

FUTURE-PROOF

Vinyl is booming, but the capacities of the pressing plants are limited. Now a German company is offering new press machines for the first time in a good three decades.

When the CD began its triumphant rise, it meant the beginning of the end for vinyl – at least that was what people thought in the mid-1980s. At that time, Toolex Alpha, the Swedish world market leader for press machines, ceased production.

Even today, pressing plants work almost exclusively with machines from the 1950s to 70s. If parts break, they are often removed from decommissioned ones, the keyword being cannibalization, because many parts can only be rebuilt with great effort.

Now “Newbilt” has developed new record presses. Behind the company from Alsdorf near Aachen are the partners Detlef Seiffert (Consulting), Kees De Jonge (Sales) and Erwin Neubauer (Managing Director). Seiffert started in vinyl

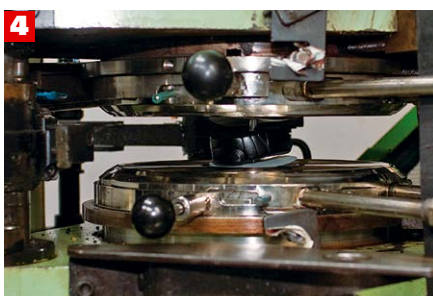
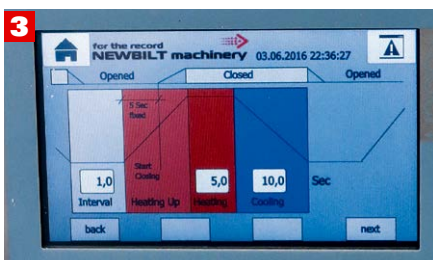
production and was for a long time head of CD production at Record Service, later Warner Music Manufacturing Europe and today’s Cinram. There he met Neubauer in 1986.

Just a few corners away from Cinram there is an inconspicuous building. “I rented it in 2010,” says Neubauer, “to overhaul used systems for CD and DVD production and then sell them again across the globe”. In 2014 he met Seiffert again, who was, at the time, in charge of a vinyl project: “A customer from Singapore had bought two scrap-ready Finebilt systems from the 1950s and 1960s and wanted them to be revised. Detlef turned to me because I had the hall at my disposal. It was then that we realized for the first time that press machines could be a market

again.” Although the customer finally bailed out because his financiers broke away, Seiffert and Neubauer did not give up the renovation. “But at some point we said to ourselves: it doesn’t pay off. It makes more sense to develop it newly from scratch.” Within one year, the project was accomplished: based on the Finebilt, the – nomen est omen – Newbilt was created.

Time to have a closer look at the machine. A semi-automatic “Newbilt Duplex”-set consists of two presses, an extruder and hydraulics. Granulate is filled into the funnel of the extruder, which is then compressed more and more until the “biscuit” comes out at the end, which is placed in the press. To start the computer-controlled printing process, an employee simultaneously presses two red buttons. The two matrix-plates move into the actual press and are closed. The vinyl “biscuit” is first heated to 180 degrees Celsius, using steam, then pressed by hydraulics at a pressure of over 100 tons and finally cooled to 25 degrees by applying water. It takes 40 seconds until the matrix-plates are extended again and present the finished record to the viewer. Since a set has two





asynchronous presses, an average of three records can be produced per minute.

Although the equipment is based on the historical design of the Finebilt, it has been modernized with new control systems. For example, inserting the

1 The vinyl granulate is compressed (under the yellow cover) until the „biscuit“ comes out at the end. **2** The biscuit is placed in a press and the pressing process is initiated (picture without matrices). Since a set consists of two presses, it is possible to work in parallel. **3** The equipment of the Newbilt is based on a historical design, but has been modernized. Electronically controlled displays provide information on temperature and other important data. **4** Unlike the Newbilt, the Toolex Alpha is a fully automatic press machine. Despite historical technology, it is used worldwide in the production of large quantities. **5** Vinyl granulate is the material of which the „black gold“ is made. **6** The funnel of the extruder is filled with vinyl granulate.

matrix-plates before the pressing process, prevents the operator from being tempted to place the biscuit differently, possibly pinching his hand in the process. Electronically controlled displays provide information on temperature and other relevant data. Also the mechanics have been improved: “in the past, 120-gram and 140-gram presses were standard. Printers of those days, which are still in use today, are not designed for the 180-gram records that are now fashionable. Because for those you need not only more vinyl, but also higher pressure.” That is why Neubauer&Co. have equipped the new Finebilt Duplex with a hydraulic piston of 330 millimeters in diameter, which is 60 mm more than the Toolex Alpha. The insider explains: “The larger the piston, the lower the hydraulic pressure required. This allows us to run a 180 gram pressing with 40 bar less than usual. So we still have some capacities left.”

Andreas Kunz

“WE ARE THE FIRST”



ERWIN NEUBAUER
Managing Director on the opportunities of the new press in the record industry.

You are the first company in more than three decades to offer newly developed record press machines. What distinguishes your Newbilt Duplex from the classic, the Toolex Alpha?

Our Finebilt Duplex is not a fully automatic but a semi-automatic machine, with the disadvantage that on every set there must be an employee to operate it. One advantage is that our machine can comparatively easily handle almost any format, regardless of whether 7, 10 or 12 inches, “Picture Discs” – i.e. vinyl with an image – or so-called splashes – color-striped vinyl. It also makes loading easier than with fully automatic machines, because changing the matrix is simpler.

Who are your customers?

You’ll be surprised: certainly not the large European printing plants Optimal, Pallas and GZ in the Czech Republic, because they have bought up all the old Toolex presses over the recent decades. But because you can’t get any more today and the waiting times at the pressing plants are sometimes half a year for

small music companies, labels and bands are interested. Jack White, for example, bought four sets for his new Detroit plant.

How did the deal come about?

Via Record Products of America, RPA for short, who represent us in the USA. The vinyl market is rather small. If you are in touch with the right people, the rest goes relatively quickly. In addition, forums are used to inform who offers what. And we have the advantage of being the first to introduce new machines to the market.

So founding Newbilt wasn’t a risk?

No. We were in the process of reorientation anyway, because CD and DVD no longer work. The prices for the corresponding production lines are so broken that you can no longer make any money with them. Vinyl sales, on the other hand, increased in recent years always between 30 and 45 percent. This is enormous, and the still intact old machines are already working at their limit. I don’t think the boom will fade quickly, especially since our industry is still quite small.

How long does it take for your Newbilt Duplex to pay off for the customer?

That depends. If you have enough orders, the machines run 24 hours a day and the “Return of Invest” is less than one year. A set consisting of two presses, an extruder and the hydraulics costs around 160,000 euros. We have already sold eleven sets, a new order from China is imminent.