

Concordes Inaugurate Supersonic

By RICHARD WITKIN

Special to The New York Times

BAHRAIN, Jan. 21 — Two Concorde jets, taking off simultaneously from London and Paris, today inaugurated the world's first scheduled supersonic passenger services.

The slender-bodied, 1,350-mile-an-hour planes streaked from London to this Middle East island in 4 hours and 10 minutes and from Paris to Rio de Janeiro in 5 hours and 45 minutes, not counting a refueling stop in Dakar, Senegal.

The twin inaugural was an historic high point in a two-nation venture that began more than 13 years ago and has so far cost \$3 billion.

There is still serious concern in the aviation world over whether airlines operating Concordes can avoid painful losses, especially if the admittedly noisy plane is denied access to New York.

On the flight here, what made the greatest impact on passengers was the realization of the high speeds being reached. This realization came not so much from the Machmeter on the cabin wall that constantly showed the current speed in Mach number (Mach 1 is the speed of sound) but from the captain's announcements of the incredibly fast passage of successive pieces of geography.

At one moment the island of Crete was just off to the left. Twenty-two minutes later, Cyprus was floating by, and nine minutes after that the captain announced that the plane was passing over Lebanon's northern border with Syria. The aircraft was over Lebanon just one minute and a half. Four Arab countries—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—had given permission for the plane to stay supersonic, despite the sonic boom, in special corridors.

Mrs. David Clifton, traveling with her husband, a director of a major corporation in England, said: "I didn't know I was flying supersonic until I saw the Greek islands literally skipping by. I usually look at Greece from a plane and say I'd like to visit that little cove, and that other one just beyond it. We were going too fast today for that."

Of the 99 passengers on the plane, only 28 were paying customers. The rest were officials, including the Duke of Kent, and other guests, and a handful of employees of the airline or the manufacturers, chosen by lot or special contests. By contrast, 90 of the hundred passengers on the French plane were fare-paying customers.

Some veteran travelers, including a few reporters, insisted that the extra speed did

not make up for the fairly close quarters, especially the narrow aisle space. The decor was average—white walls and ceilings, seat patterns in magenta and purple, flight attendants in new uniforms—blue blouses, brighter blue skirts, and blue-and-white scarves.

The food was of a quality befitting patrons whose normal charge will be first class fare plus 15 percent. But the grilled steak was overdone—no one was asked whether it should be rare, medium or well done.

The only technical aberration had to do with the Machmeter in the rear cabin. When the front passenger Machmeter properly read Mach 1.99, the meter in the rear cabin read Mach 1.72. Evidently all the instruments worked fine in the cockpit.

Until the plane reached the Adriatic Sea just south of Venice, the captain of the British Airways Concorde, Capt. Norman Todd, had to keep his craft throttled back below the speed of sound, which is 660 miles an hour altitude. This was so as not to blast the populace below with its sonic boom.

But the plane still cut het

flight time on the 3,515-mile run from the subsonics' scheduled 6 hours 30 minutes to 4 hours 10 minutes. This included 10 minutes extra waiting for take-off so it could start its roll at the precise moment the Air France sister plane did.

The time savings by Air France on its much longer run to Rio, a distance of 5,927 miles, was even more impressive. It cut the flight from the 11 hours and 10 minutes of the subsonic jets to 7 hours and 5 minutes. And this was done despite a refueling stop of one hour and 20 minutes that has to be made at Dakar—a stop the subsonics can skip.

The two airlines had wanted

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JANUARY 22,

Flights to Bahrain and Rio

to open supersonic era with regular service to New York, where prospects are deemed brightest for at least breaking even on such costly operations.

But the protests of airport-area communities, their Congressmen and other officials, and environmentalists have delayed a Government decision on allowing the Concorde to open a route anywhere in the United States.

Arrival in Rio

Special to The New York Times

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan. 21—The Air France Concorde roared into the international airport here today, inaugurat-

ing supersonic passenger jet service. But the plane was 40 minutes behind schedule because of a refueling delay and a brief technical failure that forced it to reduce its speed temporarily.

According to the pilot, Comdr. Pierre Chamoine, the plane was late in taking off from the refueling stop at Dakar.

Shortly after that take-off, he added, there was a "tiny mechanical fault" that prevented the opening of a secondary air vent in one of the plane's turbines.

As a result, he said, the plane flew at subsonic speeds until the air vent opened again.