

2 March 2019: 50th Anniversary of the first flight of Concorde

Today is the 50th anniversary of the first flight of the Anglo-French Concorde, the world's first and, so far only, supersonic civil airliner to see prolonged service. Sunday, March 2, 1969 was an emotional day for thousands of people who had contributed to the most ambitious technological project in Europe's aviation history. The flight had had to be postponed the previous day because of heavy mist. As soon as the Sun came out loudspeakers informed the waiting crowd that Concorde's crew were aboard and pre-flight checks in progress. One by one, the four Olympus engines came to life. Fire tenders and rescue vehicles moved into position. Special trucks, fitted with raucous klaxons, raced up and down the runway, scaring away great flocks of birds. The engines rumbled on and then came a crescendo of sound, and, brakes released. The white aircraft on its tall undercarriage started to move along the runway, slowly at first but gathering speed and the nose lifted followed by the rest of the slender fuselage. She climbed into the blue sky, followed by her attendant Mirage.. She dwindled to a white spot and then was gone. After a while, she came into view and for the first time, the world has seen her characteristic "sea-bird" swoop in to land. A puff of smoke confirmed that the main bogies were in contact with the runway, the nose-wheel came down, reverse thrust was engaged and the tail parachute broke from its housing to balloon out behind the aircraft. Concorde 001 taxied to a halt in front of the airport building and passenger stairs were run into position. It was a short flight, only 40 minutes, but it gave Andre Turcat and his crew a foretaste of what flying a Concorde would be like. The rest is very rich and globally memorable history that finished with very last flight to Filton, Bristol, England in November 2006.

