DESIGN OF HELICOPTER ROTORS TO NOISE CONSTRAINTS

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SUMMARY

Results from the initial phase of a research contract, "Study of Design Con-
straints on Helicopter Noise," NAS1-15226, sponsored by the NASA Langley
Research Center are presented. A description of the overall program is in-
cluded. Basic calculations of nonimpulsive rotor harmonic and broadband hover
noise spectra, over a wide range of rotor design variables were accomplished;
and the sensitivity of PNL to changes in rotor design parameters are presented.
Measured rotor noise data were used to correlate the calculations in verifying
the prediction methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Increased emphasis on reducing the noise generated by helicopter rotors to
minimize aural detection times in military applications, and increase community
acceptance during commercial operations, now require the helicopter manufac-
turer to consider noise constraints of his product early in the design phase.
Impending noise regulations, such as the FAA/ICAO possible noise limits for
certification of helicopters, are forcing designers to implement noise control
measures during preliminary design performance studies when the sizing of
rotors is being determined.

Basic rotor design parameters such as total thrust, blade tip speed, disk
loading, number of blades per rotor, and rotor solidity, which invariably
affect the noise produced by the rotor, have generally been decided long before
noise restrictions are considered. One reason is that most preliminary
designers do not have simplified guidelines for predicting rotor noise which
can be meaningful during early rotor design decisions stages. Consequently,
most designs are semi-finalized, before noise estimates of the configuration
can be made. Subsequent changes that may be required in reducing the noise to
comply with certain regulations find themselves in conflict with designs that
have already been set.

This study, when completed, will result in a general method, and sets of design
charts, which will permit evaluations of the noise and performance tradeoffs
of single rotors during the early design stage. The measure of performance
will be the percentage of available rotor thrust which must be expended in
lifting the drive system (rotor blades, hub, and rotor transmission).
Given a desired thrust and noise limit, the charts can be used to define the corresponding radius, chord, and tip speed for 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 bladed rotors. The rotor which requires the lowest drive system weight is the optimum design. Conversely, given a completely defined rotor the charts can be used to predict the noise.

Results from the completed initial phase of the study, which includes the calculation of both rotor harmonic and broadband, nonimpulsive hover noise and the relative importance of various rotor design parameters that influence changes in Perceived Noise Level (PNL) are discussed in this paper.

**SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

Values are given in both SI and U.S. Customary Units. The calculations were made in U.S. Customary Units.

- $T$: thrust, N (lb)
- $V_T$: blade tip speed, m/sec (ft/sec)
- $f_p$: peak frequency, Hz
- $A_b$: blade area, m$^2$ (ft$^2$)
- $\sigma$: angle between centerline of rotor shaft and line to observer, deg
- $S_j$: one-third octave frequency band correction
- $C_L$: lift coefficient
- $r$: distance to observer, m (ft)
- $SPL$: Sound Pressure Level, dB (re $2 \times 10^{-5}$ N/m$^2$)
- $PNL$: Perceived Noise Level, in PNdB
- $dBA$: A-weighted network
- $dBC$: C-weighted network
- $BB$: Broadband noise
- $PNLT$: Tone-corrected Perceived Noise Level
- $NOY$: Unit used in the calculation of Perceived Noise Level. It is the noisiness of a noise for which the Perceived Noise Level is 40 PNdB. The noisiness of a noise that is judged by a subject to be $n$ times that of a 1-NOY noise is $n$ NOYS.
The objective of the program is to provide a "handbook" for helicopter designers and configuration managers to evaluate the noise of rotors during the preliminary design phase, and to estimate the effect on rotor payload.

In order to produce an effective designer's tool that can be used during noise and performance tradeoff evaluations, the total rotor noise signature has to be represented accurately. All major sources of rotor noise are included in developing the design charts for the handbook. Figure 1 shows an example of these sources and their contribution to the overall noise signature. The subjective weighting of these noise sources; harmonic, broadband (nonharmonic), and impulsive, which is the prelude to determining the PNL, are shown in Figure 2 as total NOY values per octave band. The engine noise minor contribution is shown for completeness only. Examination of this figure indicates that in terms of annoyance, rotor impulse is the major factor; but if the rotor did not have an impulsive characteristic then broadband noise predominates the Perceived Noise Level (Figure 2) to a much greater extent than the Sound Pressure Level Spectrum (Figure 1).

The overall study consists of the following phases:

1. Calculating the nonimpulsive rotor harmonic and broadband noise spectra using established prediction procedures recognized and used by industry and found in open literature. The range of rotor physical parameters included in the calculations are: thrust, 44 to 356 kN (10 000 to 80 000 lb); disk loading, 287 to 575 N/m² (6 to 12 lb/ft²); solidity, 0.04 to 0.12; number of blades, 2 to 6; and tip speed, 152 to 244 m/sec (500 to 800 ft/sec). Calculations are for a sideline distance of 150 meters from rotor and a height of 150 meters (which corresponds to the measurement locations being considered in the regulations). Combining the noise signatures into one-third octave frequency bands calculating PNL, dBA and dBC.

2. Applying impulsive corrections developed by the Boeing Vertol Co. and subjective adjustments from Reference 1 to adjust dBA, dBC and PNL values to a subjectively equivalent broadband level.

3. Preparing a set of design charts to permit direct determination of values of dBA, dBC and PNdB for range of rotor physical parameters. An example of a possible design chart format is shown in Figure 3 for determining the PNdB in hover and, providing a rationale showing the effects of rotor configuration on forward flight noise.

4. Evaluating the performance penalty for each main rotor configuration and tip speed combination. The ratio of drive system weight to rotor thrust shall be used as an index of the design efficiency.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prediction of Nonimpulsive Rotor Hover Noise

The harmonic rotation noise calculation was based on the method developed in Reference 2. This widely accepted rotor noise calculation includes the design variables of thrust, disk loading, tip speed, and number of rotor blades. The only change made to the equations of Reference 1 was that an airloads harmonic decay exponent of 1.3 was used instead of 2.0, as specified by the original authors. This modification reflects a more realistic airload harmonic decay of 15 dB per octave which has been measured by other researchers and provides better agreement with measured data in the higher harmonic range.

The broadband, or nonharmonic, rotor noise calculation used was from the unpublished semiempirical prediction made by Robert J. Pegg of the NASA Langley Research Center. The equation from this prediction,

\[ f_p = -240 \log T + .746 V_T + 786 \]
\[ SPL = 10 \log A_b + 60 \log V_T + 10 \log (\cos^2 \sigma + .1) \]
\[ + S_j -20 \log r + f(C_L) - 53.29 \]
\[ f(C_L) = 10 \log \frac{C_L}{.4} \text{ for } \frac{C_L}{.4} \leq .48 \]
\[ f(C_L) = .9 + 80 \log \frac{C_L}{.48} \text{ for } \frac{C_L}{.48} > .48 \]

has as its design variables, thrust (T), tip speed (V_T), blade area (A_b) and lift coefficient (C_L).

A computer program was written to include all of the design variables and to provide an automatic calculation of both the harmonic and broadband noise, then combine them into one-third octave frequency bands and print-out the resultant dBA, dBC and PNL. Figure 4 shows a sample of this output. Nine hundred sixty computer cases were run during the initial phase of the program to provide adequate definition of the design variables for preparation of the "handbook" charts.

Prediction-Data Correlation

Measured noise data, shown in Figures 5 and 6, from a nonimpulsive and moderately impulsive rotor were directly compared to the calculated one-third octave SPL using the developed computer program. The agreement between predictions and measurement for the nonimpulsive case (fig. 5) are generally quite good, the discrepancy in the 500 Hz octave band is probably due to destructive interference between the direct and first ground reflected waves which calculates to occur at 556 Hz. In the case of the impulsive rotor (fig. 6) good agreement is attained in the first two harmonics and higher frequency broadband noise since the harmonic noise prediction method does not account for the increase in mid-harmonic loading which typifies impulsive rotor noise.
Perceived Noise Level Sensitivity to Rotor Design

To provide an indication of the sensitivity of PNL to changes in design variations, five baseline rotor designs representing different classes of helicopters were investigated. For each baseline configuration the rotor parameters of thrust, disc loading, tip speed and number of blades were varied one at a time (at constant lift coefficient) and the resultant PNdB calculated.

Figure 7 shows an example of the calculated nonimpulsive hover SPL for one particular case (3-bladed, 89-kN (20 000-lb) thrust rotor). Taking this configuration as a baseline design and varying each of the parameters one at a time results in the PNL sensitivity chart shown in figure 8. Similar studies have been done for four other baseline designs which cover a wide range of values and the resultant summary (table I) indicates some rough guidelines which can be used pending release of the final design charts which will result from this study.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The calculation of the nonimpulsive harmonic and broadband hover noise for a wide range of rotor design variations was accomplished. The prediction methodology used correlated well with measured whirl tower data. Application of the predictions to variations in rotor design (thrust, tip speed, disc loading, and number of blades per rotor) has shown tip speed and thrust as having the most effect on changing the PNL.

REFERENCES


### TABLE I. - INTERIM RESULTS SUMMARY OF SENSITIVITY OF PNL TO DESIGN PARAMETER VARIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Sensitivity*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tip speed</td>
<td>137 to 290 m/sec (450 to 950 ft/sec)</td>
<td>2 to 5 PNdB per 30.5 m/sec (100 ft/sec)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thrust</td>
<td>11,121 to 358,876 N (2,500 to 80,000 lb)</td>
<td>2 PNdB per doubling of thrust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disk loading</td>
<td>96.1 to 574.6 N/m² (2 to 12 lb/ft²)</td>
<td>0.5 PNdB per 96.1 N/m² (2 lb/ft²)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of blades per rotor</td>
<td>2 to 6</td>
<td>&lt;0.5 PNdB per blade addition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on varying parameter under study while holding all others constant.

![Figure 1. Helicopter noise source contribution during 6-degree approach.](image)

Figure 1. - Helicopter noise source contribution during 6-degree approach.
Figure 2.- Subjective weighting of helicopter noise during 6-degree approach.

Figure 3.- Possible design chart format for 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-bladed rotors.
Figure 4.- Rotor noise calculation - computer program sample output.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY (Hz)</th>
<th>LEVEL (dB)</th>
<th>NEYS</th>
<th>CORRECTION</th>
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<td>50</td>
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**Figure 4.** Concluded.
Figure 5.— Correlation of calculations with whirl tower nonimpulsive rotor noise at 152-m (500-ft) distance.

Figure 6.— Correlation of calculations with whirl tower impulsive rotor noise at 152-m (500-ft) distance.
Figure 7.- Calculated nonimpulsive hover noise 3-bladed rotor at 152-m (500-ft) distance.

Figure 8.- Relative change in PNdB with design parameter variation.