

Right royal display from Concorde

ONE of Britain's best loved inventions is now part of a stunning new interactive flight experience at Brooklands Museum.

The exhibition, which was opened by Prince Michael of Kent, was the result of a painstaking two-year restoration project by volunteers at the museum between Byfleet and Weybridge.

Now the public will be able to board Concorde and see what it was like to go supersonic in a virtual flight.

Colin Dodds, of the museum, said: "We will issue visitors with a flight ticket similar to those they would have received on the Concorde."

After boarding at the back of the aircraft, passengers can look at artefacts, including the original air pressure helmets used in testing the craft and flight logbooks documenting the plane's

journey. An audio visual flight presentation by Concorde captain Mike Bannister will take visitors on a 'flight.' The unique history of G-BBDG will also be told.

It was the first production Concorde to land at Heathrow in 1974 and the first aircraft in the world to carry 100 passengers at Mach 2 (1,520mph) supersonic flight.

Visitors can also see how the interior of Concorde has changed over its decades of service before having a closer

look at the cockpit. A technical team from Air Salvage International joined BA engineers and engineering students to piece together the gigantic aircraft, which arrived in sections from Bristol and other parts of the world in 2004.

Museum director Alan Winn said the project cost more than £750,000 in labour.

He said: "The Concorde is hugely important to us, not only as the pinnacle of our unique collection of post-war Brooklands aircraft but also as a major visitor attraction in its own right."

The G-BBDG aircraft

by Chantal Harris

is of considerable historic importance in the progress of supersonic flight. It was the first British production Concorde and the fastest of its type ever to have flown.

Though it still bears the British Airways colours, it has never flown a commercial flight and was an experimental craft used for engineering tests and route proving.

Capt Mike Bannister piloted commercial flights with Air France and British Airways. He said being back behind the cockpit of Concorde at Brooklands felt like putting on an old pair of gloves.

He said: "It was fabulous to fly and handle. It went up to the edge of space and you could see the curve of the earth. It was faster than a rifle bullet and faster than the earth rotates."

Capt Bannister said the craft's incredible speed gave Concorde the ability to buy back time in effect allowing him to experience the sunset twice in the same day.

He added: "Concorde was successful due to many special people, engineers and testers such as tester pilot Peter Baker.

"All of those people came together to make history.

"When you think they were doing that in the early seventies, it is still



Prince Michael of Kent is shown around the Concorde cabin by Geoff Want, board director of British Airways.

more advanced than anything today."

About 2.5 million passengers flew with the Concorde but, according to Capt Bannister, 80 per cent of these were business passengers and repeat customers.

He added: "The passengers were like a family, a lot of them were regulars and knew each other.

"During the retirement programme it was different. Now we were having people who just wanted the trip of a lifetime.

"There were people who had saved up their

money and grandmothers and grandfathers who had been given a ticket by their family. It was wonderful to see the look on their faces afterwards."

On July 25 2000 tragedy struck Concorde when Air France Flight 4590 crashed, killing 113 people.

BA Concorde pilot and author Capt Christopher Orlebar said that in his opinion, Concorde was resurrected in 2001 so it could be remembered positively and go out on a good note. But after 9/11 the different climate

meant the aircraft was not making money and Concorde made her last commercial flight in 2003.

Opinion still remains divided on the future of supersonic flight and whether Concorde will fly again.

Captain Orlebar said: "I'd love to see Concorde fly again. Compared to modern airlines it is still comparatively futuristic, no one has ever gone that fast."

But Capt Bannister feels that there are too many hurdles for the Concorde to fly again —

including finance, engineering support and operational experience.

HRH The Duke of Kent told gathered supporters when opening the exhibition: "To bring this superb aircraft back from dereliction is an extraordinary achievement.

"I have opened many new displays and exhibits at the museum over the years, but not one of them has given me more pleasure than today.

"I give my thanks and express my admiration to those that have carried out this great task."



Concorde pilots Peter Baker, Mike Bannister and Chris Orlebar meet up in the cockpit at Brooklands Museum. Photo: Nigel Brecknell.