



K CELEBRATES ITS 65TH ANNIVERSARY

A look back at 1952, when the trade fair began



Seven years after the end of the Second World War, people were starting to become more hopeful that the future would bring Germany and Europe lasting peace, freedom and prosperity. This optimistic period was when K was launched too: on 11 October 1952, 65 years ago to the day,

the doors opened in Düsseldorf for the first time on what was to become today's leading global trade fair for the plastics and rubber industry. In our electronic newsletter, we are taking a look back at the year in which K began.

1952 was a year characterised by the “economic miracle” in Germany. People appreciated the comfort they enjoyed, although it tended to be rather modest at first; they found fulfilment in harmonious family life, admired beauty and elegance, looked forward to leisure, holidays and mobility. It became fashionable to have your own car and airlines tried to make flights to holiday destinations attractive.



General interest in the exclusive way of life of the beautiful, famous and rich increased. Television viewers shared the excitement felt by Elizabeth Windsor, who was crowned Queen of England at the age of 27 on the death of her father, King George VI, and mourned the death of Eva “Evita” Perón. The wife of the Argentinian President Juan Perón was worshipped like a saint because of her commitment to social affairs and died of cervical cancer at the age of only 33 in July 1952. And there was collective outrage when Albert Schweitzer was initially considered unworthy of the Nobel Peace Prize, only to be presented the prize after all – following a storm of international protest – for the work he did at the hospital he established in Lambarené in the jungle of Gabon, Central Africa.



The political situation in 1952 was difficult. The relationship between East and West had deteriorated, due in part to the Korean War. It proved to be risky for countries to try and go it alone; national governments were keen to co-operate internationally. The European Coal

and Steel Community was established during this period.

As a result, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands laid the foundations for what was later to become the European Union (EU). As is still the case today, a major ally of Western Europe was the United States of America, the



world's leading economic, political and military power – and its main role model where pop culture was concerned too: the US way of life became the standard by which prosperity and satisfaction were measured in Europe.

So polymer materials and products like those presented at the first plastics trade fair from **11 to 19 October 1952** in Düsseldorf were right in line with the trend. More than any other material, plastic was already considered back then to be a convincing all-rounder in all areas of life – and one that was comparatively inexpensive too. The supporting organisation of the plastics trade fair, the Association of the



German Plastics Processing Industry, had set itself the goal of presenting the many different applications for plastics in everyday and professional life at regular intervals. The industry not only had a promising market; it also boasted a large number of different companies: **270 exhibitors** already participated in the first K 1952. All of them were German companies initially, but the

success of the first plastics trade fair inevitably paved the way for the subsequent internationalisation process.

Rubber manufacturers and processors later joined the plastics companies. The automotive industry and the companies that supplied it were an important application area even then: Dunlop, for example, launched an international innovation in October 1952 – the first “Mud & Snow” tyre, which was supposed to make snow chains superfluous in winter.



What the organisers of K succeeded in doing back then was to highlight the polymer trends of the time for the first time in a way that attracted public attention. The exhibitors presented plastic tiles for the kitchen and bathroom, a rain cape that could be folded up or the indestructible plastic bottle – both interior

design fans and outdoor activists found what they were looking for. The manufacturers of synthetic clothing attracted the biggest crowds to their stands at the trade fair.

Anyone who is looking for a symbol of the “economic miracle” period in the 1950s ends up sooner or later with two pleasantly shaped women’s legs, which are enclosed in thin, transparent nylon stockings. Stocking advertising in the 1950s came to be the embodiment of “economic miracle” aesthetics. It visualised high society beauty and elegance, epitomised by such women as Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe,



Brigitte Bardot or the Persian Empress Soraya. The latter had to bear a heavy burden at this time, when she was forced – at the age of just 19 years – to become Chairwoman of the Teheran women’s league for boycotting nylon stockings, because the country had a shortage of foreign currency. Nylons were definitely not cheap at the



time. In Germany, they cost between DEM 5.90 and 12.90 per pair in 1950 – quite a luxury when the average hourly wage was only DEM 1.50 to 2. So it is no surprise that a black market developed: on 8 December 1952, customs investigators in Lübeck exposed a smuggling ring, which was planning to supply German retailers with about 400,000 pairs of illegal nylon stockings.

The selection of products and services exhibited at K has changed drastically in what is in the meantime its 65-year history: whereas the focus in 1952 was primarily on consumer goods, the range now extends from machines for the production and processing of plastics and rubber to raw and auxiliary materials, semi-finished products and technical components made from plastic and rubber as well as various services for the industry. A trade fair with exhibitors that were exclusively German



at the start has developed into a major multicultural event with exhibitors from about 60 different countries. In 2019, i.e. in two years' time, the industry is meeting again in Düsseldorf – for the most important showcase for the plastics and rubber industry in the world.

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