

THE EFFECT OF CARBURIZATION ON HARDNESS AND WEAR PROPERTIES OF THE MILD STEEL SAMPLES

HESHAM ELZANATY

Basic Engineering Science Department, Faculty of Engineering, Delta University for Science and Technology,
Gamasa, Mansoura, Egypt

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ABSTRACT: The properties of metals and alloys can be changed by heating followed by cooling under definite conditions to make them suitable for specific applications. Carburization is a method of producing mild steel having tough inner core and hard outer surface. Three Heat Treatment process namely Quenching, Carburizing and Tempering were done. The mild steels are carburized at temperature range of 850 to 950 °C and then it is tempered at 200 °C for thirty minutes after that it subjected for different kind of tests such as abrasive wear, hardness, tensile and toughness. The results indicated that the process of carburization greatly improves the mechanical and wear properties like hardness, tensile strength and wear resistance and these properties increases with increase in the carburization temperature but apart from this, the toughness property decreases and it is further decreases with increase in carburization temperature. The mild steels carburized at the temperature of 950 °C gives the best results for the mechanical and wear properties because at this temperature it gives the highest tensile strength, hardness and wear resistance, so it must be preferred for the required applications.

KEYWORDS: Carburization, abrasive wear, weight loss, wear resistance and hardness.

1 INTRODUCTION

Engineers usually require a material with a blend of high yield strength and good elongation, but these properties are often mutually exclusive. It has been shown that the yield strength of normalized low carbon mild steel can be increased by inducing strain ageing effects in the steel, until the yield stress attains values up to and beyond the ultimate tensile strength, but unfortunately, the elongation is correspondingly reduced [1]. Steels are alloys of iron and carbon together with any other alloying elements. The steel is being separated as low carbon steel, high carbon steel and medium carbon steel. The controlled heating and cooling processes used to change the structure of a material and alter its physical and mechanical properties [2, 3]. Heat treatment is generally employed for the purpose such as to improve mechanical properties like tensile strength, hardness, ductility, yield strength and so on. The heat treatment and carburization increases the mechanical and wear resistance. The heating of a metal at a constant temperature for a suitable duration of time is called soaking time. Mechanical properties of mild steels were found to be strongly influenced by the carburizing temperature and soaking time at carburizing temperature. The mechanical properties of mild steel were found to be strongly influenced by the process of carburization, carburizing temperature and soaking time at carburizing temperature [4-7].

Carburizing is a metal treatment process that adds carbon to the surface of metal that has a low carbon content to increase the hardness of the metal. The metal is heated at an elevated temperature in an atmosphere rich with carbon. Heat will cause carbon atoms to diffuse into the metal surface. The process is done below the melting point of the metal being carburized. There are five carburizing methods — pack, gas, liquid bath, vacuum, and plasma. Pack carburizing uses a furnace to heat the metal parts to be carburized that are packed inside a container with a sufficient amount of carbon powder. The heating process will last for 12 to 72 hours at a high temperature. This method is noted to be slow compared to the other methods and has heating inefficiencies because of the difficulty in maintaining an even temperature. Gas carburizing follows the same procedure applied in pack carburizing. It, however, feeds carbon monoxide (CO) to the furnace to improve

diffusion, which is not done in the pack method. The process has safety issues because CO is a poisoning gas that is odorless and colorless and could be inhaled by persons working inside the plant. The gas method is preferred in carburizing large volumes of metal [8–14].

Hardening is accomplished when the high-carbon surface layer is quenched to form martensite so that a high-carbon martensitic case with good wear and fatigue resistance is superimposed on a tough, low-carbon steel core. Carburizing steels for case hardening usually have base-carbon contents of about 0.2%, with the carbon content of the carburized layer generally being controlled at between 0.8 and 1% C. However, surface carbon is often limited to 0.9% because too high a carbon content can result in retained austenite and brittle martensite. Carburizing steel is widely used as a material of automobiles, form implements, machines, gears, springs and high strength wires etc. which are required to have the excellent strength, toughness, hardness and wear resistance, etc. because these parts are generally subjected to high load and impact. Such mechanical properties and wear resistance can be obtained from the carburization and quenching processes. This manufacturing process can be characterized by the key points such as: it is applied to low carbon work pieces, work pieces are in contact with high carbon gas, liquid or solid, it produces hard work piece surface, work piece cores retain soft [15].

Hardness is the property of a material to resist permanent indentation. Because there are several methods of measuring hardness, the hardness of a material is always specified in terms of the particular test that was used to measure this property. Although hardness testing doesn't give a direct measurement of any performance properties, hardness correlates with strength, wear resistance, and other properties. Hardness testing is widely used for material evaluation due to its simplicity and low cost relative to direct measurement of many properties. Wear is commonly defined as the undesirable deterioration of a component by the removal of material from its surface. In laboratory tests, wear are usually determined by weight loss in a material and wear resistance is characterized by the loss in weight per unit area per unit time.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 MATERIALS SELECTION

Mild steels test specimens of the required dimensions were prepared. The chemical composition of mild steel is C-0.16%, Si-0.03%, Mn-0.32%, S-0.05%, P-0.2%, Ni- 0.01%, Cu-0.01%, Cr-0.01% and Fe-balance.

2.2 PREPARATION OF TEST SPECIMENS

Carburization of mild steel samples

The prepared test samples were embedded in the activated carbon inside a steel pot which was then tightly sealed with clay cover to prevent the CO from escaping and prevent unwanted furnace gas from entering the steel pot during heating. The furnace temperature was adjusted to the required temperature range and the loaded steel pot was charged into the furnace. When the furnace temperature reaches the required carburizing temperature, it was then held/soaked for thirty minutes. After that, the steel pot was removed from the furnace and the material was quenched in industrial engine oil (which was initially at the ambient atmospheric temperature).

The hardness of all the samples has been done using a Vickers hardness testing machine. The applied load during the testing was 100 N, with a dwell time of 10 s. It has a square-base diamond pyramid indenter. Ten hardness readings are taken at different location to circumvent the possible effects of particle segregation.

Computerized pin on disc wear test machine was used for the wear and friction tests of alloy samples under different loads from 10 N to 100 N and linear speed of 0.65 m s^{-1} for one hour. The rotating disc was made of carbon steel of diameter 50 mm and hardness of 64 HRC. The alloys samples were held stationary and a required normal load was applied through a lever mechanism. Wear resistances are measured by a weight loss using a four digital microbalance. Each wear sample is ultrasonically cleaned and weighed before the wear test using a balance with an accuracy of 0.01 mg. Three samples for each condition are tested and the average of the weight loss measurements is used for calculation of the wear property. The test specimen for abrasive wear and hardness test is prepared having the dimensions (4cm x 2.5cm x 0.5cm).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 ABRASIVE WEAR TEST

The results of abrasive wear test of the samples are shown in figures (1–3). The wear resistance is higher for the carburized mild steel and it is lowest for the uncarburized mild steel. The weight loss during abrasion is higher for uncarburized simple mild steel and is lower for the carburized mild steel at temperature of 950 °C because of comparatively low carbon content at lower carburization temperature. So it is concluded that, as the carburization temperature increases the weight loss during abrasion is decreases. The weight loss is higher for the load of 49 N and it is lower for the load of 14.7 N, this is because of the increase in the force, the friction increases which causes the weight loss, as shown in the figure (1).

For taking only the case of carburized mild steels, the wear resistance is higher for the mild steel carburized at the temperature of 950 °C and is lower for mild steels carburized at temperature of 850 °C as shown in figure (2). Hence the abrasion results explain that the wear resistance is directly proportional to the carburization temperature, as the carburization temperature increases the wear resistance increases. I.e. The mild steel carburized at temperature of 950 °C is giving the best results, as it has having the highest wear resistance, lowest weight loss due to abrasion and lowest wear rate.

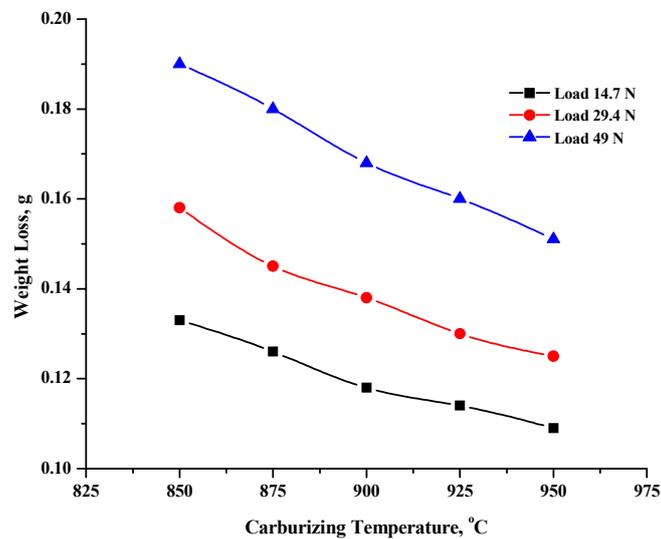


Fig. (1): A comparison of weight loss vs. carburization temperature at different loads.

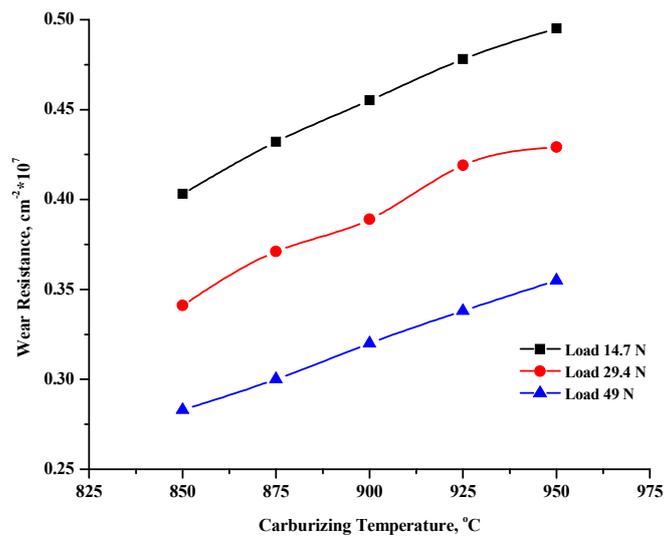


Fig. (2): A comparison of wear resistance vs. carburization temperature at different loads.

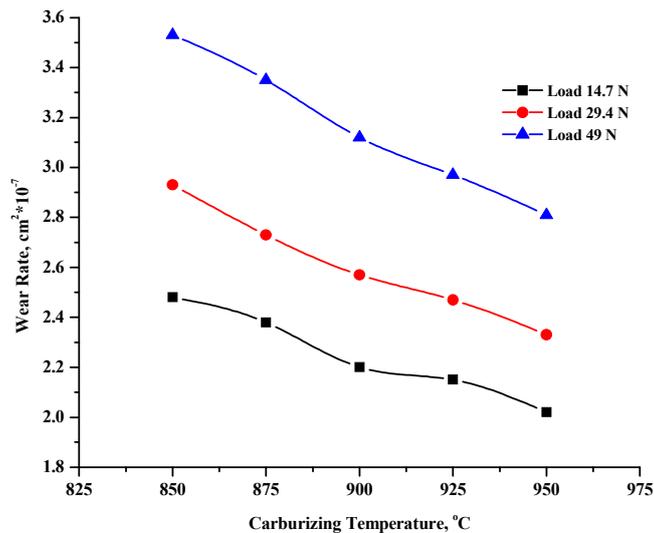


Fig. (3): A comparison of wear rate vs. carburization temperature at different loads.

3.2 HARDNESS

The hardness values varied in the range of 551 Hv – 694 Hv as shown in figure (4). With increase of carburization temperature the hardness values increases. The hardness value is higher for the mild steel carburized at temperature of 950 °C and is lower for the mild steels carburized at 850 °C, so with increase of carburization temperature the hardness values increases as shown in figure (4). I.e., the carburized mild steel at 950 °C is giving the best results for the mechanical properties like tensile strength and hardness except the case of toughness test.

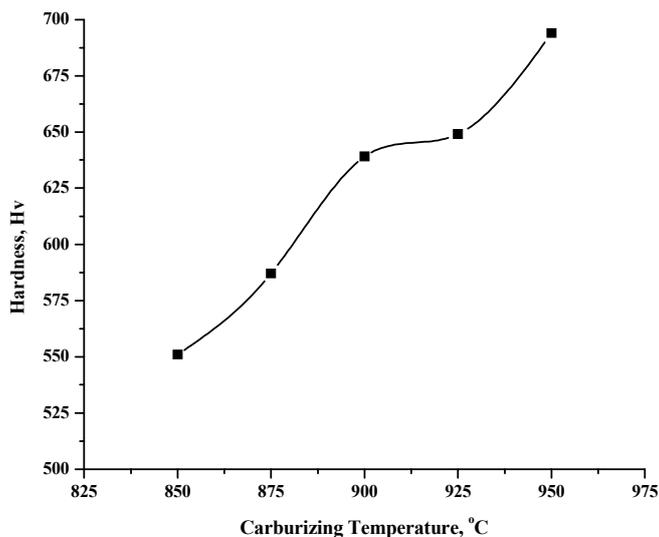


Fig. (4): Variation of hardness with the carburization temperature.

3.3 EFFECT OF HARDNESS ON THE WEIGHT LOSS AND WEAR RESISTANCE OF CARBURIZED MILD STEELS:

The variation between hardness and weight loss due to abrasion is represented in the figure (5). The weight loss due to abrasion is highly affected by the hardness and it varies inversely with the hardness. That is because of the hard material having the greater abrasive wear resistance, so the less wear occurs in the carburized mild steels and the weight loss decreases.

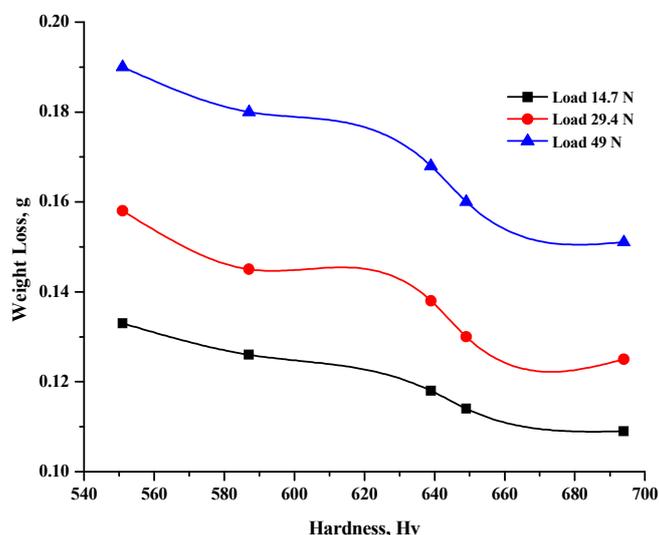


Fig. (5): A comparison of weight loss due to abrasion vs. hardness at different loads.

The wear resistance is affected by the hardness as represented in figures (6). The wear resistance increases as the hardness increases.

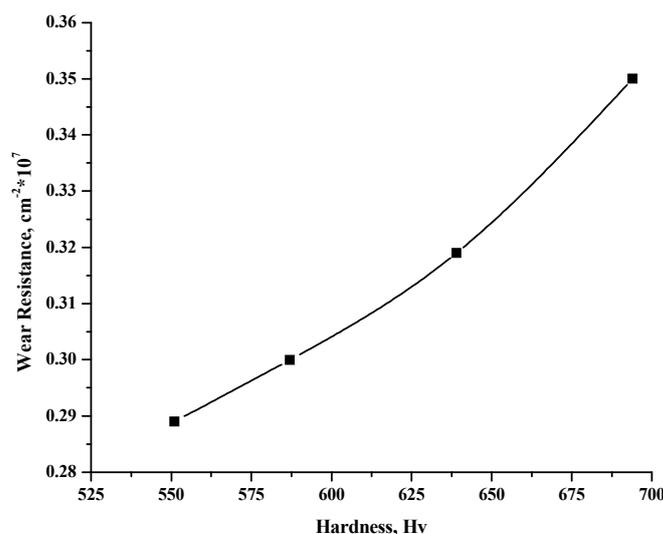


Fig. (6): Variation of wear resistance with hardness for the carburization temperature.

4 CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussions so far it can be concluded that:

1. The mechanical and wear properties of mild steels were found to be strongly influenced by the process of carburization and carburizing temperature.
2. Hardness and wear resistance increase with increase in the carburization temperature, while the wear rate decreases.
3. The weight loss due abrasion, wear volume and wear rate increases with the increase in the applied load.
4. With increase in the hardness the wear resistance increases, but there is decrease in weight loss due to abrasion and wear rate.
5. As comparing for different carburization temperature, the mild steels carburized at the temperature of 950 °C shows the best combination of higher hardness and less wear rate.
6. Finally the net conclusion is that the mild steel carburized under the different temperature range of 850 to 950 °C in which the mild steel carburized at the temperature of 950 °C is giving the best results for the wear properties and hardness.

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