Typical wear mechanism of 2-stroke exhaust valves

Extend Component Life and Time Between Engine Overhauls.
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The exhaust valve spindle can be made of different materials. Standard valve spindles are manufactured out of heat resistance steel with a hard faced seat area. These are being used in all UEC- and part of the MC engines. Nimonic valve spindles are manufactured out of nickel-based material with higher mechanical properties and are being used in all RTA- and part of the MC-engines. All exhaust valve spindles are equipped with a valve turning device. While UEC engines are equipped with a hydraulic device, MC and RTA valve spindles are fitted with a vane wheel (wing bush), which uses the exhaust gas to rotate the valve spindle.

The meaning of saving money

Nobody saves money with a cheap or bad repair. A good repair, lets say remanufacturing, changes an old part to a new one. As we will prove later, there are special methods of doing remanufacturing that make a repair more than just a repair. For example you can make a valve spindle with properties like Nimonic from a standard valve spindle, with the right method and the knowledge to do so.

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Some operating conditions, like the quality of fuel, have to be taken as they are. It’s a fact that poor fuel increases components wear. Also, cheap fuel leads to reduced component lifetimes. Wear to exhaust valve components is usually caused by the following mechanism:

Adhesion and abrasive wear

Adhesion and abrasive wear is very often found in the stem sealing area of hard chromed, MC valve spindles (see figure 02). Usually the limit of this stem diameter is reached after about 12,000 - 18,000 hrs. MC valve spindles with HVOF-stem coating, as well as RTA- and UEC valve spindles with hard-chromed stems, reach a THO (time between overhaul) of 24,000 - 36,000 hrs.

Figure 02: Physical adhesion and abrasive wear of a hard-chromed valve spindle (MC-type after 15,000 hrs)
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The valve guide of UEC- and RTA-types will show the same deposits, but after a much longer period of time (TBO is 24,000 to 36,000 hrs).

To disassemble exhaust valves, hydraulic power is usually necessary to remove the valve spindle from the valve guide. In some cases the sticking of the valve spindle is so extreme that the valve guide breaks during the operation (see figure 04a and 04b).

Figure 04a: Breakage of the valve guide during valve spindle disassembling
Figure 04b: Typical deposits of inner diameter of valve guide (MC70-type after 8,200 hrs)

Low-temperature corrosion

Heavy fuel contains high amounts of sulfur (up to 5%). If there is an exposed surface where the temperature is below the dew point of sulfuric acid, the acid condenses into liquid and can attack the metal surfaces. If a large amount of concentrated sulfuric acid condenses, it can attack the valve housing, bottom piece, valve guide and valve spindle stem. Sulfuric acid has an extremely corrosive effect on cast iron (BEHRENS, GROTH 1990).

Nearly all components of the exhaust gas channel show some low-temperature corrosion (see figure 05-07).

Figure 05: Low temperature corrosion of valve housing (MC-type 43,700 hrs)
Figure 06: Low temperature corrosion of bottom piece (RTA-type after 28,420 hrs)

High-temperature corrosion

High-temperature corrosion in heavy fuel engines is caused by the presence of Sulfur, Vanadium and Sodium in the fuel. Vanadium and Sodium are contained in heavy fuels at ratios up to 600 ppm and 200 ppm respectively (ISO 8217, 2003). This can build up sodium-vanadyl-vanadates in different structures during the combustion process. These semi-liquid, sticky, low-melting point salts together with gases containing sulfur oxide are a definite cause of corrosion due to their oxygen transitions (HESSE 1981, BLUDSZUWEIT 2000).

As a result of the above-mentioned physical process, the following wear mechanism can be described. Hard salt deposits on the seat surfaces of the valve spindle lead to dent marks caused by each closing stroke of the valve spindle. This can lead to crucial micro gas channels, which will grow over the time (NANDA, 2003). Because of the high temperature, the salt deposits reach their melting point, then the “cobble stone corrosion” starts (see figure 08) at the seat and finally leads to blow-byes (UMLAND 1975, RITZKOPF 1975). Result: The whole exhaust valve has to be replaced.

Figure 08: “Cobble stone corrosion” appearance of valve spindle failure through high-temperature corrosion (MC60 Standard-type)

The bottom of the valve spindle is mostly operating in the critical area of the high-temperature corrosion seen as “cobble stone corrosion”. The wear rate is between 0.2 - 1.0 mm / 1,000 hrs. depending on valve material and type of engine. The limit for remanufacturing is only reached after 12 mm. This leads to a TBO of about 12,000 - 60,000 hrs. Figure 09 shows micro cuts of Nimonic with high-temperature corrosion.

Figure 09: Micro cuts of Nimonic with high-temperature corrosion.
Low cycle fatigue

The valve spindle is the component with the maximum thermal stress. Most of fatigue problems are documented at the valve spindles. Figure 10 demonstrates a typical heat distribution across a Nimonic valve head.

The maximum thermal stress takes place during the warm-up period. During this period the temperature at the center of the valve bottom and the seat reaches the maximum difference. Under regular operating conditions the temperature distribution is much lower. The mechanical load of a valve spindle is nearly constant between warm-up and regular operating, see figure 11.

Load of a valve spindle

The RTA valve spindles are subjected to the highest operating temperatures. The MC and UEC valve spindles were designed for lower temperatures and mechanical properties.

While standard valve spindles have disadvantages with respect to high- and low-temperature corrosion, they do have advantages regarding low cycle fatigue. The disadvantages of standard valve spindles will seldom cause catastrophic failures. The quality of repair can be measured by comparing the TBOs.

The design of valve spindles usually takes into account the combination of mechanical and thermal load of the engine. But, the addition of residual stress, caused by non-professional forging, welding or heat treatment during the manufacturing process can be critical. Also, unprofessional repairs, including welding and heat treatment, can add further residual stress, leading to catastrophic failures. In particular, Nimonic valve spindles require excellent welding and heat treatment.

There are two typical failure reasons. One is a crack that starts in the under head radius. After the micro cracks get to a critical length, the speed of the crack growth increases. A catastrophic failure follows, with parts of the spindle dropping down into the combustion chamber (see figure 12 and 13).

Standard valve spindles

There are lots of companies who provide services and repairs for standard valve spindles. If the customer has no wish to extend the lifetime or optimize the component for the future, countless companies can do the repair.

Nimonic valve spindles

Looking at the more costly Nimonic valve spindles is a completely different situation. Only few companies are competent to do repairs on Nimonic valve spindles. Most often, the engine user wants to get his Nimonic valve spindle repaired because of the premium material. To remanufacture Nimonic very special know-how is required. The usual wear effect on Nimonic 80A is low cycle fatigue. Cracks develop in the maximum stress area because of damage to the microstructure caused by the welding procedure or by insufficient post heat treatment processing. An inadequate repair leads to fatal failures with spindle pieces dropping down into the combustion chamber.

Nimalike-Procedure

Nimalike is the premium class of remanufacturing procedures. MWH is one of the leading manufacturers and service centers that have been able to work with Nimalike.

Nimalike is used in two ways: To extend the lifetime of a standard valve spindle to a lifetime similar to Nimonic, or to remanufacture Nimonic valve spindles in a way that leads to “close to new” conditions after the process (see figures 15 a/b).

Qualified Remanufacturing

MWH uses the word “remanufacturing” instead of “repair” or “reconditioning” in order to distinguish its controlled process from typical reconditioning procedures available in the market. If engine users are to optimize the services they receive, they need to work with reliable partners. These partners need to perform all kinds of remanufacturing processes with the same care and precision as the manufacturer. The solution is to have all engine components repaired by only qualified service centers that have production knowledge and long experience in all areas of remanufacturing.

The 2-stroke exhaust valve is a complex system. Any service activity affects all components (e.g. valve spindle, bottom piece, valve housing). In the following, we are focusing on the most sensitive component – the valve spindle.

Methods to reduce the operating costs

From remanufacturing to providing correct services - there are some ways to reduce the overall operating costs for 2-stroke diesel engines.

One is to put emphasis on high quality overhaul services to ensure that engines are running reliably and efficiently. Another focus would be to improve the setup of running engines. This can be achieved by mobile diagnostic systems and technical developments.

The competence to perform this remanufacturing method is a combination of long-time experience in the field and manufacturing technology. The experience is coupled with continuous improvement of manufacturing processes and intensive R&D in the fields of metallurgy and welding processes (see figure 16).
Service: Mobile Diagnostic Systems

Whenever onboard diagnostics are necessary, it means a large investment of money and time. Online analysis is usually very complicated and they are only for large installations.

For this reason MWH provides the “Leakage Measure System”, a mobile diagnostic system which is able to detect leakages at the cylinderhead to prevent fatal failures of a running engine. The principle is based on measurement of ultrasonic sound by using one simple and robust sensor (WEHNER, ALBERT 2001).

With this very compact measurement system, the engine user is able to find out what condition the engine is in and when the next actions have to be taken for service.

Figure 17: Leakage Measure System onboard in use

Figure 18: Documentation of the result of leak age detection and valve timing/ignition

2-stroke valve rotator (Turnomat)

MWH developed and patented the valve rotator Turnomat for four-stroke diesel engines in 1983. Since then, countless engines have been fitted with the Turnomat and TBO’s has been extended. Twenty years later, MWH has developed a valve rotator for 2-stroke exhaust valves that is performing much better than vane wheels. The aim of our engineers was to extend the TBO of MC-type 2-stroke exhaust valves from 6,000 hrs to 18,000 hrs.

The valve rotator forces an accurate, reliable valve turning during valve closing. The Turnomat principle is simple and surprisingly effective: The forced rotational movement causes a defined rotational energy for the valve at the instance of seating. This brings about the desired polishing effect, removing combustion deposits between valve spindle and valve seat and, at the same time, optimizing the heat exchange to the cooler valve seat.

The rotation also prompts a balanced temperature distribution across the entire valve head, thereby reducing thermally induced strain.

First field tests are ongoing with a MC70 engine. Inspections have proven that the Turnomat works as designed (see figure 19).

Figure 19: Seat ring and valve spindle show no dent marks after approx. 1,000 hours.

Summary

The power ratings of modern 2-stroke engines with exhaust valves have increased significantly along with a simultaneous deterioration of the fuel oil quality. The exhaust valves are operating under increasing thermal load and in a more corrosive environment. Based on our service experience of the last decade the typical wear mechanisms of exhaust valves of MC-, RTA- and UEC-engines have been investigated and discussed.

Adhesion and abrasive wear was found at the valve drive, air cylinder and valve spindle stem. Build up of deposits in valve spindle guides reduces the valve spindle rotation and results in non-symmetrical thermal load. Deposits and dent marks formed on the valve spindle seat can cause micro gas channels, which will grow over the time. “Cobble stone corrosion” starts at the seat and finally leads to blow-byes.

By using the new development of the 2-stroke Turnomat, the critical build up of deposits between valve spindle and seat can be greatly reduced. Ongoing field tests have also proven the benefit of the Turnomat in preventing sticking of the valve spindle in the guide.

Nearly all components of the exhaust channel have contact with sulfur acid coming from the condensation of the exhaust gas (low-temperature corrosion). In addition, the bottom of the valve spindle is subject to “cobbled stone corrosion” (high-temperature corrosion) with a wear rate of 0.2 - 1.0 mm / 1,000 hrs.

Standard valve spindles can be upgraded with the Nimonic-like procedure to achieve a lifetime similar to Nimonic. The procedures used to remanufacture Nimonic valve spindles (including welding and heat treatment) are critical to preventing low-cycle fatigue. An inadequate repair leads to catastrophic failure. While standard valve spindles have disadvantages with respect to low- and high-temperature corrosion, they do have advantages regarding low-cycle fatigue.

Figure 20: Typical wear mechanism of 2-stroke exhaust valves

Literature


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