seemed to enjoy seeing what Concorde could do; one young visitor described the nose and visor movements as “sick!” (I think this means “very good”...)

Further information about the British Airliner Collection and Concorde G-AXDN can be found here: [www.britairliners.org/airliner/concorde-101-1921/](http://www.britairliners.org/airliner/concorde-101-1921/)



### Perfect timing

DAS Chairman Mike Smith talks visitors through the nose droop at 11.40am, 50 years to the second since the first commercial Concorde flight. *Photo: Katie John*

## F-WTSS/F-BTSD: Le Bourget, 24 January

A commemorative day was organised by Musée de l’Air et de l’Espace (MAE) at Le Bourget on 24 January.

Features included two films about the aircraft, together with a conference organised by MAE with the Association des Professionnels de Concorde et du Supersonique (APCOS) and the Association des Amis du Musée de l’Air (AAMA). Other attractions included a chance to talk with Hubert Protin, former Concorde engineer and AAMA volunteer, in the Concorde hall, and with other AAMA volunteers, as well as a display of Concorde memorabilia and the chance to view unpublished videos of Concorde’s life in service.

Further information on the day can be found here: [www.museeairespace.fr/agenda/50e-anniversaire-du-premier-vol-commercial-concorde/](http://www.museeairespace.fr/agenda/50e-anniversaire-du-premier-vol-commercial-concorde/)



### The Concorde Hall, MAE, Le Bourget

*Photo: Eric Salard / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 2.0)*

## Anniversary memorabilia

Both the UK and France commemorated the anniversary by issuing coins and stamps.



### Monnaie de Paris gold coins

Available at: [www.monnaiedeparis.fr/fr/concorde-monnaie-de-50eur-1-4-oz-or-qualite-be-millesime-2026](http://www.monnaiedeparis.fr/fr/concorde-monnaie-de-50eur-1-4-oz-or-qualite-be-millesime-2026)



### Westminster Collection coins

Available at: [www.westminstercollection.com/p-709V/The-Concorde-50th-Anniversary-BU-50p-Coin.aspx](http://www.westminstercollection.com/p-709V/The-Concorde-50th-Anniversary-BU-50p-Coin.aspx)



### Royal Mail stamps

Photos by Adrian Meredith. Available at: [shop.royalmail.com/special-stamp-issues/concorde](http://shop.royalmail.com/special-stamp-issues/concorde)

## It was 50 years ago...

As G-BOAA took off, the thousands of spectators watching from the airport fences included the 19-year-old John Tye. On that day he had no idea that he would go on to become a Concorde pilot and fly this aircraft himself. He recalls the day here.

● **21 January 1976.** It was a Wednesday. I was a sixth former at Hampton Grammar School in South West London. I joined the CCF, the Combined Cadet Force, soon after I'd started at the school in September 1969, 6 months to the day after the Concorde prototype took to the air for the first time in Toulouse, France. Commentator, Raymond Baxter had announced "She flies. She flies. Concorde flies."

The Combined Cadet Force had harnessed my interest in aviation. We had a glider with a bungee to get it airborne. But with spoilers fitted to the wings to ensure it didn't. I'd been airborne for the first time in a DH Chipmunk with the Air Experience flight at RAF Benson.

I was an aircraft spotter. My hobby started with Mum and Dad taking me to the Queen's Building at Heathrow when I was young, making my own way there when I was older on the bus. And then my moped when I was 16 and a proper motorbike when I turned 17.

Now, 7 years after that first flight, Concorde was ready to take commercial passengers for the first time. I still had 6 months to go at Hampton. My 'A-Levels' were scheduled for that summer. Maths, Physics and Geography were my chosen subjects and I was applying for a place at City University to study Air Transport Engineering.

It was big news. Concorde was going to take off at 11.40 that morning, a simultaneous launch with the Air France craft in Paris. It was history in the making. Hampton Grammar School was only 4 miles from Heathrow, just 15 minutes or so on a motorised pair of wheels. Surely we wouldn't be missed?



It was Graham's idea of course, Sir. He told me to do it. My pal, Graham Marley, probably blamed it on me, but either way, we found ourselves clinging to the fence, having made our way to the front of the crowd. Thousands had turned out to watch this pioneering event. We were there when we should have been in double Geography.

If someone standing alongside me that day had bet me a million pounds that one day I'd fly that very aeroplane, I would have laughed and not taken the bet. But 23 years later I did fly that very aeroplane. I pushed the throttles forward vigorously, just like Captain Norman Todd did that day. The reheats ignited and the Olympus engines roared. Seconds later she was airborne and on her way to 'The edge of Space' at twice the speed of sound.

● **21 January 2026: 50 years later.** It was also a Wednesday. I was now a retired Training Captain, still living close to Heathrow. I'd spent an amazing 47 years in the aviation industry, with 35 years of it flying professionally, and that day thousands tuned in to radio and TV broadcasts where I and others were describing passionately what it was like to fly Concorde. A prestigious celebration dinner at Brooklands in Weybridge, where much of Concorde was designed and built, brought enthusiasts and former Concorde pilots together. Francine Carville, thought to be the last surviving crew member

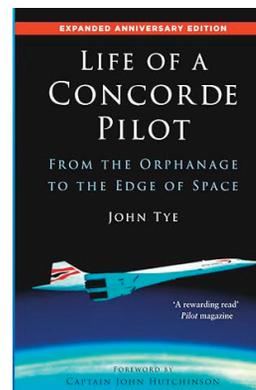
### A personal memento

Alpha Alpha preparing for take-off.  
Photo: John Tye

from that first commercial flight, recounted her memories of the day, 50 years ago. Captain Todd's uniform jacket and his logbook, opened at the relevant page, were on display amongst many other artefacts.

Captains Norman Todd and Brian Calvert, along with Engineer Officer John Lidiard, the flight crew on that inaugural flight, have long since departed this world for the next. Others have come and gone. Not many though; fewer than there have been astronauts. Thousands of skilled people dedicated their expertise to design and build Concorde in the 1960s, before we had colour TV, and the cabin crew, ground engineers and many other trades kept her in the air for 27 years, into the 21st century, with 4K and streaming taken for granted.

Concorde has been a museum exhibit for 23 years but if the recent 50th anniversary was anything to go by, she will surely live on in the hearts of the British public forever.



John Tye's memoir of a life in aviation. Expanded Anniversary Edition available now on the internet and in bookstores. [thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/life-of-a-concorde-pilot/](http://thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/life-of-a-concorde-pilot/)



# CONCORDE WATCH

## Concorde G-BOAC British production aircraft

**Location:** Runway Visitor Park, Manchester, UK

**Reporter:** Graham Cahill **Date:** 3 December 2025

The team for the visit consisted of Graham Cahill for Heritage Concorde and John Hepple representing the Runway Visitor Park (RVP). This was a quick visit just prior to Christmas. The following work was completed.

### Lighting

#### 1. Exit lighting

Installation of battery powered non-maintained fire lights at the exit. We installed 4 small fire lights at the exit of the aircraft, so in the event of a power loss lighting will be provided for exiting the aircraft. The old ones had failed.

#### 2. Door lighting

Made a small change to the 24-hour lights by the door so when stewards open the door in the morning they have light in the essential area without having to use a torch. They can then easily see to turn the power on.

#### 3. Cockpit lighting

We replaced the low-voltage spotlights inside the cockpit with newer LEDs. The original 50-watt-equivalent spotlights made filming inside the cockpit difficult because they were flickering, so we replaced the LED drivers too. Now the lighting doesn't affect filming in the cockpit.

Investigation of supplies to fit LED dash lights (as we have already done on the engineer's panel). The LED lights will illuminate the panels when 28v power is off. We did this at Duxford and the results were good. We will complete this next time.



#### Cockpit lighting

Above and right: Two views of the flight deck, powered but with the general lighting turned off.

*Photo: Heritage Concorde*

We continued installing the general LED lights in the roof panel; roof panels are now done.

#### 4. Cabin lighting

Reduction in the brightness of the original exit light inside the cabin, following feedback from visitors saying that the light was too bright while doing tours. We reduced the brightness by 50%.

#### Hydraulic systems

Inspection of the hydraulic systems for nose and visor: no issues found, and no leaks. The hydraulic power

#### Hydraulic system

A view of the hydraulics bay; the inspection revealed no leaks and no other problems.

*Photo: Heritage Concorde*



pack is working great and we are not losing oil.

#### General inspection

We carried out a general inspection of the rest of the aircraft to check for leaks and issues; none were found. In all a great little visit; BOAC looks great.

#### Additional report

We have spent almost a year trying to source suitable material for the



### Cockpit seating repairs

Above: A seat with damaged fabric; a long swatch of replacement fabric is laid on top, to the left of the tear. Above right: The seat with new fabric fitted.

Photos: John Hepple

### Floor runner

The new runner fitted in the cabin.

Photo: John Hepple

cockpit seats. We managed to source some from a supplier that almost perfectly matches.

We passed this information on to the RVP, who quickly purchased all the remaining stock. The RVP arranged for a company called Aero Technics to make the seat covers by using the original covers as a template. The new covers look great and should serve the aircraft well for many years.

In addition, the carpet runner inside the cabin has been replaced using spare carpet that was supplied with the aircraft. The spare carpet was not bound at the edges; the RVP has had it bound and installed the new runner.

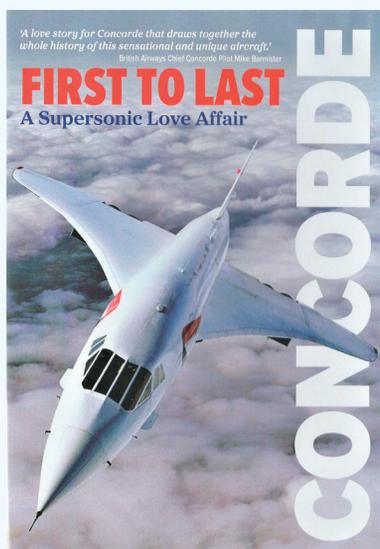
G-BOAC is probably one of the busiest aircraft in terms of people passing through the cabin and cockpit, and as a result she does need regular maintenance in terms

of furnishings. By comparison, G-AXDN at Duxford has between 300 and 400 thousand visitors passing through per year; however, guests are not allowed inside the cockpit and the flooring is not carpet so although visitor numbers are higher there is less wear.

For information on G-BOAC and tours at the RVP, see the website:

[runwayvisitorpark.co.uk](http://runwayvisitorpark.co.uk)

## Concorde film: raising funds for preservation



*Concorde: First to Last*, produced by 1st Take, is the fascinating story of Concorde's existence from the start of design up to the present day. The DVD has 150 minutes of archive footage, including footage from the factory floor and interviews with test pilots, designers, airline pilots, and others who participated in Concorde's history. The DVD also includes 90 minutes of extras such as film from a round-the-world trip and a flight deck tour of Concorde G-BOAC at the Runway Visitor Park.

The film is available as a DVD or HD stream, priced £14.95. Now each purchase by a Heritage Concorde member will mean £2 going to Aerospace Bristol, home of Alpha Foxtrot, the last Concorde to fly.

To make a contribution, just add "- Heritage" to your name when placing your order. See the Heritage Concorde web page for further details: [www.heritageconcorde.com/first-to-last-filton-film](http://www.heritageconcorde.com/first-to-last-filton-film)