

Yesteryear – The Remarkable Anglo/French “Concorde”[©]

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There are many facts and figures about the evolution of the very impressive super-sonic Concorde, as developed, produced, tested, and put into service in a joint British/French endeavor! All related details are as admirably-delineated in the following Wikipedia web site article: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concorde> As the Wikipedia article states, this extremely-unique engineering “marvel” first entered revenue service on January 21, 1976 and continued in service until its retirement – 27 years later – on October 24, 2003, a truly impressive accomplishment! Considering that I had a 40-year career as a McDonnell Douglas & Boeing employee, you may wonder why I have chosen to write an article about a “Brand X” airplane (a label commonly used by us for our competitors). Well, as an aviation professional, I love all facets of aviation and I have many special memories of being around and seeing the Concorde in action. As has always been the case in writing my articles, I just want to share some of my experiences with you! Hopefully what I have to say here will be of interest to YOU.



So, my story begins. During 1978-1979, I was the Douglas Aircraft Company’s Field Service Representative assigned to British Airways (BA) at their London-Heathrow Airport (LHR) facility. My mission was to support BA during their evaluation of the Douglas-Long Beach-built DC-10, as a possible future addition to the BA fleet. After a short time, I met and be-friended a number of BA middle-management engineering and flight operations personnel involved in the DC-10 evaluation. Thanks to the British Airport Authority’s security generosity, I was given an unlimited vehicle access pass that allowed me to drive my car all over the LHR flight ramp. Thus, although I continued to fulfill my requirements to support BA, I soon began calling on all airlines at LHR that operated Douglas-built airplanes. During this time, I saw the magnificent Concorde up quite close almost every day! Eventually BA was very gracious in accommodating me on 2 different occasions: first, a group of engineers hosted me for a very detailed on-aircraft exterior and interior examination; later on, I was invited to participate in the evaluation of some meal service trials, as related to changes in the future meal service to be offered to Concorde passengers. While sitting in a Concorde passenger seat (on ground), after consuming no fewer than 3 filet mignons with all the trimmings, needless to say, I gave a BIG THUMBS UP for the proposed future meal service! I remain extremely grateful for these experiences afforded me by BA during my all-too-short 1-year stay at LHR, my very first permanent Douglas Field Service assignment.

During October 1979-October 1980, I was assigned to support VARIG, a Douglas DC-10 operator in Rio de Janeiro who had purchased 6 additional new DC-10's during May 1979. Having seen the Concorde at LHR during on-ground operations, during takeoff, and during landing approaches, my memories stayed with me, but I was unsure of just when I may see this "beautiful bird" again. I actually didn't have to wait too long. As the summer days wound down, darkness in Rio occurred earlier each day. As it turned out, just as I exited the VARIG facility each night around 6 pm, for many weeks like clockwork, an Air France Concorde was blasting off with full afterburners from Rio's International airport. I witnessed this on countless occasions and it was indeed very impressive in the dark!



After leaving Rio, my wife and I spent the next 7 years on an assignment during which we resided in San Francisco and San Diego, California; neither of these sites was served by the Concorde. Then, from 1987-1992, we were on another permanent assignment in Olbia, Italy on the island of Sardinia. During this time we visited my wife's parents who resided in the London area near LHR on a couple occasions. I'll never forget that my wife's parents home was basically directly in line with the Concorde's approach path to LHR and, each morning of our stay, upon its approach to LHR, we were "rattled out of bed" by the Concorde passing closely overhead!

During 1992-1998, my wife and I visited the London area on a couple additional occasions during which we witnessed the Concorde in action once again. This was to be the last time we would see this truly glorious engineering marvel.

Sadly, during July 2000, after a tire failure during takeoff caused a fuel tank rupture and fire, an Air France Concorde crashed killing all those onboard. This was the beginning of the end for Concorde and the airplane was retired at Air France during May 2003 and at British Airways during October 2003.

Above all, with the exception of a single major accident, the Concorde compiled an impressive record of being in service for 27 years and it was a true pleasure of mine to have known her - just a bit. Of course both McDonnell Douglas and Boeing had "supersonic transports" on the drawing board, but their viability could not be justified; thus, neither ever came to fruition.



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