update
Customer magazine of Deutsche Plasser

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SUSTAINABILITY
On the right track since the beginning
FIRMLY EMBEDDED IN OUR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES
Contents

03 Editorial
04 On the right track since the beginning
06 A conversation with Thomas Ruland
08 Deutsche Plasser Polen – Repair & Modernisation
10 New record in Munich
12 Results of the customer survey
14 A conversation with Alexander Lehner
17 Eight advantages of a Deutsche Plasser retrofit
18 News
Dear readers,

When we started with the editorial planning of this issue of Deutsche Plasser update, I wanted to touch on various subjects in my editorial. I wanted to write about our business activities with regard to sustainability and about the fact that this has been an integral part of Deutsche Plasser’s business culture for 60 years. But the world has changed since, and we all have to deal with the consequences of the global Corona pandemic.

We introduced appropriate measures in our company straight away and have strictly followed the legal requirements. For me this was a matter of course, as the health and well-being of our staff and our customers and business partners is a top priority.

At the same time, it was important to me to that we work at full capacity for you, our customers. You should be able to rely on us. And rely on us always doing everything possible to keep your machines fully operational.

The railway in particular has a vital role these days. It is hugely important for our economy that freight traffic can continue to run at its usual capacity. This ensures the smooth functioning of many companies despite the huge challenges they face. You, our customers, play a pivotal role in this, as your work ensures that the railway infrastructure will always be in perfect condition.

Some processes have changed in the last few weeks, personal contact has often been replaced with phone calls and video conferencing, but one thing has remained the same: our endeavour to support you as best as possible so that you can perform your tasks to the usual high standards.

In the end we will be left with the ever-present questions about the way back to normality. How long will it take? How will we be able to and permitted to shape it? When will the economy recover from this lockdown? I am confident that together we will get through these difficult times. Let’s take the positives from this period with us and look forward with optimism, in the hope that this crisis will in the end create a stronger and more responsible society.

I wish us all every success. And above all, stay safe and healthy!

Yours
Ralf Lange
Managing Director Deutsche Plasser

„Let’s take the positives from this period with us and look forward with optimism.”
Ralf Lange
Managing Director Deutsche Plasser
On the right track since the beginning

We live in turbulent times. Many crucial questions remain unanswered. Without doubt, one of the central topics is the global climate change. Business, in particular, is called upon to fundamentally question previously valid concepts. New ways of thinking and implementation are required, with sustainability playing a major role. Here, a lot could be learned from modern track construction. At Deutsche Plasser, sustainability is already embedded in the corporate objectives.

One of the key areas we have to confront in order to get a grip on climate change is transport. Of course, we need mobility to retain our standard of living. But we need to ask ourselves if we really need everything we have today and if we can afford to keep it up. Above all, we need to ask ourselves if we should not push certain means of transport much more. Yes, this clearly refers to the railway. For the simple reason that the railway is the most sustainable means of transport we have. How long have we been talking about moving freight primarily onto the rail? And how far do we still have to go with this? Anybody working in track construction knows this only too well.

Deutsche Plasser was founded to support these sustainable companies. It is 60 years this year since we started to provide original spare and wear parts for Plasser & Theurer machines in Germany. We gradually developed into a service company with a comprehensive offering. We carry out repairs, both on the track and in the workshop, we provide hire equipment and replacement parts, have been overhauling tamping units for many years and are continuously expanding our range of services with new offers such as the retrofit programme. Ultimately, our services will always help to secure the availability machines and to extend the service life of tamping units and machines.

All companies that make a direct or indirect contribution to keeping the railway attractive are working in the right place. They help to promote sustainable mobility.
When the Leverkusen-Opladen maintenance plant was opened ten years ago, Deutsche Plasser demonstrated a vision of the future. Today there is no doubt that a plant of that size and with those facilities is of great importance for the track construction sector.

Deutsche Plasser was founded 60 years ago. It has developed into a valuable part in a sustainable system. And it will never tire in setting new trends.

Retrofit is sustainability par excellence. Machines that have been in operation for 20 or 30 years can stay in service for many more years after this type of upgrade.

Deutsche Plasser: the right answers
Sustainability is one of the crucial answers to today's pressing questions. The railway, too, is a key answer. And the companies that promote the success of the railways through economically efficient track construction and maintenance are certainly in the right place. We at Deutsche Plasser are proud to be part of this sustainable system and to contribute to making it even more attractive for the future with our services.

Retrofit: on the right track
Deutsche Plasser's philosophy is characterised by setting sensible trends for the long term, such as the establishment of the Leverkusen-Opladen plant. It is also important to recognise the signs of the time, which today more than ever are on the long-lasting use of available resources. The new retrofit programme hits the nail on the head with this trend. Retrofit is the obvious answer to the question whether it is worth upgrading a 20- to 30-year old machine. It is definitely worth doing.

The fundamental idea of the programme is to retain the basic substance of a machine that is in working order and only recondition or renew those parts that need it. Furthermore, components are replaced in a targeted manner to achieve higher productivity with new technologies. Typical examples would be the DRP data recording device, the new SmartALC guiding computer or the latest measuring technology. All work is agreed with the customer and corresponds exactly to the scope of the planned investment. After a retrofit, the machine will be operational again for many more years.

The cost is distinctly below the purchase cost. The time effort is significantly less, and the approval is retained. In addition, the staff are familiar with the machine and can work at full capacity straight away.

Leverkusen-Opladen: at the right time
In addition to the Munich headquarters, we set up a new maintenance workshop in Leverkusen-Opladen ten years ago. That was by far not the best time for such a venture in German track construction. Nevertheless, we were convinced that in the long term there would be a demand for a workshop of that size and with those facilities. And we were right. For it is proven again and again that expert repairs, maintenance, overhauls and upgrades of machines are key for the economic success of more and more partners. The idea behind it: the bottom line of the longer a machine is in service the more economically efficient it is.

It was not just considerations on the sustainable development of track construction that fed into the construction of the Leverkusen-Opladen workshop. Back then we were also keen to consider the topic of sustainability in the building process. Right from the start, the building was heated using heat pumps that supply thermal energy from the ground into the floor of the building. The roof was designed such that a large area was available for the use of photovoltaics and the factory hall has plenty of natural light. Air conditioning was not installed to avoid the consumption of unnecessary additional energy. In addition, an unusually large amount of green spaces was provided on the factory site. So, many initiatives in this industrial building set an example in many an area.
Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. You have been the Works Manager in Opladen since last November. How do you like your new role and what experiences have you made in the first few months?

I like the job very much and have made some very positive first experiences. I have a lot of experience in process optimisation and organisational management and have already implemented initial measures. The first one is the introduction of project organisation. Each machine is now defined as a separate project with a project manager. Depending on the scope and requirements of a project, we put together the appropriate team. This change has been received well by both our staff and customers, and we have had our first successes with it. As a result of this measure, we have experienced completely new dynamics in our processes.

This also means more responsibility for the individual members of staff, especially the project managers.

Yes, of course. I find this is very positive and motivating for all members of a team. They all work together to achieve a goal and therefore are also jointly responsible for its success. The notion of having a “right to success” is very important to me. Each member of staff should not only take on responsibility but also appreciated for successful completion of a task.

This sounds very respectful. Apart from that, have you been able to introduce other initiatives?

To me it is generally very important to support and encourage staff as much as possible. We have a colleague who is responsible for the areas of occupational health and safety as well as waste and environmental management. Another colleague will look after training and development, both for our apprentices and the rest of the staff. He is the first point of contact for any training requests and develops individual training programmes in cooperation with the works management; all with the ultimate aim to be even better positioned for our customers and to be able to serve them even better.

This colleague has another important role, doesn’t he?

Yes, definitely! He is responsible for putting together our service teams, especially for requirements at short notice. This way we can respond flexibly and adjust quickly to the very diverse requirements of our customers. This was of particular importance to me: to have a competent and experienced team ready to be deployed so that the machines will be operational again as quickly as possible.

What are your objectives as Works Manager?

I want to ensure that the “first hand service” that Deutsch Plasser stands for is delivered at our Leverkusen-Opladen site. To achieve
this, we have to make sure that we have the required know-how available. Here, our team at the maintenance workshop has excellent prerequisites. My job is to utilise the existing potential even better and to develop it further.

**How do you want to achieve this?**
Through a sensible approach to specialisation in individual areas. Our members of staff have a wide range of expertise. They are highly competent and experienced, which is invaluable for us and our customers. But I would like to develop and encourage certain specialist skills so that we become even more effective and diverse. Therefore, it was important for me to introduce the new role of training and development manager and equip him with the right competencies.

In your new position you work closely with Sven Peters, the Technical Manager of the maintenance workshop. How well does this cooperation work?
Very well. Of course, we have to get used to each other and grow together as a management team, but we are on the right path. Mr Peters deals with all the technical issues and so is in close communication with the colleagues in Munich and myself, both in the bidding and implementation phase of a project. In addition to that, he assists the project managers with any technical issues. I look after the “admin” side of things, i.e. I make sure that the right members of staff are available for a project in the right numbers, the processes run smoothly, and the cost and time specifications are adhered to.

*With regard to the workshop, at what capacity are you working this year and what work priorities do you envisage?*
At the moment we work at full capacity, which I am very pleased about, especially since we are working on very interesting projects. A major focus this year is retrofit, there is a clear trend towards this service. The customer gets a machine upgraded that is already in use, and its functional scope extended; and all that at a cost which is below the purchase price of a new machine. And on top of that it is much quicker! Here in Leverkusen-Opladen we are ideally positioned for this type of project, and the positive reception this has from our customers confirms our assessment.

What have you got planned for this coming winter?
We are planning for this at the moment and will also optimise our processes further to be available for our customers even more quickly and at an even better quality than before. We are already in initial talks with customers with regard to winter planning; but I also want to invite our customers to talk to our sales department so we can review jointly how best we can meet the customers’ needs this coming winter.

Many interesting and exciting points that sound very promising. We would also like to get to know the person behind the position. Where have you been before joining Deutsche Plasser?
My training was in business administration. After that I was the works manager for a machine manufacturer for the pharmaceutical industry. Then I had various positions in project management and was branch manager in the USA. Later, I worked as a consultant for process and production optimisation. In addition, I studied in Germany, the USA and Canada and completed an Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA).

Ideal prerequisites for your new position in Leverkusen-Opladen! What attracted you to Deutsche Plasser, why did you want to work there?
Above all, the versatility of the job and the “appeal of optimisation”. I like companies that have “grown”, such as Deutsche Plasser, also in the context of a technological world leader such as Plasser & Theurer. No matter how well a company is organised and how well a workshop runs, there is always room for further optimisation; and the Deutsche Plasser maintenance workshop is where I want to get involved and use my knowledge and experience to contribute to the success of the company for the benefit of our customers. I think of the bigger picture; for me, track construction is a market of the future; I regard the railway as the transport sector of the future, especially if we think about the protection of the environment and sustainability. And I want to be part of this development and make a positive contribution.

Thank you very much for talking to us!
In March 2018, a large Polish construction company took delivery of a Plasser & Theurer Duomatic 09-32 CSM. The machine was operating successfully until it derailed near Warsaw in mid-October 2019. Our customer decided to have the machine repaired by our Polish workshop. In the course of the repair, the machine will also be upgraded.
A derailment is one of the worst accidents a track maintenance machine can have. The Duomatic 09-32 CSM did not just derail, it then also tipped over sideways. The machine was so heavily damaged that a thorough examination and subsequent repair was inevitable.

**Machine should remain in Poland**

For the customer it was important that the machine remains in Poland during the repair work. Thanks to the excellent collaborative partnership with the machine operating company, our Polish office was able to secure the repair contract. The work will be carried out in a production hall of Trakcja PRKi in Wroclaw, which has been rented for fulfilling this contract.

**Work to be carried out**

The machine arrived at the hall on 18th December last year, work commenced on 7th January this year. Following a thorough examination of the damaged machine, a number of components were dismantled. The satellite was sent for repair to our maintenance workshop in Leverkusen-Opladen, the tamping units will be repaired at our Munich workshop. Bogies and wheelsets will be repaired by other partner companies. All other repair work, e.g. on the measuring car, will be carried out in Wroclaw.

**Trust & Reliability**

The Duomatic 09-32 CSM took up operation in March 2018.

"We are pleased about the great trust in our work. I am confident that we will be able to carry out the repair work on time and to the usual high quality. I am especially delighted that we will also upgrade the machine."

Wojciech Musial  
Head of Poland office

**Modernisation**

As the machine will be out of action as a result of the repair work, the customer decided to have it upgraded at the same time. A gauge measurement system for the DRP recorder (Data Recording Processor) will be fitted, without delaying the eventual handback to the customer.

**Work is on schedule**

The work is in full progress and on schedule. The completion of the repair work is scheduled for end of June, after that the machine will go back into operation. Staff from Deutsche Plasser Poland will be there and make sure that everything is working well.
New record in Munich

At the end of 2019 it became apparent: in the Deutsche Plasser workshop in Munich the 144th tamping unit of the year was overhauled successfully. This set a new record and confirms the outstanding work of the whole team.

Franjo Basic and Simon Selbert head up the repair workshop of Deutsche Plasser.
Reconditioning of tamping units 2017 - 2019

Tamping unit overhaul has developed very positively in recent years.

Great teamwork

Continuous optimisation

We are particularly delighted that the continuous optimisation of internal processes has such a positive effect. This enabled us to reduce the throughput times but at the same time retain the usual high quality of Deutsche Plasser.

Under the leadership of Franjo Basic and Simon Seibert, the workshop areas were restructured about a year ago, resulting in a significant optimisation of the paths. Amongst others, space was made for a new crane, which helps to reduce the throughput times even further.

Our tried and tested tamping unit test rig was upgraded recently and now provides additional functionality. The overhaul of tamping units is a service that Deutsche Plasser is particularly associated with. Since the company was founded, we have acquired a wealth of expertise and gained a huge amount of experience in this area.

The team at Deutsche Plasser is pleased that this know-how is also in high demand on an international level, both from customers and partner companies. As reported in issue 13 of DP update, we are always pleased to support our partner companies in setting up their own overhaul departments, e.g. in India or the USA.

Further improvements planned

Despite this milestone success, we will not rest on our laurels but will try to improve and optimise our processes even further in future. So, the team’s target for this year is clear: to beat the previous record.

This and other measures have made it possible to reduce a test run from eight to four hours. The new record impressively substantiates this increase in workshop capacity.

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Our tried and tested tamping unit test rig was upgraded recently and now provides additional functionality. This enables an even more realistic simulation of the conditions of use of a tamping unit and allows us to assess its functionality more accurately than before.
Last year we carried out a customer survey on our spare parts management. The results will help us optimise our offering even further. Two subject areas were especially popular: retrofit and fixed prices.
Retrofit

Our retrofit offer is a response to our customers’ requirements when they do not want to replace a machine that has been working well for many years but still want to make use of new technologies to make the machine even more efficient.

This type of modernisation means that the basic substance of a machine is retained and upgrades and replacements are only made where the customer requests this. It is a targeted approach, to replace components where new technologies will result in higher productivity. Typical examples include the digital Data Recording Processor DRP, the new guiding computer SmartALC or the rotation speed modulation for tamping units.

Of course, a lot depends on the current condition of the machine but upgrading a machine to the latest technology is not as cost intensive as the purchase of a new machine. We expect the cost of a retrofit to be significantly lower than the purchase price of a new machine.

An even greater benefit are the timescales. A retrofit takes eight to ten months, depending on the scope of work and the size of the machine. After that, the machine will go straight back to work on the track.

45% more fixed prices

At the end of 2018, we published the first edition of our service catalogue. The aim was to provide our customers and potential customers with a transparent overview of our service offering, with three immediate benefits: time savings, less admin effort and better planning security.

We are publishing new editions of the catalogue at regular intervals, adding further offers and information on our services. Where possible, we will also provide fixed prices for the new services. We are now at edition 6 and are pleased that this edition has 45% more fixed prices than the 1st edition.

The feedback has been very positive. Our customers appreciate the support they get with their calculations as well as the transparency of the service descriptions. The latter especially contribute to an in-depth understanding of what is involved and so avoid differing interpretations of a scope of services.

Conclusions

The survey feedback shows that we have understood our customers’ requirements and are responding with the right initiatives and offers. We are pleased about this, as we have pledged to intensify the dialogue with our business partners.

We are always open for suggestions from our customers, also outside of surveys. If we can help you, please get in touch. We are there for you! ✅

Our service catalogue is available in its 6th edition, with 45% more fixed prices listed than at the beginning.
Thank you for your time. Since late 2019, you have been in charge of “Global Customer Services” at Plasser & Theurer. Before diving into your vision and goals, we would like to hear about your career so far.

Basically, I followed your typical engineer’s career path. After graduating in mechanical engineering, I completed a graduate engineer’s degree in electrical and electronics engineering and an MBA. I started my career as a project manager, moved on to international sales with various postings abroad, and then I became the director of Corporate Business Development at a medium-sized company. I have been working in corporate environments for the past 10 years. After creating a technology centre for digitalisation, I started focussing on developing a global customer services organisation. My entire career has been shaped by customer contact. This is why I put so much emphasis not only on employee orientation, but also on customer orientation.

That sounds very impressive. Where is your new position within the Plasser & Theurer hierarchy?

I am responsible for Global Customer Services, which concerns our head office and partner companies in equal measure. I report directly to Chief Sales Officer Thomas Schöpf, our strategic head of global sales.

Isn’t it unusual to define customer service as part of sales?

In my opinion, it’s a good fit. Integrated customer service has a lot to do with sales. For me, sales means supporting customers every step of the way: from their first enquiry to the end of the machine’s service life. This entails providing customers with the best advice possible so they reach their goals efficiently while using their resources optimally. In this respect, we have taken the first steps already. Customer Services now is an integral part of the sales process. This allows us to shape the sales process from the beginning.

You seem very dynamic and driven! How would you describe your other strengths?

In my professional life, I have always dealt with change, which is why I have a lot of experience with it. As a manager, my clear focus is on my employees and on supporting them and their individual development. Our customers will also benefit greatly if we succeed in furthering our employees’ knowledge, development, motivation, and experience.

You argue that a machine manufacturer like Plasser & Theurer will need to organise its customer services efficiently to maintain a sustainably strong market position. What does this mean exactly?

For me, there is no doubt that customer service is going to be our decisive USP. Of course, Plasser & Theurer is a technological leader and has great innovative power. But we cannot underestimate the fact that
Retrofitting will take on an important role in the future. Alexander Lehner sees a lot of potential for Deutsche Plasser in this regard.

There are imitators from other places who offer products that seem quite appealing to some customers. This brings me back to what I said before: customer service starts when we get in touch with a customer for the very first time. This is when we already have to be present. Together with the customer, we have to analyse their needs and offer them solutions based on our many years of experience and our technical know-how, thinking beyond nominally lower prime costs. Keeping the machine’s entire service life in mind is key. Certain cost factors are added to the prime costs later on, e.g. the fast provision of spare parts, high availability of the machine, proactive maintenance and, later on, modernisations, such as retrofits.

Hasn’t service of this kind always been one of Plasser & Theurer’s and its partner companies’ strengths?
Absolutely. Our company, but also the partner companies, have worked on this successfully for many years. Now we can build upon this solid base, further develop our customer services and ultimately integrate it worldwide. In this context, I like to use the expression “integrated customer services”.

What do you mean by that, exactly? What does sustainable and successful customer service mean to you?
Until now, customer service at Plasser & Theurer and its partner companies has entailed many independent efforts. Obviously, they have always cooperated whenever it was necessary. But there was no official joint planning or general coordination. Before my position was created, there was no single point of contact to provide that. Now, this has changed. I think it’s important to think about the big picture, to use the resources we have as efficiently as possible – regardless of which company is in charge of them. This will help us deploy our maintenance technicians in a more flexible manner. The aim is to balance workloads in different markets and take advantage of skills available in companies in other countries. All partner companies will be able to draw on a larger skill set which will allow them to better address customer requirements.

In addition, we will carry out an in-depth analysis of our logistics movements and warehouse systems. I envision one or two central storage locations which provide all partner companies and also our customers with spare parts.

“Spare parts” is a keyword that brings me to my next question: until now, emphasis was put on spare parts and direct machine services. Which services will be added in the future?
Spare parts will continue to play a key role. Customer Services is putting all its effort into ensuring spare parts are readily available, so companies operating machines have the highest possible availability for their machines. We want to create added value for our clients and to act proactively. Intensifying predictive maintenance and expanding digitalisation and connectivity is what I have in mind here. In other words: the more data we are able to obtain and analyse about the machines in operation, the better we can develop prediction models for machine availability. We are definitely moving in the direction of fleet management and want to offer optimal customer support in this aspect as well. No one knows the machines better than we do. By collecting and analysing actual operating data, we will be able to inform our customers about maintenance services that will become necessary, and we will be able to develop suitable solutions with them. By doing so, machine availability will be even greater.

But there’s more: I see us auditing our customers’ warehouses to prepare recommendations for optimisation. We are also contemplating new machine operation concepts such as “pay per use” and the role of used machines. For example, I like the idea of providing customers with a used machine to work with while their own machine is being serviced.

For Deutsche Plasser, retrofitting is a very hot topic. It has been successfully implemented in several projects. Other customers have shown great interest in this form of modernisation. What part does retrofitting play in your vision?
Definitely a major and very important one. Retrofitting is particularly effective and advisable when performed by the original manufacturer. It has access to the design plans – no one knows more about the
design of the machine. The lifespan of a successfully employed machine can be extended significantly and also its efficiency can be improved by modernising the machine. We will consider this option more often when advising customers in the future. In some cases, it might make more sense to use retrofitting to add value to an existing machine instead of buying a new one. We want to assess our customers’ individual situations with them to help them make the right decision.

That’s an interesting approach. How will customers benefit from this?
The most important factor is availability. All efforts aim at providing even higher availability. But we are not only thinking about the machine itself. We strive for the best possible availability of spare parts, service technicians, and maintenance workshops. When our proactive analyses show that maintenance work will be needed soon, we have to ensure the necessary resources will then be available.

To use a catchy turn of phrase, I’d say I want to give our customers “peace of mind.” I want them to be able to fully rely on the service provided by Plasser & Theurer without having to give this topic any more thought. Instead, they can focus entirely on their construction and maintenance projects. We take care of the highest possible machine availability.

You described your vision of “integrated customer services” very impressively. What role do service providers like Deutsche Plasser play in it?

A major one. They are already immersed in the topic — often times even more so than Plasser & Theurer itself. We appreciate the many years of experience, the close ties to our customers and the wealth of technical knowledge. But we strive to apply all this in an even better and more flexible way. Doing so gives Deutsche Plasser new possibilities and fields of application. This also applies to customers who weren’t able to draw on these skills in the past. This wealth of knowledge will become usable for other countries and customers.

I see a lot of potential for Deutsche Plasser, especially in the fields of work unit overhaul and retrofitting. The quality of the work units doesn’t need explaining. The outcome speaks for itself. In terms of retrofitting, especially during the past year, Deutsche Plasser has completed several very impressive projects which show that this form of modernisation is in excellent hands.

Thank you very much for your time!
A retrofit can extend the performance and functionality of a machine.

A retrofit is considerably less cost-intensive than the purchase of a new machine.

The approval remains valid and the machine can be deployed again straight away once the work has finished.

A retrofit takes eight to ten months, depending on the scope of work and the size of the machine.

Following a retrofit, the machine will be operational again for many years.

The basic elements of the machine remain and only those areas are reconditioned and renewed where it is necessary.

The staff is familiar with the machine and can operate it with full efficiency from day one.

The staff will appreciate the machine all the more once it has been upgraded and becomes even more attractive to work with.

EIGHT ADVANTAGES OF A DEUTSCHE PLAßSER RETROFIT
You have a machine you’d like to sell after many years of successful operation or are looking for a used machine in good condition? Then get in touch with us – we will support you as best as we can!

The 4th EU Railway Package – Benefits for machine operating companies

The 4th EU Railway Package introduces many changes for the railway sector. They include new requirements for approvals, which manufacturers, such as Plasser & Theurer, want to respond to with increasing standardisation of machines.

Greater standardisation, if implemented professionally, not only means a simplification of approvals procedures but also huge advantages for stocking spare parts. Clearly defined standardised spare parts suggestions are available for machines, and they can be routinely supplied together with the machine.

Furthermore, this will also result in advantages for the operator training and machine maintenance, as service companies, such as Deutsche Plasser, can rely on their huge expertise in these areas as well as a wealth of experience of and familiarity with the machines.
We are looking forward to welcoming you at the new dates of the trade fairs

InnoTrans 2021
27. – 30. April 2021
Berlin

iaf 2022
31. Mai – 2. June 2022
Münster
Find more information on retrofit here:
www.deutsche-plasser.de/retrofit