



When supersonic passenger airliner Concorde came to Auckland, New Zealand (Howie, C., 2022)



By [Cherie Howie](#)

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A British Airways Concorde is escorted by Skyhawks from the Royal New Zealand Air Force No.75 Squadron while flying to New Zealand in April 1986. Photo / RNZAF

In 1986 Halley's Comet crossed the sky above New Zealand, and a Concorde touched down in Auckland. Kenneth Irons, then a Palmerston North businessman, brought the two together.

It fascinated me that a rock in the sky could go someplace for 76 years and come back, and people could predict where it'd be and when you'd be able to see it.

And if you missed it ... there'd be very few people who could see it twice in their own lifetime.

That blows my mind.

I thought, 'Where is it going to be?', so I started this research. It was pre-internet of course, so you had to go to the library and get a book out.

I started to find out that Halley's Comet takes a particular elliptical orbit, and it's so far away that it takes several days to pass through the visible spectrum of astronomical observation.

That's what got me going, and I thought, 'Well okay, how are you going to look at this? If it's flying through the sky fast, what goes fast through the sky? And what could I rent?'

There was only one answer.

Concorde.

I got in touch with the then-sales manager for British Airways New Zealand, who thought it was a great idea.

I kept badgering for six months till finally he said he couldn't get the boss interested.

The funniest story of the passengers was the first lady to book.

I appointed Cox & Kings, the world's oldest travel agency, to be the London booking agent.

We put it out in the press that we were chasing Halley's Comet with a Concorde.

The very first lady to walk into the travel agency worked on the vegetable barrows on New King's Rd.

And she sat down and said, 'I've heard about this Concorde thing. I've always wanted to go on the Concorde!'

The sales rep, she's terribly upper class.

She looks down her nose, over her horn-rimmed glasses, at this barrow lady going, 'You do realise the price, don't you? It's £10,600 for the top package', thinking the lady will faint.

The lady said, 'Do you take cash?' And she reached into her brown paper bag and pulled out the cash.

She knew the price all along.

The money had rubber bands around it and they'd perished. She'd been saving up the money for so long.

I don't think the taxman had been too near it.

She put £10,600 on the counter and came first class.

• As told to Cherie Howie

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