

LAKER AIRWAYS DC-10 “Skytrain” – California Here We Come! ©

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida

For a 1-year period during 1978-1979 I was assigned as a McDonnell Douglas Field Service Representative to British Airways at London’s Heathrow Airport. My primary mission was to provide technical support to British Airways who were evaluating the DC-10 via an interchange agreement with Air New Zealand. Additionally, during the absence of their assigned McDonnell Douglas representatives, I also supported London-Gatwick-airport-based British Caledonian and Laker Airways DC-10 operations.

During July of 1979 I felt very privileged to be in attendance at a reception and press conference at Gatwick airport just prior to the launch of Laker’s first DC-10 “Skytrain” service to Los Angeles! Although I had previously met the notorious Freddie Laker, I was happy to visit with him once again in the presence of his Texas-born American wife and their young daughter! It was a truly upbeat atmosphere enlivened by hors d’ oeuvres, champagne and a band continuously playing the song “California Here We Come”! As it turned out, there was a technical “snag” discovered during the cockpit pre-flight checks and I was able to assist in the resolution. Actually 1 of the 2 autopilots would not engage and there were no obvious indications of the specific fault. Having been a DC-10 autopilot and navigation Customer Service Specialist prior to assuming my Field Service position, I advised Laker mechanics to replace the associated Linear Accelerometer Unit; this was accomplished and the problem was resolved – without any dispatch delay! I was grateful for the opportunity to be on site and to offer my technical assistance!

The intent of Laker’s newly-inaugurated Gatwick-to-Los Angeles DC-10 “Skytrain” flights was, like all his previous pioneering Skytrain ventures, to offer affordable airfare to the multitudes who had previously found the fares offered by other airlines to be out of their financial reach! As I recall, the initial roundtrip airfare for the Gatwick-Los Angeles-Gatwick flight was £238 (British pounds sterling), far below the fares charged by all other carriers at the time.

Sadly, due to the world-wide recession, intense competition, and diminishing revenues, Laker Airways was forced to declare bankruptcy during early 1982; but Skytrain memories live on!



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