



TEST PILOTS TOAST CONCORDE G-BBDG

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By OLIVIA DAWKINS

FOUR former Concorde test pilots and a flight engineer were reunited with one of the supersonic planes they once flew at Brooklands Museum on Thursday.

Peter Baker, who flew the first and last flight in G-BBDG, test pilots Alan Smith, Johnnie Walker and Roy Radford, and flight engineer Alan Heywood gathered at the birthplace of Concorde to welcome the arrival of the impressive front and rear fuselage sections of the plane with a champagne toast.

G-BBDG, the first British production Concorde, was used for much of the flight testing prior to the supersonic passenger aircraft entering service.

In 1956 supersonic airliner research started in Britain and France, leading to the production of the first British Concorde prototype at Filton, near Bristol, in 1966.

Completed in 1973, G-BBDG was registered to British Aircraft Corporation Ltd at Weybridge and its first flight took place from Filton to RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire on February 13 1974.

Most of the plane has now been moved from Filton to Brooklands Museum but the central fuselage/wing section remains at Filton while preparations are made for its 100-mile journey to Weybridge.

The Brooklands site has made a vital contribution to Concorde since design work began in the late 1950s. A greater proportion of its airframe was manufactured at Weybridge than at any other factory in Britain or France.

The then British Aircraft Corporation factory at Weybridge built the forward fuselage and tail sections for all 20 Concordes which were produced, before shipment to the final assembly lines at Toulouse, France and Filton.

The last time G-BBDG took to the skies was on December 24 1981. Since then it has been stored at Filton, where it was kept serviceable for any further development work or test flights if required.

It was offered to Brooklands Museum as a permanent exhibit and will eventually be displayed in state-of-the-art surroundings and used for corporate events.

"Flying Concorde was very exciting and something I will never forget," said Alan Heywood. When visitors climb the stairs to the plane they will receive boarding cards similar to those used by real Concorde passengers.

"It was a great feeling to arrive somewhere and the whole airport would stop and stare.

"It is sad Concorde is no longer in service. The aviation world has moved on and lots of the technology on Concorde is now being used in other planes," he said.

Christopher Orlebar was a Concorde pilot for 10 years and alternated between instructing pilots to fly Concorde and flying the supersonic airliner with passengers on board.

He said: "By luck and endeavour I chose to work for BOAC — the long haul wing of what was to become British Airways.

"I had the good luck to become a pilots' instructor on Concorde in 1976 and had to learn how to fly it before I was able to teach other pilots."

He said: "It was the highlight of my career. I used to pinch myself and look at the speed we were travelling.

"The triumph of Concorde was that it worked.

"The tragedy of Concorde was that we did not build the second version. This would have been capable of flying from Frankfurt or Rome to New York, as opposed to the first version which could only fly there from Paris or London."

Mr Orlebar said he was sad to see Concorde taken out of service: "We have taken a step backwards and now find ourselves with a larger world than we had before."

He said it was possible Concorde may fly again one day, adding: "All the oil has been drained from the planes and consequently the pipes may corrode. However, nothing is impossible and you can never say never."

He will be visiting Brooklands to see the completed Concorde once it is on display and has already been to the museum to see some of the parts arriving.

Mr Orlebar said: "I am delighted that Concorde is coming back home to Brooklands Museum."

Julian Temple, curator of aviation at Brooklands Museum, said: "I am personally very pleased and relieved, after quite some time of waiting, that we have the front and rear fuselage sections. They were built in Weybridge and have not been back for some 30 years.

"I am now looking forward to getting the big centre section of the aircraft here at Brooklands in the next few weeks," he said.