



THE MAGAZINE FOR THE PLASTICS AND RUBBER INDUSTRY



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Twenty editions and counting

# Plast turns sixty-two... and ageing well!

From a European plastics fair to a world-class event. Sixty-two years, twenty editions, one unwavering vocation: to be the meeting point between those who build technology and those who use it. A journey retracing the milestones of a trade fair born and grown alongside the industry it serves.

By **Giampiero Zazzaro**

If you are reading this copy, it means that Plast is about to begin or is already under way – and perhaps you are standing right here inside the halls of Fiera Milano in Rho, where from 9 to 12 June 2026 the event has opened its doors for the twentieth time. It is a rare opportunity to pause and look back, not out of nostalgia, but to better understand how far we have come. Because the history of Plast is, in large measure, the history of the plastics and rubber industry: it has followed the industry's seasons of growth, accompanied its transformations, and weathered its crises without ever losing its function as both mirror and compass.

The last time the sector had gathered in these halls was September 2023 – an unusual September for a fair that had always preferred the spring. Between that edition and this one, nearly three years have passed, filled with change, organisational choices, and new challenges. But to understand the meaning of Plast 2026, one must go further back still, all the way to the beginning.

## 1964: the birth of Plast

It all begins in an Italy still riding the wave of the economic miracle, a country in which the word “plastic” evoked modernity, lightness, and the future. It was 1954 when Giulio Natta had synthesised isotactic polypropylene at the Politecnico di Milano, opening a path that would transform industrial production worldwide. Montecatini's Moplen had already found its way into Italian homes, thanks to the television advertising programme

Carosello and the unmistakable catchphrase of comedian Gino Bramieri. The industry was growing, processors were multiplying, and machinery manufacturers were looking for a showcase worthy of their ambitions.

In 1964, at the Fiera di Milano, that showcase took shape: the European Salon of Plastics and Rubber was born – what history would simply come to call Plast. The first edition brought together around 800 exhibitors, 250 of them from abroad, and drew more than 200,000 trade visitors and technical specialists. Extraordinary figures for the time, confirming how ripe the sector was for a dedicated event. The European Congress on Plastics, held in parallel, attracted 50 speakers and 400 delegates from 22 countries.

From that first edition, the frequency would move from quadrennial to triennial. The event's visual identity received an early boost in 1969 from Armando Testa, the great Turinese graphic designer who had, among other things, created the Pirelli logo. His graphic work for Plast became, in 1972, an iconic poster – so much so that it was acquired for the permanent Architecture and Design collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

## From the seventies to the new millennium: growth and internationalisation

In the years that followed, Plast consolidated its position as the European benchmark for the sector. The triennial format ensured continuity; the Milanese location, at the heart of Italy's

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capital equipment manufacturing industry, provided an unrivalled industrial context.

Promaplast, the organising company owned by Amaplast – Italian Plastics and Rubber Processing Machinery and Moulds Manufacturers' Association, affiliated to Confindustria – has built over time a professional structure capable of managing an event of international scale, nurturing relationships with partner fairs abroad, coordinating visitor delegations, and guaranteeing the quality of both the exhibition and conference programmes.

With the turn of the millennium, Plast was already an established institution. The editions of the 2000s recorded growing numbers of international exhibitors and visitors, with an increasingly significant presence of Asian companies, particularly Chinese ones. Italy remained the exhibiting heartland, with domestic machinery manufacturers forming the backbone of the offer, but the fair's global vocation was strengthening edition by edition.

In 2015, Plast took place in an exceptional setting: the opening week of Expo Milano, from 5 to 9 May. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for international visibility, it brought more than 50,000 trade visitors to the fair and more than 1,584 exhibitors, a slight increase on the previous edition. The concurrence with the World Exposition amplified the event's media resonance considerably.

## **2018: The Innovation Alliance and record-breaking figures**

The 2018 edition is probably the high-water mark in terms of scale and impact. From 29 May to 1 June, Fiera Milano hosted not only the plastics and rubber fair but an unprecedented exhibition project: The Innovation Alliance, which brought together simultaneously Plast, Ipack-Ima – the international reference fair for food and non-food packaging processes and technologies – Print4All, the hub for the printing, converting, and finishing supply chain, Meat-Tech, a fair dedicated to innovative technologies and solutions for the meat processing industry, and Intralogistica Italia, covering automated systems for industrial material handling. Five events, an entire exhibition quarter, one clear message: capital equipment is an interconnected ecosystem, and supply chains speak to one another.

The results vindicated the vision: the Alliance recorded 150,000 trade visitor attendances, 27% of them international. Plast alone brought in more than 1,500 exhibitors across 55,000 net square metres, with over 63,000 visitors, 27.5% of them from abroad.

For Italian machinery manufacturers – who in those years were recording a turnover of over four billion euros, with exports accounting for around seventy per cent – Plast 2018 was a launch platform into international markets, an instrument for promoting Italian manufacturing excellence that no advertising campaign could have replicated with the same effectiveness. The meetings, live machine demonstrations, contracts signed at



the stand: the physical trade fair, at a time when people were already beginning to talk of digital transformation, reaffirmed its irreplaceable value.

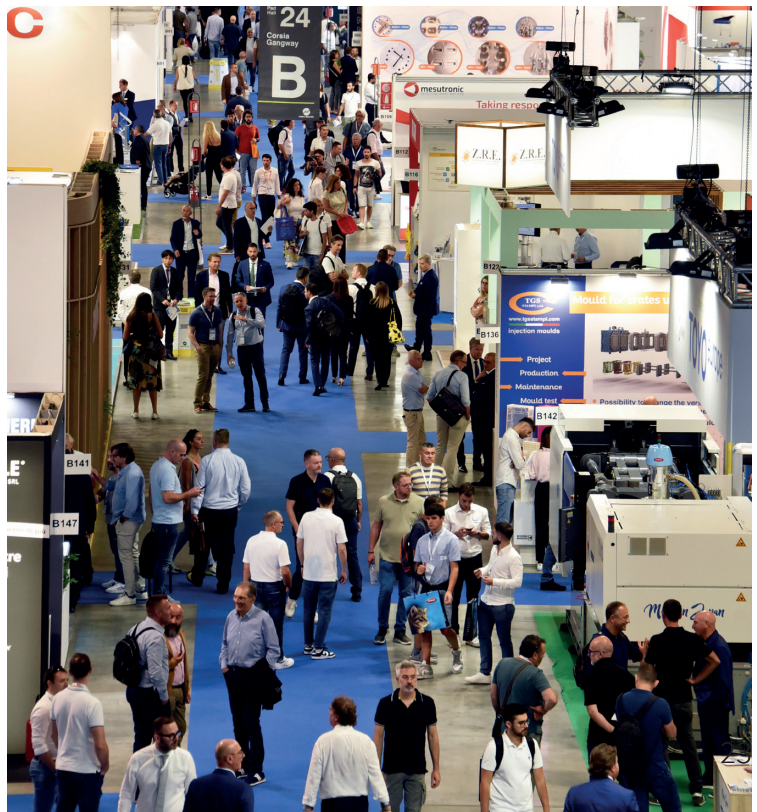
## **The unexpected: pandemic, postponement, and the birth of GreenPlast**

The triennial calendar would have brought the nineteenth edition in 2021. The dates were already set, registrations open, the organisation under way. Then came Covid-19.

The pandemic swept through the global exhibition industry, forcing Promaplast into a painful but inevitable decision: the 2021 edition was cancelled. The sanitary, logistical, and psychological conditions required to safely host the thousands of international exhibitors and visitors that Plast demands were simply not in place. It was a significant loss – not only financial: an industry already grappling with the first signs of the supply chain crisis found itself deprived of its principal moment of collective gathering.

But from that difficulty something new was born. Promaplast seized the opportunity to launch GreenPlast, a trade exhibition and conference of more modest proportions but with a

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precise strategic positioning: sustainability in the plastics and rubber industry. The first edition was held in May 2022, as pandemic restrictions were beginning to ease, opening a thematic strand that the sector had an urgent need to develop. Plastics – a remarkable material for its performance and versatility – had found itself at the centre of an increasingly heated public debate about end-of-life treatment, recycling, and environmental impact. GreenPlast gave that debate a physical, qualified, industry-specific home.

The 2025 edition of GreenPlast confirmed the vitality of the format: 200 exhibitors (75% Italian, 25% international), 17,373 visitors, 19 countries represented, 5,500 square metres, a highly qualified audience, and a substantial conference programme that attracted researchers, policymakers, and sustainability managers from across Europe.

### Plast 2023: the return after five years

“Five years have passed, but it feels like another era”. With these words Mario Maggiani, Managing Director of Promaplast, had introduced the 2023 edition of the fair. And he was right: from 2018 to 2023, the world had changed beyond recognition. Covid, the raw materials and components supply crisis, the war in Ukraine, inflation, soaring energy costs. A scenario that no one in 2018 could have foreseen.

Plast 2023 was held from 5 to 8 September – unusual dates for a fair that had always occupied the spring, a choice that Maggiani himself explained as strategic, to avoid clashes with other major international events. The results gathered sent a signal of confidence in a market that was anything but straightforward.

The nineteenth edition of Plast recorded 1,323 exhibitors, 47% of them from abroad, spread across 50,000 net square metres in six halls at Fiera Milano Rho. Visitor numbers reached 38,000, from 109 countries, with an international share of 26%. Figures below the 2018 record – inevitable, after five years’ absence and against a difficult economic backdrop – but sufficient to reaffirm Plast’s standing as the principal European event in the sector.

Alongside the three established satellite salons – Rubber, dedicated to rubber processing technologies; 3D Plast, to additive manufacturing; and PlastMat, to innovative materials – the fair offered an extensive conference programme addressing the most pressing topics of the moment. The visitor delegations organised in collaboration with the Italian Trade Agency (Agenzia ICE) brought qualified operators from several strategic areas of Italian export, confirming the importance of the institutional channel in the internationalisation of the fair. When the gates closed on 8 September 2023, it was possible to speak of a successful return. Not triumphalist – the difficulties facing the sector were real, and it would have been inappropriate to ignore them – but convincing. Plast had once again demonstrated its ability to weather external turbulence without losing its own identity.

### The 2023–2026 period: building the twentieth edition

The organisational journey towards Plast 2026 began, as is customary, almost immediately after the previous edition closed. Registrations opened in March 2025, and recorded a resilience remarkable in one of the most complex market environments of recent years. With the automotive sector in deep crisis, demand slowing, and geopolitical uncertainties weighing on investment decisions, Plast 2026 arrives at Fiera Milano with more than 1,000 registered companies from countries across

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the globe, and around 200 new exhibitors compared to the previous edition, 32% of them international. A result that, read against the general backdrop of the sector, confirms the structural robustness of an event capable of holding firm even in adverse conditions.

The most important structural novelty of the 2026 edition is, however, of a different nature: Plast is not exhibiting alone. For the first time, the fair forms part of MaTec, an exhibition project bringing together three advanced manufacturing trade shows: Plast for plastics and rubber technologies, Xylexpo – the biennial for wood processing and furniture technologies, organised by Acimall – and Composites Future, an exhibition and conference event dedicated to composite materials, born from collaboration between Assocompositi and Xylexpo.

Eight halls, three complementary fairs, a single exhibition quarter. The stated objective is to encourage “technological cross-fertilisation” between sectors sharing similar challenges: materials sustainability, process automation, production digitalisation, and access to international markets. A visitor arriving at Plast for extrusion machinery can find, just a short walk away, the latest innovations in wood processing or composite materials. The logic is that of the industrial cluster applied to the trade fair format.

The three satellite salons that had debuted and consolidated their identities in previous editions return in 2026: Rubber is in its fifth edition, 3D Plast its fourth, and PlastMat its third. Their continued presence confirms a by now structural tendency.

On the internationalisation front, collaboration with the Italian Trade Agency has been strengthened compared to 2023. Buyer delegations are expected from multiple geographical areas, with particular attention to the growth markets of Asia, the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. Online pre-registrations, opened in March 2026, have confirmed high global interest.

## The road to June: stands, fairs, and press tours

The twentieth edition has not been built solely at the drawing board. The 2023–2026 triennium has seen Promaplast deploy a wide-ranging international promotional strategy, taking the Plast name directly to key markets, to competing fairs, and to the circuits of the world's specialist press.

On the exhibitions front, the information stands set up by Amplast at the sector's principal international events have provided the most direct channel for reaching potential foreign exhibitors and visitors. K 2025 in Düsseldorf represented the most important stage: beyond being a major trade fair in its own right, it is traditionally where the seeds are sown for subsequent editions of smaller fairs. Alongside the German event came PlastEurasia in Istanbul – one of the most liveliest markets for Italian machinery purchases in the Euro-Mediterranean area – Plastex in Cai-

ro, Plastindia in New Delhi with its Italian Technology Day, Expo Plásticos in Guadalajara, and Chinaplas in Shanghai: a circuit spanning almost every continent and reflecting the real map of Italian machinery exports for plastics and rubber.

The most intensive moment of this communications plan was, however, the press tour of 24–26 February 2026. Around thirty Italian and international journalists, representing the sector's leading trade publications, spent three days in Italy visiting three exhibiting companies: a window onto the fair's technological content before the doors had even opened. The programme, organised by Promaplast in collaboration with the host exhibitors, gave the media a concrete preview of the innovation they would subsequently find at the fair, transforming journalists from spectators into first-hand witnesses. Bringing the international press inside Italian factories is one of the most effective promotional instruments a B2B trade fair can deploy.

## The twentieth edition, sixty-two years on

In 1964, someone had the ambitious idea of gathering in one place everything an industry knew how to do. Sixty-two years later, that idea is still here – somewhat larger, far more international. But the underlying idea has not changed: bringing face to face those who produce technologies and those who are interested in buying them, in a physical space where negotiations take shape. Plast has never ceased to be, above all else, a place of encounter. And places of encounter, when they truly work, do not age.

Fairs that last twenty editions do not survive through inertia. They survive because they continue to answer a real demand. And that demand, for now, shows no sign of quietening. **IMP**



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