Concorde makes its final flight, November 26, 2003

Suzanne Deffree - November 26, 2018

Turbojet-powered supersonic passenger airliner Concorde made its final flight, soaring over Bristol, England, on November 26, 2003, and ending 27 years of service.

Scheduled flights began on January 21, 1976, on the London-Bahrain and Paris-Rio routes. The United States had originally banned flights due to citizen protests regarding noise pollution and sonic booms, but lifted that ban in May 1976.

Concorde came about through the joint manufacturing efforts of Aérospatiale and the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC), produced under a Franco-British treaty. The craft’s name, itself, is reflecting of that as it means “agreement” or “union.”

Concorde is an ogival delta-winged aircraft with four Olympus engines and was the first airliner to have a fly-by-wire flight-control system. The avionics of Concorde made it the first commercial aircraft to employ hybrid circuits.

While commercial jets take about eight hours to fly from New York to Paris, the average supersonic flight time on the transatlantic routes was just less than 3.5 hours. Concorde had a maximum cruise altitude of 60,039 feet and an average cruise speed of Mach 2.02, about 1155 knots (about 1334 mph), more than twice the speed of conventional aircraft.

A complex air data computer (ADC) for the automated monitoring and transmission of aerodynamic measurements (total pressure, static pressure, angle of attack, side-slip, etc) added to the aircraft’s efficiency.

Concorde did not feature an auxiliary power unit, so it would only visit large airports where ground air start carts were available.
Full-regime autopilot and autothrottle allowed "hands off" control of the aircraft from climb out to landing.

When landing, Concorde employed its drooping nose (see photo). Developed by Marshall Aerospace, this enabled the aircraft to switch between being streamlined to reduce drag and achieve optimum aerodynamic efficiency, and not obstructing the pilot's view during taxi, takeoff, and landing operations.

Concorde was retired in 2003 due to a general downturn in the aviation industry after the type's only crash in 2000, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and a decision by Airbus, the successor firm of Aerospatiale and BAC, to discontinue maintenance support. By that time, Concorde analog cockpits were very dated. Lack of competing supersonic passenger aircraft did not force such an upgrade.

All Concordes are now grounded, with some on display at various museums including Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York.

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