Fatigue properties of EP/A356 aluminium matrix syntactic foams with different densities

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Abstract. The fatigue properties of EP/A356 aluminium matrix syntactic foams were measured. Four different type of syntactic foam were produced in order to determine the relation between the density and the fatigue properties. The density range was set to be between 0.7 – 1.1 g/cm³. The measured values indicated that, both the fatigue limit and the slope of the Wöhler curve increased with the density. However, the comparison of Globocer filled aluminium matrix syntactic foams with EP filled aluminium matrix syntactic foams suggested that this trend only applicable to foams with identical filler materials.

1. Introduction

Metal matrix syntactic foams (MMSFs) are materials with porous structure. This makes them a light weight material which is really important nowadays. Taking advantage of this property machine parts can be lighter what makes them more energy efficient, which is one of the main goals of the modern designers [1].

Based on the structure of this material it is mostly used as energy absorber. The compressive behaviour has been widely investigated in the literature [2-10]. It is well known that the compressive strength and the energy absorption of metal matrix syntactic foams (MMFs) are good. The wear and the thermal properties of these materials are also been studied [11-16].

Regarding the compressive properties of MMSFs only a few research contributions can be found in the databases. An interesting work on composite metallic foams (CMFs) that contain steel hollow spheres in aluminium alloy matrix (produced and manufactured by simple gravity casting) or in steel matrix (produced by a simple powder metallurgy method) was published by the research group of Vendra et al. Under repeated compression load, the CMFs proved high cyclic stability and the deformation of the CMF samples could be separated into three stages: (i) linear increment in strain with fatigue cycles, (ii) minimal deformation accumulation through relatively large number of cycles and (iii) fast deformation accumulation during a few cycles up to complete fracture. The deformation of the MMSFs occurred to be more uniform compared to regular metal foams, which deform by forming collapse bands at weaker sections [17].
On the other hand, Katona et al. [18] published on MMSFs, consisting of two grades of aluminium alloys (Al99.5 and AlSi12) and a set of specific oxide ceramic hollow spheres. The MMSFs were studied in the viewpoint of repeated loading. The final results of the repeated compressive load with the load asymmetry factor of R=0.1 provided full reliability design data for the studied materials in the whole lifetime part of the Wöhler curve, besides the fatigue limits were determined by the so called staircase method. Based on the experiments the Wöhler curves of the foams were plotted, considering the median curves, their given confidence statistical boundaries and the fatigue limit. Considering the matrix materials, the softer matrix proved higher load levels for the fatigue limit than the more rigid AlSi12 matrix. Regarding the average diameter of the filler ceramic hollow spheres, larger spheres proved to be better than the quite easily vulnerable smaller ones. Considering the failure modes, only one common fracture mode was separated for the studied foams: the samples were crashed along a single shear band, similar to the quasi-static case.

Other publications are available on the fatigue of ‘conventional’ metallic foams [19-21], from which a few generalities can be summarized: most of the investigations apply R=0.1 stress asymmetry factor, with pure compression load, however the test frequencies can differ significantly, however, its effect on the fatigue properties was not considered.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Materials

A356 alloy was applied as matrix material, its chemical composition is listed in Table 1. As filler, expanded perlite was applied which was obtained from Australian Perlite Pty. and they had a size range of 3 – 4 mm. The chemical composition of the filler is also listed in Table 1.

| Chemical elements in weight percent |
|-----------------------------------|
| Matrix material: A356              |
| Si | Mg | Fe | Ti | Al    |
| 7.2| 0.4| 0.1| 0.12| Balance |
| Filler material: Expanded perlite |
| SiO₂ | Al₂O₃ | Na₂O | K₂O | CaO | Fe₂O₃ | MgO | TiO₂ |
| 75 | 14 | 3 | 4 | 1.3 | 1 | 0.3 | 0.2 |

The counter gravity infiltration process which was used to produce the EP/A356 syntactic foam is described in details in Taherishargh et al [22]. However, a modification was used: namely the compaction procedure, which is used to tailor the density values of the produced syntactic foams. This procedure is detailed in Broxtermann et al [23]. Four different density range were created using compaction masses. 5, 10 and 15 kg compaction masses were used, and also a reference type also created without compaction mass. The sample names refer to the producing process, samples with “1st batch” means that these samples were created with 15 kg compaction mass, samples with “2nd batch” designation refers to the 10 kg compaction mass, while “3rd batch” means 5 kg compaction mass, and finally “4th batch” refers to those samples which were created without compaction mass.

2.2. Fatigue test procedure

The produced syntactic foams were firstly investigated under quasi-static compression tests. These results are also detailed in Boxtermann et al [23]. This was necessary because the 1% compression strength is the base for the calculations of the load levels for the fatigue tests. Figure 1. depicts the scheme of the fatigue cycle with the most important test parameters.
Compressive stress, $\sigma$ (MPa)
Time
$\sigma_{\text{min}} = R \sigma_{\text{max}}$
$\sigma_{\text{m}} = (\sigma_{\text{max}} + \sigma_{\text{min}})/2$
$\sigma_{\text{max}} = k \sigma_c$
$\sigma_a = (\sigma_{\text{max}} - \sigma_{\text{min}})/2$

Figure 1. Parameters of the fatigue test

Figure 2. The measurement setup with the 10 kN load cell

The maximal stress was calculated from the 1% compressive stress ($\sigma_c$) – determined from the quasi-static tests –, by multiplying it with $k$, that is the load ratio which was varied between 70 – 100%. $R$ is the asymmetry factor which was always set to $R = 0.1$. The frequency of the test was $f = 10$ Hz and the fatigue limit was taken as $2 \cdot 10^6$ cycle. The failure criterion was 2% engineering deformation according to the literature [24, 25]. The samples’ diameter was $D = 27$ mm, and the height was $H = 42$ mm (the aspect ratio was $H/D = 1.56$). The fatigue tests were performed on a MTS 810 hydraulic testing machine, with a 10 kN load cell if the maximal load was under 8 kN. Otherwise a 250 kN load cell was used. The displacement was measured with the crosshead displacement due to the relatively large sample dimensions. Figure 2. shows the measurement setup.

3. Results and discussion
First, we had to determine the maximum stress for the fatigue tests. In order to get this data for every density a plot had to be created. Figure 3. depicts the density – compressive stress diagram, where the stress values are equal to the 1% compressive stress from the quasi-static measurement.
The 1% compressive strength showed linear relationship to the density, the fitted line’s equation is

\[ \rho = -48.28 + 72.86\sigma_c \] (1)

With this equation the maximum stress was calculated individually, considering the load ratio too. From the maximal stress and R value, all of the other cyclic load parameters can be easily derived. Table 2. summarizes the properties of the specimens and the calculated parameters for the fatigue test.

Total duration of the measurements was ~ 700 h. Two types of failure mechanism were detected. These failure modes are similar to what Taherishargh et al. [26] found in their research. Type I failure mode means that a shear band appears across the cylindrical specimen with an angle of ~45° and the specimens usually completely fell apart along this shear band. Type II has a different method. The first part is similar to type I, namely a 45° shear band appears, but after a relatively small deformation the failure slows down because of the hardening of the material. This deceleration of the failure creates a plateau in the engineering deformation – number of cycles diagram. After this plateau a new shear band appears, which is perpendicular to the previous one. After the second shear band appears the samples completely fall apart. Figure 4. shows the mechanism of the failure types [26]. Type I typically occurred at those samples which survived at least 10,000 cycles, while type II occurred at lower lifetime. Type I only has one peak at the deformation speed diagram, while type II has a plateau zone after the first peak.

The Wöhler curves were plotted in a load ratio – failure cycle number graph (Figure 5.).

![Type I and Type II samples](image)

**Figure 4.** The cross-section of samples showing the deformation mechanism at low and high loading ratios (type I and type II) [26]

**Table 2.** Sample properties and the individual parameters for the fatigue test

| Sample (batch num.- sample num.) | Density, \(\rho\) (g/cm\(^3\)) | Calculated compressive strength, \(\sigma_c\) (MPa) | Load ratio, \(k\) (-) | Minimal stress, \(\sigma_{min}\) (MPa) | Maximal stress, \(\sigma_{max}\) (MPa) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1-1                             | 0.78                          | 8.55                            | 0.9               | 7.70            | 0.77            |
| 1-2                             | 0.75                          | 6.36                            | 0.8               | 5.09            | 0.51            |
| 1-3                             | 0.74                          | 5.64                            | 0.8               | 4.51            | 0.45            |
| 1-4                             | 0.73                          | 4.91                            | 0.9               | 4.42            | 0.44            |
| 1-5                             | 0.73                          | 4.91                            | 0.7               | 3.44            | 0.34            |
| 1-6                             | 0.71                          | 3.45                            | 0.9               | 3.11            | 0.31            |
| 1-7                             | 0.69                          | 1.99                            | 0.8               | 1.59            | 0.16            |
Table 2. Sample properties and the individual parameters for the fatigue test (continued)

| Sample (batch num.- sample num.) | Density, ρ (g/cm³) | Calculated compressive strength, σc (MPa) | Load ratio, k (-) | Minimal stress, σmin (MPa) | Maximal stress, σmax (MPa) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2-1                             | 0.88               | 15.84                                    | 0.7               | 11.09                       | 1.11                        |
| 2-2                             | 0.87               | 15.11                                    | 0.8               | 12.09                       | 1.21                        |
| 2-3                             | 0.87               | 15.11                                    | 0.8               | 12.09                       | 1.21                        |
| 2-4                             | 0.86               | 14.38                                    | 0.9               | 12.94                       | 1.29                        |
| 2-5                             | 0.86               | 14.38                                    | 0.9               | 12.94                       | 1.29                        |
| 2-6                             | 0.86               | 14.38                                    | 0.7               | 10.07                       | 1.01                        |
| 2-7                             | 0.86               | 14.38                                    | 0.9               | 12.94                       | 1.29                        |
| 2-8                             | 0.85               | 13.65                                    | 0.8               | 10.92                       | 1.09                        |
| 3-1                             | 1.00               | 24.58                                    | 0.9               | 22.12                       | 2.21                        |
| 3-2                             | 1.00               | 24.58                                    | 0.8               | 19.66                       | 1.97                        |
| 3-3                             | 1.00               | 24.58                                    | 1.0               | 24.58                       | 2.46                        |
| 3-4                             | 0.99               | 23.85                                    | 1.0               | 23.85                       | 2.39                        |
| 3-5                             | 0.99               | 23.85                                    | 0.9               | 21.47                       | 2.15                        |
| 3-6                             | 0.98               | 23.12                                    | 1.0               | 23.12                       | 2.31                        |
| 4-1                             | 1.07               | 29.68                                    | 1.0               | 29.68                       | 2.97                        |
| 4-2                             | 1.06               | 28.95                                    | 0.95              | 27.50                       | 2.75                        |
| 4-3                             | 1.06               | 28.95                                    | 0.95              | 27.50                       | 2.75                        |
| 4-4                             | 1.05               | 28.22                                    | 0.85              | 23.99                       | 2.40                        |
| 4-5                             | 1.04               | 27.49                                    | 0.95              | 26.12                       | 2.61                        |
| 4-6                             | 1.04               | 27.49                                    | 0.85              | 23.37                       | 2.34                        |

Figure 5. Load ratio – failure cycle number diagram

It can be seen that the slope of the Wöhler curves are increasing with the density, and the fatigue limit also increasing with the density. The Wöhler curves were compared to another type of syntactic foams, namely AlSi12 matrix filled with Globocer balloons [18]. The results of the two fatigue tests can be compared and proves that Wöhler curves dependency on the density only works with the same type of syntactic foam, because this type of syntactic foam has a density of 1.8 g/cm³ (Figure 6.) and does
not fit into the trends of the EP filled composites. This phenomenon indicates that the filler has significant effect on the fatigue properties of the MMSFs.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 6.** Load ratio – failure cycle number diagram supplemented with an AlSi12-Globocer syntactic foam’s results

A large difference between the two type of syntactic foam is in the filler material, and in the shape of the quasi-static compressive curve [27-29]. The Globocer filled syntactic foams have a defined peak stress, which means if these type of materials go through that stage, it will collapse, but in the other hand, the EP filled syntactic foams do not have such a peak in their quasi-static curves, which means that if they exceed the 1% compression stress point they will only be stronger. This can cause, that the dependency from the density not apply for the Globocer filled syntactic foams.

### 4. Conclusions

From the investigation which was described above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The compaction method is a proper way to produce different density range syntactic foams from expanded perlite and A356 aluminium alloy.
- The slope of the Wöhler curves depends on the density of the syntactic foam.
- The fatigue limit depends on the density of the syntactic foams.
- The slope of the Wöhler curves and the fatigue limit dependency from the density only applies for the syntactic foams made from the same filler material.

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Thank you for the positive review, the noted missing punctuations have been corrected and the highlighted paragraph has been justified as suggested by the Reviewer.

The corrected manuscript has been uploaded to the Journal’s system.

Best regards,
Attila Szlancsik
Corresponding Author