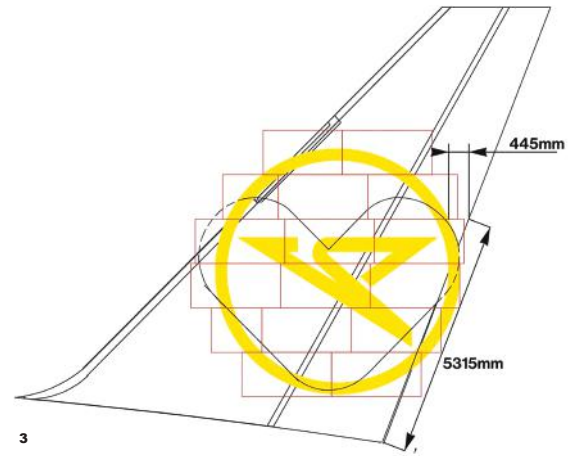
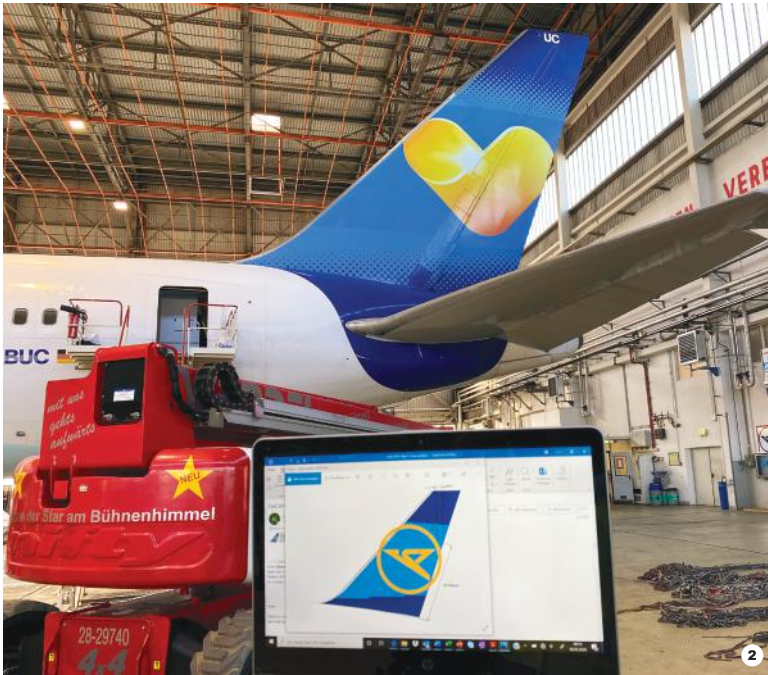


# 50 TAILS OF GRAY

STORY *Roland Müller-Buchner*  
PHOTOS *Author unless noted*

CONDOR'S OLD EMBLEM  
FLIES AGAIN





**Imagine if, a year ago, you had told anyone from the Thomas Cook Airlines Group that the travel group would collapse, that some of its airlines would be liquidated, and that, after a controversial comeback, the German charter airline Condor (DE) would survive and bring back its iconic tail logo after a 16-year hiatus.**

**AND ADD** to that that most of DE's Boeing 767-300(ER)s are now serving as freighters coping with a sudden surge in cargo demand amid a global pandemic.

Too hard to believe? Well, that's what happened in just a few months. However, the Thomas Cook story is far from over. China's Fosun Tourism Group acquired the Thomas Cook brand and its intellectual property assets last November. Therefore, the branding that identified Condor as part of the Thomas Cook Airlines Group had to be replaced. Thomas Cook owned 49.9% of DE, which is struggling financially and seeking help from the German government until it finds a new owner.

#### **FAREWELL TO THE 'SUNNY HEART'**

Like its (now former) sister airlines, Condor had been branded with the symbol of the 'Sunny Heart' (the logo that adorned the tails of the fleets of the Thomas Cook Airlines Group) together with

a palette of yellow, gray, and white tones. But, as Fosun became the new owner of both the logo and palette, DE had to quickly rebrand its fleet.

This rebranding has occurred as Condor's fate is at a crossroads. After the demise of Thomas Cook in September 2019, DE secured additional credit facilities of US\$425 million (€380 million) to keep flying. Then, in January 2020, the PGL Polish Aviation Group, owner of LOT Polish Airlines (LO), announced plans to buy Condor—a sale that, despite months of negotiations, eventually did not come to fruition.

Based on this scenario, the quick rebranding of Condor has fulfilled two goals: One, regain customer confidence after the uncertainty about DE's fate. Two, meet the new legal, trademark ownership-related requirements that all Thomas Cook-related branding be replaced by a specific deadline.

And that's where my company, LXM group, comes into play; it was awarded the contract to carry out the rebranding of DE's fleet of 50 aircraft. As an aviation enthusiast who reacts to every airline collapse with more than a hint of emotion, I felt that this clearly was not just a normal project.

Salzburg-based LXM Group is a provider of exterior livery and aviation signage. We offer services to airlines, leasing companies, and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) service providers, and provide ancillary services through

① The logo of Condor is seen again on the tails of three Boeing 757-300s tails at Hamburg Airport on a sunny spring day.

②③ From the layout to the production. The teams at Condor and the LXM Group are getting ready to start the installation of the new vinyl decals on a Boeing 767-300(ER).



## / airways industry /



advertising solutions and In-Flight Entertainment and Connectivity (IFEC) monetization.

### ON A FAST TRACK

The first project meeting kicked off just a day after signing the contract. The following day, the management of Condor released and approved the final design of the new tail logo. Given DE's strong brand reputation in Germany, the airline's iconic namesake tail-logo bird was to return to its erstwhile place.

Instead of a paint-livery makeup, we had tendered with a high-performance, aviation-grade vinyl foil solution. This would allow us to carry out the project quickly, during A-check maintenance schedules, and would be a green approach, as it would save to up to 100 ferry flights to paint shop facilities. A project team from Condor's side, headed by the carrier's Technik's Cabin Engineer Stanislaw Conradi, was ready to hit the ground running

The timeline to be met was a tough one! The first aircraft to wear the full Condor logo was going to be a Boeing 767-300(ER) (D-ABUF · MSN 26985 · LN 537), the rollout of which was scheduled for November 29, 2019, in front of

hundreds of employees inside Condor Technik's Hangar 9 in Frankfurt Airport (FRA).

The deadline gave us just a few weeks. Our specialist team picked up work on design layouts, production drawings, and all required regulatory documentation for all the areas touched on the aircraft.

Condor's new livery consists of the former paint job base of a white fuselage and yellow engines; a ribbon of yellow and light metallic gray on the aft of the aircraft; and a dark gray tail overlaid with the updated logo. While the former circular logo remains in full within the tail section, it has been retouched and modernized; now being remarkably larger, with parts of the circle cut off on the leading and trailing edges of the vertical stabilizer.

The simplest to deal with were three aircraft that had been in retro and special liveries: An Airbus A320 (D-AICH · MSN 971) in the original 1960s paint job; a Boeing 767-300(ER) (D-ABUM · MSN 25170 · LN 542) in the 1970s color scheme; and a Boeing 757-300 (D-ABON · MSN 29023 · LN 929) in the colorful 'Wir Lieben Fliegen' ('We love to fly') look. These remained untouched, as none of them sported any Thomas Cook markings.

4 The tail design for a Boeing 767-300(ER) consists of 16 rectangular elements.

5 Works start on a Boeing 767-300(ER) with the removal of Thomas Cook's 'Sunny Heart' logo.





One of the most challenging phases of the project was to determine the specific branding needs for every aircraft. Not all aircraft are the same, and not all paint jobs or logos had to be applied in the same way. Therefore, we had to devise a matrix that would lead us to a process that depended on the aircraft type, the livery, the material used for the application of the 'Sunny Heart' tail logo, and the Aircraft Operator Certificate (AOC) under which every aircraft operates. Ultimately, this matrix yielded 13 different processes.

Matching the paint color with the printing color proved tricky, as the effect of weathering on each aircraft's paint had caused variations that had to be borne in mind. In the end, we printed four shades of yellow, six different variants of gray, and three hues of blue.

After achieving the color match, the LXM Group began producing the first kits. Each side (port and starboard) of a Boeing 767-300(ER) requires 16 decals for the tail design and five for the aft fuselage blank out, except on those aircraft on which Condor Engineering had already covered the former Thomas Cook titles with white paint. The area where the tail stickers were to be positioned was around 120m<sup>2</sup> (1,290sq ft). On the Boeing 757-300 and Airbus A320, we applied 13 different stickers each tail side.

Once the project was completed, a total of over 5,500m<sup>2</sup> (59,200sq ft) of aircraft space would have been covered. As a comparison: the standard size of an American football field is 4,460m<sup>2</sup> (48,000sq ft).

The edges of the stickers are sealed with a prime edge sealer. Additionally, the trailing edge of the vertical stabilizer and the leading edge of the rudder are reinforced with anti-erosion tape to prevent damage to the applied material to be caused by the rudder movements. In the Boeing fleet, weight and balance issues also had to be considered.

The material used to produce these stickers is not ordinary; it must endure the harsh conditions to which aircraft are subjected: strong winds, storms,

6 7 Two finished airliners show the new Condor branding.



speeds of up to Mach 0.8, and temperatures that sometimes vary by over 100°C (from -60°C to +40°C).

## THE ROLLOUT

The big day came closer and, in the morning hours of November 28, our team, led by Andy Legge, was in the hangar alongside our Condor colleagues and a TV crew, capturing the moments of the so-called 'DEbranding'.

Some technical issues with the boom lift slowed us down as we began the installation of the decals on D-ABUF, but then everything went smoothly. The port side was completed by the early hours of the evening. The next morning, the boom lift went tech and had to be replaced. It was a race against the clock as the job was scheduled to be completed by noon. It was a close call. Eventually, the teams only just did it (the edge sealing and the cutting of the rudder access panels were made after the rollout).

Once our job was completed, we covered the port side with a huge, black curtain. We also had to cover the starboard side with cardboard strips to prevent any untimely sighting of the new logo in case someone entered from that side of the hangar.

The party about to start, a few hundred Condor employees were bused to the hangar, where a small buffet and music were waiting.

Excitement was in the air. Evidently, everyone was looking forward to see the so-called 'paperclip' (as Condor employees call the airline's logo) back on the tails.

Ralf Teckentrup, the CEO of Condor, put to an end the anxiety of the 'Condorians' by slowly lowering the curtain amid their cheers and applause. To the rhythm of the song *Hoch (Up)* by Tim Bendzko, Teckentrup announced, "After 16 years, the Condor logo has returned to the tails of our aircraft, a logo that made us proud. Condor and our logo are together a strong brand that has signified Germany's most popular airline for 64 years."

Looking into the smiling faces—some even shedding tears of joy—I thought of how we at the LXM Group had committed to this project. Sometimes a project is just that, a job with a budget and a timeline to which we must comply; but, in this case, more than a project, it was a mission that has given me a taste of the world of aviation that went beyond what passengers usually see. Even when the filming team started their work, it felt like reality TV to me. Now, when I look back, it was actually reality to us.

9 A TV crew was in charge of recording the installation of the new logo. The documentary has been properly named 'DEbranding.'

9 The installation of the vinyl decals requires precision and care to details.

10 The work is complete on D-ABUF, the first Boeing 767-300(ER) to receive the new Condor branding.

11 The 'vinyl countdown' during the unveiling ceremony with hundreds of Condor employees.







The following day, D-ABUF made its first flight in the new Condor look from Frankfurt to Cancun (CUN) in Mexico, with the crew's arrival and the preparations for departure all featured as a live broadcast on Condor's social media channels.

#### ONE TAIL UP, 49 DOWN TO GO

After completing D-ABUF, we had 49 more aircraft to go. All Boeings were modified at Condor's Frankfurt maintenance facility and Lufthansa's Technik Hangar (Hall 12), in which Condor has a permanent maintenance position. Nearly all the Airbus aircraft were rebranded during their A-Checks, a few C-Checks, and other maintenance sessions in Düsseldorf (DUS). Two Airbuses had to fly to third-party MRO facilities in Hahn (HHN) and Zagreb (ZAG).

The delayed return of a Boeing 767-300(ER) from the Boeing China facility in Shanghai (where Condor carries out some of the annual C-Checks) was a telltale sign of times to come in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted our project when we had completed 46 aircraft, leaving two Boeing 767-300(ER)s and two A320s still with the 'Sunny Heart' logo.


Finally, after a seven-week lockdown, work was resumed in early May. At press time, a single Airbus A320 (EC-MVH · MSN 2142) is the last airframe left to be rebranded. Coincidentally, this aircraft is one sporting large Thomas Cook titles, and will transition from Thomas Cook Airlines Balearics to Condor by early June. As a 'grand finale,' the airliner will receive

a 'maximum foil treatment,' covering the fuselage titles, tail logo, registrations, underwing registration and logos on the wingtips.

#### COMPLICATIONS FROM COVID-19

After the failed takeover by LOT's parent company PGL, Condor is seeking bankruptcy protection, with a new sale intended to start later this year. DE has been remarkably agile in the past months—and seems to have grown a strong resilience. Just a few days before press date, the airline set the pace for other holiday airlines by publishing a revised summer timetable for the resumption of operations to two-thirds of its medium-haul destinations by mid-June.

Condor has converted nearly all of its Boeing 767-300(ER)s into interim freighters, removing the seats to transport Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies, and to patch up the disrupted supply chains of the automotive industry.

Once the COVID-19 crisis is over, these jetliners will return to their natural role, flying holidaymakers to distant shores—with the iconic Condor logo shining from their 50 gray tails. 

THE AUTHOR WISHES TO  
THANK HIS COLLEAGUES  
AT CONDOR AIRLINES FOR  
THEIR COOPERATION IN THE  
WRITING OF THIS STORY.