

27 CONCORDE

Sans doute, Concorde décédé hier à l'âge de 31 ans tout ce qu'il restera le mythe d'un bel oiseau blanc.

*Le Figaro, following the loss of AF 4590
on take-off from Charles de Gaulle aerodrome, 25th July 2000*

One day in May 1984 Geoffrey Ratcliffe, at the time engineering director at British Airways, telephoned. It was one of those modal occasions when the questioner expects the answer to be in the affirmative. Would I like to go to lunch in New York, travelling there and back on Concorde on the flight deck?

When I was first in Surrey I had been to the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC), Weybridge, Concorde production line. The nose and fuselage as far back as the forward entrance were engineered there, as were the fin and tail section. They were also machining a double curved profile on the engine nacelles for the McDonnell Douglas DC10. There was concern about the future. Concorde was an aircraft like none other. People waved to it whilst it taxied. On take-off the noise and the shock diamonds of the after-burners were shattering. As it growled overhead our house outbound to the west it was impossible not to look up. On its last flight over us to New York from Heathrow, flying into the setting sun, it had the colour of burnished gold. On landing everyone stopped to watch. (See photo plate 33.)

The technology was breathtaking and yet well dated by the time it left service. I had watched at Farnborough in September 1956 as