

Concorde 'takes off' again

by Charlotte Talbot

ALMOST six years after Concorde's final flight, the simulator that trained all of the iconic aeroplane's pilots has been officially opened at its new home.

The simulator was unveiled last week at Brooklands Museum by Richard Noble OBE, who broke the world land speed record in 1983.

The project, funded by the Engineering and Physical

Sciences Research Council, has been completed with the simulation knowledge and skill of XPI Simulation, The University of Surrey and museum volunteers.

The opening also marked 40 years since the first Concorde took to the sky. Guests, including 10 former Concorde pilots, watched as a plaque was unveiled by Mr Noble.

He said: "It is a very special day. This simulator is really going to make Brooklands.

"I come from an age where we took Concorde for granted. It would always fly above my house in Hampton and I would look up at it and hear its terrific noise."

Former chief Concorde pilot Captain Mike Bannister added: "The simulator is a very important piece of the Concorde story. It taught the test pilots how to fly the aeroplane.

"Every single pilot who flew in Concorde, flew on it. What the team has done is to take the simulator back to how it was. It is an amazing achievement."

Capt Bannister joined Mr



The Brooklands Concorde G-BBDG which now has the simulator next to it.

Noble in the cockpit to fly the simulator from Filton in Bristol, to Fairford, the first route a UK-based Concorde ever took.

After being decommissioned in 2003, the simulator was dismantled in two parts and transported to Brooklands the following year. Since then work has been ongoing to restore it.

Allan Winn, director of the museum, said: "The simulator was in service for 30 years and all

British Concorde pilots have trained on it. It is a really important part of history. Very few people have been lucky enough to fly in the simulator since Concorde's decommission.

"It is not quite ready for the public to use yet but eventually people will be able to fly along with the pilots. It will be open to fly from mid-May."

The simulator, which first entered service in 1975 as one of

two in the world, cost £3 million, around £20m in today's prices.

A lot of time was spent in the simulator by the pilots before they were able to fly the real thing. First, a pilot had to have around 15 years previous experience on a different plane.

It would then take six months to train in the simulator, compared to about two months to learn to fly a Boeing 747.

The pilot would have 19, four-hour sessions on the simulator to learn about handling the plane before taking the equivalent of a final exam.

Every six months the pilot would go back to the simulator to do another three or four hour session and re-take the exam.

As Capt Bannister took off in the simulator from Filton, we could see out the front window.

The plane flew over the M5, Wales, the Severn Estuary, River Avon and the Clifton suspension bridge.

Capt Bannister said: "The simulator was originally in situ, so the whole machine could move around to simulate the G-force, acceleration and deceleration, but we haven't got the space here.

"But with the visual outside set-up it is very realistic. Inside the simulator all they have done is remove the flight engineers seat to get the public in.

"Today it is a nice day on the simulator but it is very clever. You can talk to the internet and pick up the real weather wherever you are in the world."

And after safely landing us at 'Fairford', he added: "In real life that would have cost about £10,000 each."

The simulator is housed next to the museum's Concorde G-BBDG.



Richard Noble unveils plaque.



Former chief Concorde pilot Mike Bannister tries out the Brooklands simulator for size. Photo: Darren Pede