

Comet 1

World's first jetliner



BOAC staff and press waving goodbye to the Comet 1 for the first flight of the very first passenger jet

27th of July 1949 the world's first jetpowered airliner made it's first flight.

The de Havilland D. H. 106 design was ordered in 1946 as a passenger carrier for service across the Atlantic. The design evolved into a four-engine jet aircraft with a 20° wing sweepback with accommodation for 36 passengers. It was powered by de Havilland Ghost centrifugal turbojet engines.

BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) played a key role in the development of the Comet and ordered 8 Comets already in 1946. BOAC then took delivery of 9 aircrafts. The testing and proving of the aircraft was remarkably troublefree for a design that really was a revolution in air travel. Route proving proceeded swiftly with flight times more than halved on all tested routes.

The Comet 1 in BOAC colors made it's first regular passenger flight on May 2nd 1952. The route was London/Heathrow - Johannesburg. As the range of the delivered Comets wasn't enough to cross the Atlantic, BOAC used the jetliner for it's Empire routes to Africa and Asia. Passengers marvelled over the smoothness of the flight way above clouds and bad weather. The Comet 1 was an instant success. This was indeed the future of flying. All flights were almost full, the load factors being 90 %.

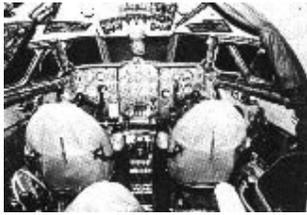


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But this was to be a short lived success as one of the Comets crashed outside Calcutta in 1953. Probable cause was very bad weather. But as another Comet crashed and later in 1954 a third of the jet airliners was broken up in midair all remaining Comets were grounded. Something was very wrong with the Comet 1. An extensive investigation was undertaken. This included the use of a water tank for pressurization tests of the aircraft. The investigation committee could establish the reason for the break-ups of the aircrafts as metal fatigue of the cabin structure. This was due to the constant increase and decrease of pressure when the Comet climbed and descended.

The findings led to the redesign of the Comet and on October 4th 1958 the Comet 4 flew the world's first trans-Atlantic passenger service. But by this time the Boeing 707 had made its entrance into the jet air traffic world and the British

lead in the evolution of jet flight was over. BOAC and BEA (British European Airways) used it's Comets 4s and 4Bs on short and medium routes.



Specifications of the Comet 1

No of passengers: 36
Engines: 4 de Havilland Ghost turbojets, 4,450 lbs (2,018 kgs) thrust
Cruising speed: 490 mph (790 kms/h)
Range: 1,750 miles (2,816 kms)
Weight: 105,000 lbs (47,600 kgs)
Wing span: 115 ft (35 m)
Length: 93 ft (28 m)

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