

I've never flown in one or even been inside one but I had a definite, if quirky, relationship with the A380.

**My affair with the monster plane started nearly 20 years ago.** The scene: a plush hotel on a smart boulevard on the south side of Paris. The first international aviation conference I had ever been to. (I had been asked say something about 'airport communities').

I arrived just after the conference started, not knowing what to expect and a tad apprehensive. And then I walked into a blazing row in the conference hall. Members of the audience were on their feet shouting and screaming at the platform speakers. I thought this is what campaigners are meant to do! **But here were suited and booted members of the aviation industry disrupting their own conference.** Plane Stupid would have been proud of them but at the time they weren't even a gleam in an anarchist's eye!

**I soon discovered the sound and the fury was all to do with different views about future trends in aviation. Was it to be bigger planes using hubs or more point-to-point flying?** The A380 versus whatever alternatives were (I wasn't up on my A, B, Cs of aircraft). Airbus against Boeing. Europe versus America.

A year or two later at another conference a swarthy character sidled up to me to say that Airbus, in developing the A380, was being guided by Heathrow's stringent night noise standards. Still lacking any real aviation knowledge, I nodded, thanked him politely and was relieved he wasn't Boeing as I had just been accosted by a by a PR woman from Boeing, a fixed smile firmly in place but clearly furious with HACAN. The Advertising Standards Authority had recently upheld a HACAN objection to a Boeing leaflet, resulting in the company having to bin tens of thousands of them.

**My next encounter with the A380 was on a village green near Hatton Cross waiting for it to land at Heathrow for the first time.** A 747 was arriving first followed by the much-anticipated big bird and the media was out in force to assess the difference in noise between the two planes. I was there to give my instant reaction to the BBC. **There was no contest: the A380 was noticeably less noisy** (with the caveat it was not fully laden).

Then our relationship settled down. The A380 landed regularly over me in Stockwell – bigger and more invasive but with a slightly gentler sound than the other large planes. I thought little about it until.....

**People in the Teddington and Strawberry Hill, alerted to the noise in their areas by the 2014 trials, pin-pointed the 15 or so A380s which go over them each day as particular bête noirs.** To their credit they dug hard to bring to light the fact that, fully-laden, the A380s struggled to climb as rapidly as most other planes and that, since many of them were leaving mid/late evening to reach the inter-continental destinations, they were particularly disturbing.

Such was the hatred of the A380 built up that the one time I dared to suggest that on landing over me in Stockwell it was less disturbing, I was accused of being a 'fifth columnist' working for the industry! At that moment I think Boeing would have been more welcome to relocate its headquarters to Teddington than I would have been walking its High St!

**So, the A380 controversial to the end. And, I would argue, beyond.** A very large plane will have gone to be replaced by more frequent smaller planes. What is better for the noise climate: fewer larger planes or more smaller planes? Let battle commence.....again!

John Stewart