

Effect of Vibration Amplitude and Welding Force on Weld Strength of Ultrasonic Metal Welding

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Abstract

Ultrasonic metal welding has been the subject of ongoing research and development, most recently concentrating on metal joining in miniature devices, for example to allow solder-free wire bonding. As well as at the small scale, there are also opportunities to research the joining of thicker sheet metals and to widen the range of similar and dissimilar materials that can be successfully joined using this technology. This study presents the design, characterisation and test of a lateral-drive ultrasonic metal spot welding device. The ultrasonic metal spot welding horn is modelled using finite element analysis (FEA) and its vibration behaviour is characterised experimentally to ensure ultrasonic energy is delivered effectively to the weld coupon. The welding stack and fixtures are then designed and mounted on a test machine to allow a series of experiments to be conducted for various welding and ultrasonic parameters. Weld strength is subsequently analysed using tensile-shear tests. The results show how the weld strength is particularly sensitive to the combination of clamping force and ultrasonic vibration amplitude of the welding tip, but there are optimal combinations of these and also limits that must be clearly identified.

Keywords: Ultrasonic welding; Ultrasonic metal; Interstitial oxides

Introduction

Ultrasonic welding can be defined as a solid-state joining process in which materials are held together by a normal force whilst a high-frequency shear vibration is applied. During this process the vibration deforms, shears, and flattens surface asperities, scatters interstitial oxides and contaminants, and increases the contact area of the parts being welded [1]. The first demonstration of ultrasonic welding was in the early 1950s and was limited to grain refinement and soldering [2], but now the technique can be applied to various softer metals, such as copper and aluminium, as well as harder metals [3]. Ultrasonic welding has become an efficient joining technique for many industrial and scientific applications, using lighter and more versatile equipment to produce a stronger, smaller, and more precise weld [2]. Furthermore, ultrasonic welding does not require any solder or filler and therefore has some associated environmental and economic benefits [4].

Ultrasonic welding systems consist of a power supply, transducer, booster, horn and anvil. The horn is tuned to operate in the longitudinal mode but imprecise design can affect the dynamic characteristics of the device, reducing both vibration amplitude and weld quality. In this study, two investigations have been carried out to improve weld strength; numerical design and subsequent experimental characterisation of an integrated ultrasonic spot welding horn to enhance the vibration characteristics at the welding surface, and secondly an experimental study of the effects of process parameters on the weld itself, considering issues such as tool/workpiece adhesion and weld quality. The weld strength is characterised experimentally in terms of the results of repeated tensile shear tests.

Design and Characterisation of the Welding System

Numerical design of the ultrasonic spot welding horn

A lateral-drive system has been used to investigate ultrasonic metal spot welding because it can produce high amplitude vibration but yet apply the low forces necessary to weld thinner parts [5]. Several factors are considered in the design of such an ultrasonic horn including resonant frequency, frequency separation, amplitude amplification,

amplitude uniformity and stress concentration. High amplification and low stress are obtained through the use of a catenoidal horn, the horn being modelled as steel to take advantage of its high fatigue strength and good wear qualities. An integrated welding tip with knurled welding flats 6 mm in diameter is employed, the horn being clamped at the nodal plane as shown in Figure 1. This horn is modelled in the FEA package, Abaqus, and a harmonic analysis is carried out through the application of an excitation vibration to the base, to extract the shape of the operating vibration mode and those of some of the surrounding modes.

Experimental characterization of the ultrasonic spot welding horn

The numerical results are compared to the results of an Experimental Modal Analysis (EMA), shown in Figure 2, carried out using a Polytec 3D-Laser Vibrometer and random excitation over a frequency range from 0 to 40 kHz. The amplifications, resonant frequencies and mode shapes of the horn are found to be in agreement and the system is therefore considered to operate as designed.

Welding Experiments

Experimental set up

A 1 kW ultrasonic generator (Sonic Systems L500/3-20) is used to drive the transducer and hence the welding horn, known together as

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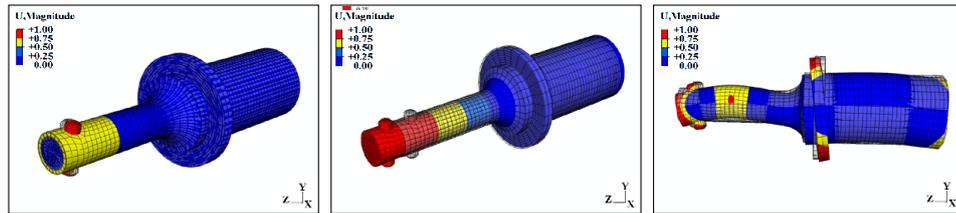


Figure 1: Numerical shapes of the torsional (13.2 kHz), operating (20.8 kHz) and bending (22.6 kHz) mode.

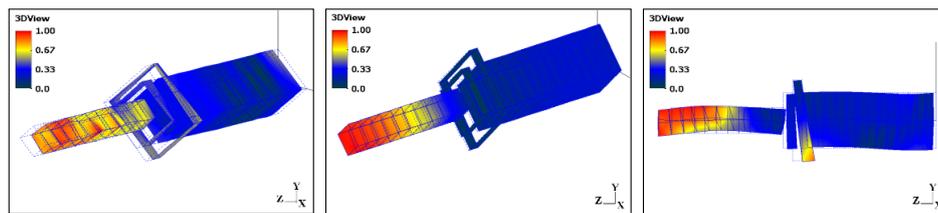


Figure 2: EMA shapes of the torsional (13.7 kHz), operating (20.8 kHz) and bending (23.5 kHz) mode.

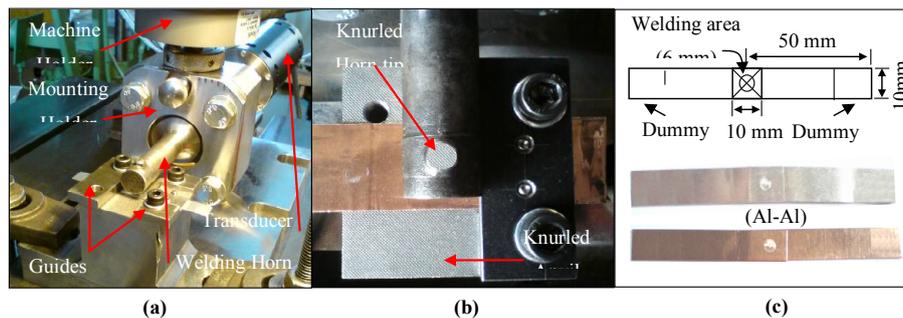


Figure 3: Experimental set up of welding tools, knurled surfaces, specimen layout and welded coupons.

the welding stack. A tensile test machine (Zwick Roell) is employed to secure the stack by holding it at the nodal plane, as shown at left in Figure 3a, and also to measure the clamping force and weld time. The 6 mm knurled flat contacts the upper specimen during welding, while the lower specimen is secured by a knurled anvil as shown in Figure 3b. The specimens themselves are 0.1 mm and 0.5 mm thick aluminium and copper strips, as shown in Figure 3c, and their properties are obtained from ASTM [6] and BSI [7] codes. Five tensile tests at each set of weld conditions are carried out, the results are averaged, and the standard deviation for the tests is obtained. Tests of both similar and dissimilar metals and of different thicknesses, are performed with different arrangement or stacking order. Several tests are also carried out to ameliorate the problem of horn sticking.

The effect of process parameters on weld strength in similar materials

Figure 4 shows the average measured values of weld strength against clamping force applied for various welds with different vibrational amplitudes and specimen thicknesses. The error bars represent one standard deviation of the five tests for each parameter set. Welding strength is seen to increase with clamping force although it is noted that excessive clamping force may generate high friction and suppress the relative motion of the surfaces, resulting in reduced weld

strength [8]. Al-Al welds appear to be slightly stronger than Cu-Cu welds created under identical process parameters, regardless of sample thickness. Scattering of weld strength across the five tests tends to become proportionally smaller as clamping force is increased.

The effect of process parameters on weld strength in dissimilar materials

In welding dissimilar materials it is important to determine which strip is placed on top, as the results in Figure 5 suggest a superior bond is created when the horn bears against aluminium. It is also noted that sticking becomes more prevalent at higher clamping forces, particularly where thinner samples are employed.

Conclusion

Design and fabrication of a lateral-drive ultrasonic spot welding system has been carried out to investigate the welding of thin metal strips. It has been observed that vibration amplitude, clamping force and, in some circumstances, material arrangement order, have a significant effect on weld strength. Al-Al welds are stronger than Cu-Cu welds and weld strength in both cases tends to increase with clamping force within the range of forces examined. However, when dissimilar metals are considered, slightly stronger welds are obtained when the

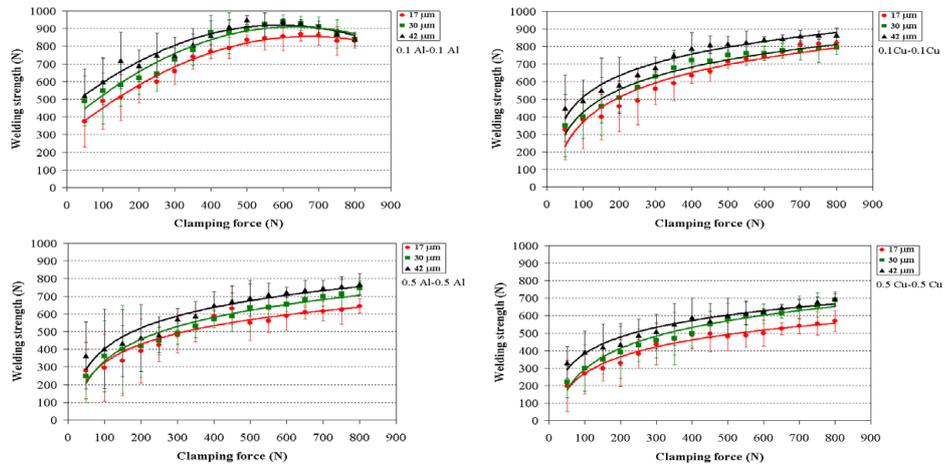


Figure 4: Variation of weld strength vs. clamping force for joining similar materials.

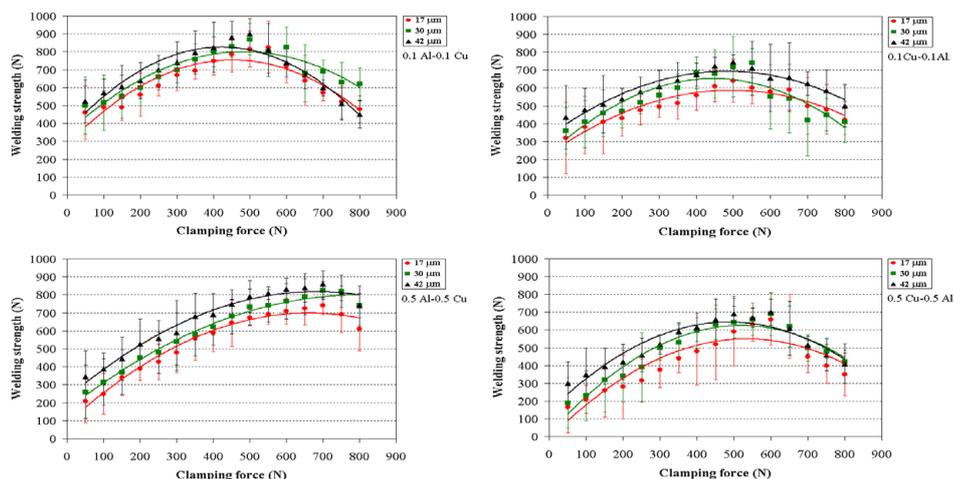


Figure 5: Variation of weld strength vs. clamping force for joining dissimilar materials.

aluminium layer is placed on top and in direct contact with the ultrasonic horn and, in general, there is a decrease in weld strength when clamping forces above approximately 500 N are applied.

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