



## Tech Talk

### Concorde Resurrected? ©

*by John McCarthy*

Hi and a very warm welcome to another edition of Tech Talk. You may remember that a few months ago we dedicated a programme to aviation in general and the future of Aviation Traffic Management in particular. Well, in the history of the passenger plane, Concorde is arguably the most iconic, emblematic and charismatic aircraft that has ever existed. Capable of flying at twice the speed of sound, it was an 'objet d'art', the crowning jewel of the British Airways and Air France fleets and a true testament to the quality of Franco-British cooperation, inventiveness and engineering brilliance. Alas, it fell out of favour after an Air France Concorde crashed in Paris in the year 2000, and it was retired soon after making its final flight in 2003, much to the sadness of real aficionados.

Well, the aviation world is now abuzz with reports that a group of British aviation enthusiasts committed to seeing Concorde in the air once again, has revealed it has the funds to purchase one of the supersonic jets and bring it back to service in the next four years. 'Club Concorde', which comprises ex-captains, ex-charterers and people passionate about Concorde, has managed to accumulate the sum of £120 million for its 'return to flight' plan. The organisation hopes to purchase a Concorde. If successful, the plane will be restored to its former glory before resuming operation as a private heritage aircraft that will be flown at air displays as well as being available for charter. There's certainly no shortage of billionaires ready to part with their cash for the exclusive privilege of flying their wives and friends for a weekend away from it all in what would be the only flying machine of its kind, contentedly swigging chilled bubbly at 1500 mph. The aim is to recommence flights in 2019, which will coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Concorde's first flight.

There are also plans to buy a second Concorde, which will be displayed on top of a two-deck platform on the river Thames, near the London Eye, as a new tourist attraction. The lower deck, consisting of restaurants, bars, a souvenir shop plus an aircrew presentation area. Champagne presentations would take place on board Concorde and visitors would be able to access the platform using riverbank walkways.

The question remains whether these two projects are actually feasible.

For the Concorde near the Thames, most certainly so. Some may say that it's a rather ignominious fate for an object of such beauty and illustrious history, but billionaire F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone has thrown his admittedly slight frame behind the project, saying it has the potential of becoming a huge tourist attraction, and this will undoubtedly attract other backers.

As for the idea of getting Concorde airborne again, one doesn't want to put a damper on such a noble idea, but the reality is that money alone is never enough to put a decommissioned plane back in the skies. Concorde is an immensely complex supersonic aircraft and would require the full backing of its manufacturer, Airbus, to ensure safe upkeep of its airframe and systems. Apparently, British Airways looked into the possibility of keeping a single Concorde operating, for heritage purposes, but in the end simply couldn't justify the enormous expense this would entail. Sourcing a suitable plane would also be almost impossible as even the best-conditioned aircraft would require extensive maintenance checks and possible modifications to bring it into line with civil aircraft mandates introduced since Concorde's demise. Added to all this are the reasons why it was never a commercial success in the first place. Because of the sonic boom it would only be able to fly at supersonic speed over oceans, and there would be restrictions at many airports due to all the noise.

Initial plans were to buy the Concorde in Le Bourget. Perhaps the final nail in the coffin is the fact that if the French authorities were initially – and quite understandably – ambivalent about the project, and loath to sell off such an important part of their aviation heritage, more recently the Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace issued a statement saying that Concordes are not for sale at any price and won't fly again. This means that the entire project, once so promising, will in all probability end up as nothing more than a damp squib.

That brings us to the end of this program. Do join us again for another edition of Tech Talk next time on EnglishWaves.fr.