

# CONCORDE TO NEW YORK

As supersonic commercial flights look set to return, now is a good time to recall the remarkable Concorde project – with a little expert insight

**W**ith exciting plans afoot for second-generation supersonic aircraft, as reported in this magazine (March 2016, p68-78), top-tier flyers can – once again – look forward to three-hour transatlantic crossings.

“Concorde could cross the Atlantic Ocean in less than half the time of any other jetliner flying that route, even today,” states John Lampl, vice president of corporate communications for the Americas at British Airways (retired).

Concorde commenced operations in January 1976, with initial routes being British Airways from London, UK, to Bahrain, and Air France from Paris, France, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (via Dakar, Senegal). But the struggle for US market acceptance involved courtroom battles.

“The US government blocked access to the USA,” explains Lampl. “There was political pressure as Boeing was trying to build the 2707 as a competitor to the British-French supersonic airliner. Opposition groups and community lawyers argued that Concorde’s sonic footprints would cause terrible damage to people’s health, homes and other buildings, and adversely affect commercial property values. After months of testing, however, it was shown that other subsonic aircraft actually produced more noise than Concorde. And even after years of testing Concorde operations, no physical damage was ever shown or proved.”

In May 1976, Concorde was granted landing rights at Washington DC. But it took until November 1977 for Concorde to be permitted to inaugurate supersonic passenger services into New York, the world’s most-coveted business hub.

With its legendary client list of tycoons, moguls, royalty, pop idols, and TV and film stars, the British Airways London-New York service became by far

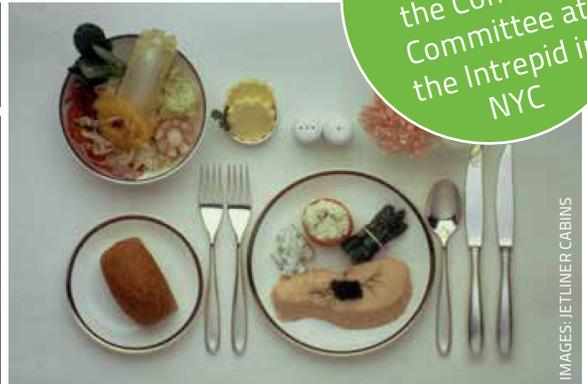


the most successful route in Concorde’s 27-year operational history.

In 2019, to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Concorde’s first flight, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City is planning to launch an exhibition that will explore supersonic flight in the context of global innovation. A starring attraction will be the record-breaking British Airways Concorde G-BOAD (aka Alpha Delta), which is currently on display and open for guided tours at Intrepid’s Pier 86.

The Alpha Delta cabin features the dramatic ‘indigo-shade’ treatment created by Conran and Partners, Factorydesign and Britax Aircraft Interior Systems. Key points include cradle-mechanism seats with footrests and ergonomically contoured headrests and backrests; dark-blue seat covers made of glove-soft Connolly leather; and refurbished and restyled carpets, curtains, overhead bins, lighting filters, accessory items and lavatory finishes.

Incorporating cutting-edge technology, the ‘indigo-shade’ program, which reportedly cost £14m (US\$17m), was implemented in 2001 to replace the iconic silver-gray scheme created by Landor that had flown, with interim updates, for 15 years. The indigo cabin was made from



lighter materials than the previous design, with an estimated weight saving of 20%.

Passengers often expressed surprise that the interior was so constrained. The configuration was 2-2 for the 40 passengers in the front cabin and the 60 in the rear cabin, with an aisle width of 16in, a seat pitch of 38in, and window panes measuring only 6.5in by 4.5in.

But at 60,000ft, flying at Mach 2, passengers could see the glorious colors of the ‘edge-of-space’ horizon and the curvature of the Earth. It provided unforgettable experiences, without the need to wear helmets or oxygen masks.

More in-depth stories about Concorde cabins – and many more aircraft cabins – are available in aviation consultant Jennifer Coutts Clay’s 2014 book *Jetliner Cabins: Evolution & Innovation*, available as an app on Amazon, Apple iTunes and Google Play. Across her aviation career, Jennifer Coutts Clay has held a number of senior positions, including controller of corporate identity at British Airways and general manager of product design and development at Pan Am. ☒

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