Microstructural and Material Quality Effects on Rolling Contact Fatigue of Highly Elastic Intermetallic Ball Bearings

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Bearing Material: State-of-Art (SOA)
(Current suite of candidates is severely limited)

• Four general types of bearing materials:
  – Steels (Corrosion resistant steels, martensitic, austenitic)
  – Ceramics (Si₃N₄ balls + steel races, a.k.a., hybrid bearings)
  – Superalloys (e.g., jet turbine blade alloys)
  – Non-ferrous alloys (bronze, nylon etc.)

• Each of these has inherent shortcomings:
  – Hard steels are prone to rusting (even “stainless steels” like 440C)
  – Superalloys and austenitic stainless steels (304ss) are soft.
  – Ceramics have thermal expansion mismatch and dent steel races
  – Non-Ferrous materials are weak and lack temperature capabilities

• No known bearing material blends all the desired attributes:
  – High hardness, corrosion immunity, toughness, surface finish, electrical conductivity, non-magnetic, manufacturability, etc.
New approach: 60NiTi-Superelastic
(Hard but resilient material based upon shape memory alloys)

- **60NiTi Basics: market name NiTiNOL 60**
  - Invented by W.J. Buehler (late 1950’s) at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory (NiTiNOL stands for Nickel-Titanium Naval Ordnance Lab).
  - Casting (mix, melt, pour) was original process.
  - Contains 60 wt% Nickel and 40 wt% Titanium
  - 60NiTi is not a metal or a ceramic: a weakly ordered inter-metallic compound.
  - A close cousin to the shape memory alloy, NiTiNOL 55, but 60NiTi is dimensionally stable.
  - 60NiTi is bearing hard (Rockwell C60) but only half as stiff as steel.
  - Buehler found 60NiTi too difficult to manufacture but modern (ceramic) processing methods enable 60NiTi bearings with remarkable properties.

- Fine Grained 60NiTi microstructure via powder metallurgy
- Highly polished 60NiTi bearing balls
### Technical Properties Comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>60NiTi</th>
<th>440C</th>
<th>Si$_3$N$_4$</th>
<th>M-50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>6.7 g/cc</td>
<td>7.7 g/cc</td>
<td>3.2 g/cc</td>
<td>8.0 g/cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardness</td>
<td>56 to 62 HRC</td>
<td>58 to 62 HRC</td>
<td>1300 to 1500 Hv</td>
<td>60 to 65 HRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermal conductivity W/m·°K</td>
<td>~9 to 14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>~36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermal expansion</td>
<td>~11.2×10^{-6}/°C</td>
<td>10×10^{-6}/°C</td>
<td>2.6×10^{-6}/°C</td>
<td>~11×10^{-6}/°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>Magnetic</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>Magnetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrosion resistance</td>
<td>Excellent (Aqueous and acidic)</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensile/(Flexural strength)</td>
<td>~1000(1500) MPa</td>
<td>1900 MPa</td>
<td>(600 to 1200) MPa</td>
<td>2500 MPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young’s Modulus</td>
<td>~95 GPa</td>
<td>200 GPa</td>
<td>310 GPa</td>
<td>210 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisson’s ratio</td>
<td>~0.34</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fracture toughness</td>
<td>~20 MPa/√m</td>
<td>22 MPa/√m</td>
<td>5 to 7 MPa/√m</td>
<td>20 to 23 MPa/√m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum use temp</td>
<td>~400 °C</td>
<td>~400 °C</td>
<td>~1100 °C</td>
<td>~400 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical resistivity</td>
<td>~1.04×10^{-6} Ω-m</td>
<td>~0.60×10^{-6} Ω-m</td>
<td>Insulator</td>
<td>~0.18×10^{-6} Ω-m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Modulus is $\frac{1}{2}$ that of steel, yet hardness is comparable.
- Ultra-high static load capacity.
- Tensile strength akin to ceramics.
- NiTi alloys are brittle but do not rust.
Contact Engineering: Ball-Race

- **When hard surfaces contact**
  - Forces are transmitted at small, concentrated contact points (Hertz).
  - Resulting stresses cause deformations that help “spread the load”.
  - Contact area is a function of the geometry, material stiffness and load.
  - High stiffness (modulus) inhibits deformations leading to small contact area and high stresses (contrast with a tire contacting the ground).

- **Hard surfaces can dent**
  - Even modest loads can exceed stress capability limits.
  - Bearing raceways are particularly prone to Brinell dent damage.
Dent Depth vs. Load
(Si$_3$N$_4$ ceramic ball pressed against 60NiTi plate)

- 60NiTi combines high hardness, reduced stiffness and superelasticity to increase load capacity over other steels dramatically.
- But what about rolling contact fatigue, RCF?
Rolling Contact Fatigue
(Accelerated Test Protocol: 3 Ball-on-Rod)

• 3-Ball test allows for RCF evaluation of new materials prior to investing in the manufacture of full-scale bearings.

Figure 7.4-9. Rolling Contact Fatigue (RCF) Specimen Arrangement in which Steel Bearing Balls are Loaded against a Rotating NiTi Rod. Tests are run until rod damage is detected or 800 hours of operation is reached.
Early Rolling Contact Fatigue: Cast 60NiTi

Modern bearing steels yield long life at 500 ksi (~3.5GPa).

Cast 60NiTi’s life-threshold stress varies widely.

Results linked to material quality.

Table V-Preliminary rolling contact fatigue (RCF) life for 60NiTi rods (loaded against M50 steel balls, 3600 rpm, mineral oil lubricant).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCF Stress Level, Ksi</th>
<th>Wear Track Width, µm</th>
<th>RCF Life, hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>429</td>
<td>850 +/- 18</td>
<td>5.7 +/- 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>356</td>
<td>701 +/- 25</td>
<td>5.4 (typical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>13.8 to 841 (no failure)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rolling Contact Fatigue:
Early cast 60NiTi rod microstructure

- Internal defects such as precipitates and voids are fracture initiation sites for hard bearing materials and must be eliminated through processing and alloying.
- Newly emerging processing expected to lead to enhanced RCF life.
Rolling Contact Fatigue: PM Material?

*Powder Metallurgy 60NiTi has fine, uniform microstructure*
Rolling Contact Fatigue
(PM Rod Specimen: represents bearing race)
Rolling Contact Fatigue
(Updated test results: more representative materials)

Table X—Three Ball-on-Rod Rolling Contact Fatigue Preliminary Results
(test duration to first detected surface damage)
{3600 rpm, steel balls, NiTi rods, oil drip lubrication}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rod Specimen</th>
<th>Peak Contact Stress (GPa)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.7 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM-60NiTi (Baseline)</td>
<td>&gt;800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-847 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;20 hr (tests ongoing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.3 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM-60NiTi (With inclusions)</td>
<td>131-800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.2 to &lt;236 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60NiTi (Cast &amp; hot-rolled)</td>
<td>13-800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;5 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;5 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59NiTi + X alloy (Cast)</td>
<td>&gt;800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.1 to 970 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59NiTi + X Alloy (Cast and extruded)</td>
<td>&gt;800 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>400 to 800+ hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.1 to &lt;31 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Modern bearing steels yield long life to at least 3.5GPa.
- 60NiTi begins to exhibit permanent dents at stresses above ~3.0GPa.
- 60NiTi’s life limiting fatigue stress is lower (~2GPa) but is adequate for some applications. RCF results highly dependent upon material quality.
Rolling Contact Fatigue: PM 60NiTi rod

PM 60NiTi rod running surface after test.
Improperly formed 60-NiTi showing unconsolidated particle boundaries.

Baseline PM60NiTi
~2.5GPa RCF Stress Limit

Nominal 60-NiTi showing well bonded prior particle boundary

- Microstructure affects RCF stress capability in the 3-Ball test
- Does the effect of quality translate to full-scale bearings?
Centrifuge Bearings: 50mm bore 60NiTi Hybrid

Two batches of bearings fabricated

Low Quality 60NiTi (2011)

High Quality 60NiTi (2013)

- Quality level affected 3-ball RCF stress capability.
- Does the effect of quality translate to full-scale bearings?
Life Test: 50mm Hybrid NiTi Bearing

- Pair of 50mm hybrid (60NiTi races, Si$_3$N$_4$ balls) ball bearings, 90 pound axial preload (~1.1 GPa stress).
- 200 rpm, continuous turning, torque measurements.
- Accelerometer with hourly vibe spectrum data capture used for health monitoring.
- Tests continued (24/7) until vibration changes or 5000 hours reached.
Life Test #1: Low Quality 60NiTi, 1156 hours

- Test began normally, low torque, smooth operation.
- Inspection after 600 hours. Bearing surfaces and lubricant in as-new condition.
- At 1156 hours, rig making noise. Full inspection of bearings.
- Fatigue damage, debris contaminated grease.

*Inner race pit*

*Outer race pit and cross-race crack*
Life Test #1: Low Quality 60NiTi

Outer race crack propagation through entire race.
Life Test #2: High Quality 60NiTi
Life Test #2: Vibration plot at 1100 hours

Typical vibration cascade plot for three day period shown below:

- 3.2 Hz-shaft rpm
- 22 Hz-rig support brg
- 24 Hz-ball pass frequency
- 37 Hz-rig support brg
Life Test #2: High Quality 60NiTi-1100 hours

- 1100 hour inspection—all surfaces and lubricant in as-new condition
- Bearings re-greased and returned to test.
Life Test #2: Inspection at 5000 hours

- Lubricant grease looks new, no visible wear or damage on races.
Bearing Life Test: Inspection at 5000 hours

- Inner race surfaces shiny and without any apparent wear or other signs of contact damage.
Bearing Life Test: Inspection at 5000 hours

- Outer race looks fine too.

- Bearings were cleaned, visually inspected, re-greased and re-started.
- Health monitoring (torque and vibration) used to indicate failure.
- Tests to be halted at 10,000 hours.
Summary Remarks

- Sub-component RCF tests indicate relation between material quality and stress capability.
- Full-scale bearing life tests corroborate the sub-component tests.
- High quality 60NiTi, largely free from inclusions and other flaws can provide long running life under modest continuous stress levels.
- NiTi bearing materials offer several unique attributes (high static load capability and corrosion resistance) that make them attractive candidates for space mechanisms.
- As the technology matures, the growing knowledge-base coupled with alloy improvements will enable expanded use of these new materials allowing designers to take advantage of NiTi’s unique capabilities.
Thank You!
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