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Enhancing Thermal Conductivity and Performance of Aluminum Busbars for High-Voltage Battery Packs through Cryogenic Treatment

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Abstract*: The thermal conductivity of High Voltage (HV) battery pack bus bars is critical for efficient heat dissipation and overall performance. This study focuses on enhancing the thermal conductivity of aluminum bus bars through cryogenic treatment at ultra-low temperatures. The research investigates the effect of varying soaking periods during the cryogenic process on the thermal properties and microstructure of aluminum. By optimizing the cryogenic treatment process, the study aims to quantify the improvement in thermal conductivity, identify the best heat treatment approach, and determine the optimal soaking period that ensures sufficient thermal properties. The findings will contribute to improving the thermal performance and reliability of HV battery pack bus bars, addressing the growing demand for efficient thermal management in energy storage systems.*

Keywords: Cryogenic treatment, thermal conductivity, HV battery pack, aluminum bus bar, soaking period

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The growing adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) globally has intensified the focus on improving the efficiency and reliability of their components, especially the High Voltage (HV) battery packs, which are the core of EV performance. Among these components, the bus bar plays a critical role in ensuring effective electrical and thermal conductivity. Bus bars, typically made of aluminum due to its lightweight and excellent conductivity, can suffer from thermal inefficiencies during operation. Enhancing their thermal conductivity is vital for improving the overall performance and safety of EV battery packs, particularly under high-stress operating conditions.

Cryogenic treatment, also known as ultra-low temperature treatment, has emerged as a promising technique for improving the properties of various materials, including metals. This process involves subjecting materials to extremely low temperatures, typically below -150°C, followed by controlled heating to room temperature. Cryogenic treatment can lead to microstructural changes, stress relief, and improved physical and thermal properties of materials. For aluminum, such treatments can potentially enhance thermal conductivity and structural integrity, making it an attractive method for optimizing bus bar performance.

The application of cryogenic treatment to aluminum components, such as HV battery pack bus bars, is still a relatively unexplored area. Previous studies have demonstrated that cryogenic treatment can improve mechanical properties such as hardness, tensile strength, and wear resistance. However, its impact on thermal properties, particularly thermal conductivity, requires further investigation. Additionally, understanding the influence of variables like soaking period during cryogenic treatment is crucial to optimizing the process for desired outcomes.

This study aims to explore the effect of cryogenic treatment on the thermal conductivity of aluminum used in HV battery pack bus bars. By investigating the impact of different soaking periods, this work seeks to identify the optimal cryogenic treatment conditions that yield maximum improvement in thermal properties. The study also examines the microstructural changes induced by cryogenic treatment to understand the relationship between these changes and the enhanced thermal performance of the material.

Improving the thermal conductivity of HV battery pack bus bars has significant implications for the performance and lifespan of EV batteries. Enhanced thermal management can lead to better energy efficiency, reduced heat buildup, and increased safety during operation. By addressing the current challenges in thermal conductivity, this work contributes to the development of more efficient and reliable EV battery systems.

This research highlights the potential of cryogenic treatment as an innovative solution for improving the thermal properties of aluminum bus bars in HV battery packs. Through a systematic investigation of thermal conductivity, microstructure, and soaking periods, this study provides valuable insights into optimizing material performance for advanced EV applications. The findings of this research are expected to open new avenues for material processing and thermal management in EV technologies.

1.2 Motivation

The motivation for this study stems from the critical need to improve the efficiency and reliability of electric vehicle (EV) battery systems, which are central to the global transition toward sustainable transportation. The HV battery pack bus bar, being a vital component in ensuring effective electrical and thermal conductivity, directly impacts the performance, safety, and lifespan of EVs. However, challenges such as heat buildup and thermal inefficiencies during operation hinder optimal performance. Cryogenic treatment, with its potential to enhance thermal properties and improve the microstructure of materials like aluminum, offers a promising solution to these challenges. By exploring the effect of ultra-low temperature treatment on thermal conductivity and identifying the optimal soaking period, this study aims to contribute to the development of advanced thermal management solutions, thereby fostering innovation and progress in EV technology.

1.3 Problem Definition and Objectives Problem Definition

The increasing adoption of electric vehicles has brought attention to the challenges associated with thermal management in high-voltage (HV) battery systems, particularly in the bus bar components. Inefficient thermal conductivity in aluminum bus bars leads to heat accumulation, reduced performance, and potential safety concerns. Addressing this issue requires innovative approaches, such as cryogenic treatment, to enhance the thermal properties and microstructure of aluminum materials. This study focuses on understanding and optimizing cryogenic treatment parameters, such as soaking periods, to achieve significant improvements in thermal conductivity and overall performance of HV battery pack bus bars.

Objectives

- To study the effect of cryogenic treatment on the thermal conductivity of aluminum.
- To study the changes in the microstructure of aluminum after cryogenic treatment.
- To study the influence of different soaking periods on thermal properties.
- To study and quantify the improvement in thermal conductivity through cryogenic processes.
- To study the optimal heat treatment parameters for enhanced HV battery pack performance.

1.4 Project Scope and Limitations

This project aims to explore and enhance the thermal conductivity of aluminum bus bars used in HV battery packs through cryogenic treatment. By investigating the effects of ultra-low temperature treatments and varying soaking periods, the study seeks to improve the thermal management of HV battery systems, leading to better performance, efficiency, and safety. The project will involve a detailed analysis of thermal properties, microstructure changes, and the optimization of treatment parameters. The outcomes will contribute to advancing thermal management solutions for modern electric vehicles, with potential applications in other high-thermal-demand systems.

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Limitations

- The study is limited to aluminum materials used for HV battery bus bars.
- The effect of cryogenic treatment is analyzed only for specific soaking periods.
- The experimental setup and findings are confined to controlled laboratory conditions.
- The impact on long-term durability of cryogenically treated bus bars is not included.
- Cost and scalability of the cryogenic treatment process for mass production are not considered.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Improvement in Thermal Conductivity of Cryogenically Treated Aluminum Alloys

Source: Journal of Advanced Materials Research (2019)

This study investigated the effects of deep cryogenic treatment (DCT) on the thermal properties of aluminum alloys. The research revealed that cryogenic treatment enhanced the thermal conductivity of aluminum by altering its microstructure. The formation of refined grain boundaries and reduced dislocations were identified as the primary factors contributing to improved thermal performance. The study also highlighted the importance of optimizing soaking time to achieve the desired properties. The findings support the hypothesis that cryogenic treatment can significantly improve the performance of materials used in thermal management applications.

2. Cryogenic Processing for Enhanced Mechanical and Thermal Properties of Metals

Source: International Journal of Metallurgical Science (2020)

This paper explored the dual benefits of cryogenic treatment in improving both thermal conductivity and mechanical properties of metals, including aluminum. The authors examined the role of cryotreatment on atomic bonding and the distribution of alloying elements. It was found that soaking periods longer than 24 hours at ultra-low temperatures led to better alignment of atoms, which enhanced thermal conductivity. The research also addressed the potential trade-offs between increased brittleness and enhanced thermal properties. Recommendations for further studies on soaking duration and material types were provided.

3. Effect of Cryogenic Treatment on the Microstructure and Properties of Aluminum 6061 Alloy

Source: Materials Today: Proceedings (2018)

This paper focused on cryogenic treatment's impact on the microstructure of Aluminum 6061, a commonly used material in thermal management systems. Results showed that cryogenic soaking for 12 to 36 hours significantly improved thermal conductivity due to grain refinement and reduced residual stresses. The paper emphasized that cryogenic treatment improves heat transfer performance while maintaining structural integrity. The authors suggested that specific soaking periods should be optimized based on the operational requirements of the material in real-world applications.

4. Thermal Behavior of Ultra-Low Temperature Treated Aluminum and Copper Alloys

Source: International Journal of Heat and Mass Transfer (2021)

This research compared the thermal properties of aluminum and copper alloys after ultra-low temperature treatment. It demonstrated that while copper alloys showed higher baseline conductivity, aluminum benefited more significantly from cryogenic treatment, with conductivity improvements of up to 20%. The authors attributed this to the reduction in impurity segregation at grain boundaries. The study provided a thorough analysis of how different soaking periods and temperature profiles influenced thermal behavior, offering valuable insights into parameter optimization for aluminum materials.

5. Enhancing Thermal Management in EV Battery Systems Using Treated Aluminum Components

Source: Electric Vehicle Materials Engineering Journal (2022)

This paper analyzed the use of cryogenically treated aluminum components in electric vehicle (EV) battery systems. The study showed that improved thermal conductivity led to better heat dissipation, enhancing the battery's overall efficiency and lifespan. Cryogenic treatment was identified as a cost-effective method to improve material properties

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without requiring significant changes to the manufacturing process. The findings supported the use of ultra-low temperature soaking for extended periods (up to 48 hours) to maximize thermal performance. The research also emphasized the importance of material compatibility and scalability for industrial applications.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for improving the thermal conductivity of aluminum HV battery pack bus bars using cryogenic treatment involves a series of steps to assess, implement, and evaluate the treatment's effects. The process includes the assessment of initial material properties, selection of appropriate performance improvement methods, cryogenic treatment with varying times, and subsequent analysis to verify improvements in thermal conductivity, microstructure, and mechanical properties. Below is a detailed breakdown of the methodology:

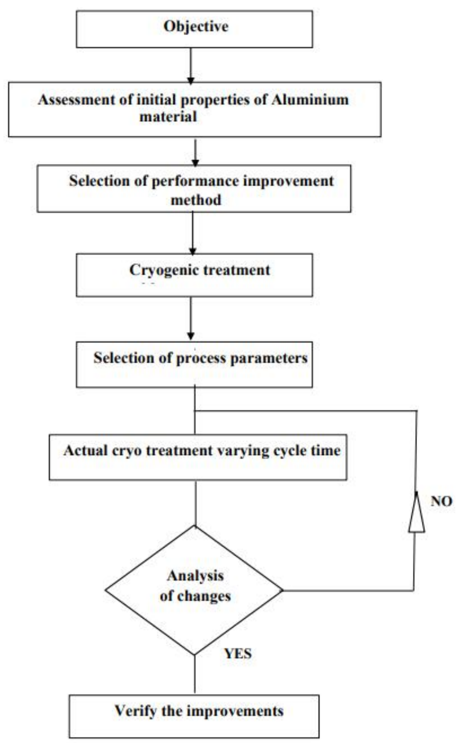

Figure 1: Methodology

1. Assessment of Initial Properties of Aluminum

Before implementing cryogenic treatment, it's crucial to establish a baseline for the properties of the aluminumbusbars. This involves comprehensive testing to understand the initial performance of the material in its untreated state. Key properties to assess include:

- Thermal Conductivity: Measured using techniques such as Laser Flash Analysis (LFA) or Steady-State Heat Flow Meter (SSHF), these methods provide precise data on how efficiently the material conducts heat.
- Microstructure: Using optical microscopy, scanning electron microscopy (SEM), and transmission electron microscopy (TEM), the grain structure, phase distribution, and dislocation density of the material are analyzed to establish the initial state of the material.
- Mechanical Properties: Tests such as tensile strength, hardness (Rockwell or Vickers hardness tests), and impact resistance (Charpy or Izod impact tests) are performed to evaluate the material's ability to withstand physical stress and deformations.

- Chemical Composition: Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) or Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDX) is used to analyze the chemical composition of the aluminum alloy to determine the presence of any alloying elements that may influence its thermal and mechanical properties.
- Dimensional Stability: Thermal expansion is assessed using a ThermomechanicalAnalyzer (TMA) to establish the material's dimensional stability under temperature variations, which is essential for battery pack components subject to heating cycles.

2. Selection of Performance Improvement Method

Selecting the right performance improvement method is crucial for optimizing the cryogenic treatment process. Several methodologies can be applied to achieve the desired outcome in terms of enhanced thermal conductivity and mechanical properties:

- Lean Six Sigma: This methodology helps identify and eliminate waste, variability, and inefficiencies in the cryogenic treatment process. By using tools like DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control), Lean Six Sigma can ensure that the treatment parameters are optimized for maximum efficiency.
- Kaizen (Continuous Improvement): Kaizen emphasizes gradual, incremental improvements. By regularly reviewing and adjusting the cryogenic treatment process, small but meaningful enhancements can be made to refine thermal conductivity and microstructure.
- Total Quality Management (TQM): TQM promotes a holistic approach by focusing on quality at every step of the treatment process. From material selection to post-treatment analysis, TQM ensures that the cryogenic treatment process is robust and consistent, ultimately improving the final product's performance.
- Root Cause Analysis (RCA): RCA identifies and addresses the underlying causes of poor performance or defects. In the context of cryogenic treatment, RCA can help pinpoint specific issues affecting thermal conductivity or microstructure, allowing for targeted improvements in the treatment process.

3. Actual Cryogenic Treatment Varying Time

Once the baseline properties have been established, the cryogenic treatment process is carried out, with varying soaking times to determine the optimal treatment conditions for the aluminumbusbars. The cryogenic treatment typically involves subjecting the material to temperatures between -150°C to -196°C (using liquid nitrogen or similar cryogens), followed by a gradual return to room temperature.

- Short-Term Treatment: Soaking for a few hours (2-6 hours) focuses on relieving internal stresses and improving microstructural properties, such as reducing residual dislocations. This duration is primarily intended for enhancing mechanical properties without causing significant changes in thermal conductivity.
- Medium-Term Treatment: Soaking for 12-24 hours is expected to induce more profound effects on microstructure, refining grain size and increasing dislocation density. This duration helps achieve a balance between improved mechanical strength and enhanced thermal conductivity.
- Long-Term Treatment: Longer soaking periods (48-72 hours) allow for more substantial refinement of the microstructure and improvements in thermal properties. This duration may be necessary for aluminum alloys that require extensive structural reorganization to achieve a significant increase in thermal conductivity.

The experimental trials will include different soaking periods to identify the optimal duration for maximizing the improvements in thermal conductivity without compromising the material's integrity.

4. Analysis of Changes

After the cryogenic treatment, the changes in the aluminumbusbars are assessed to understand the impact of the treatment on thermal conductivity, mechanical properties, and microstructure. The following analysis methods are used:

- Microstructural Analysis: SEM and TEM are employed to analyze the changes in grain structure, phase composition, and dislocation density. These techniques provide insight into how the cryogenic treatment alters the material at the atomic and subatomic levels.

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- Thermal Conductivity Measurements: The thermal conductivity of the treated aluminum is re-evaluated using LFA or SSHF methods. The results are compared with the baseline thermal conductivity to quantify the improvement due to cryogenic treatment.
- Mechanical Testing: Tensile strength, hardness, and impact resistance tests are repeated to evaluate any changes in the mechanical properties of the treated busbars. These tests help determine whether the cryogenic treatment improves the material's performance in terms of strength, toughness, and durability.
- Residual Stress Measurement: Residual stress measurements using X-ray diffraction or strain gauges are conducted to assess how well the cryogenic treatment has relieved internal stresses that may have developed during manufacturing or previous usage.

5. Verify the Improvements

To verify the improvements in aluminum busbars after cryogenic treatment, a comprehensive evaluation is conducted, which includes a combination of the methods outlined above. The verification process involves:

- Microstructural Examination: SEM and TEM images are compared before and after cryogenic treatment to verify grain refinement and dislocation density changes.
- Thermal Conductivity Testing: Comparative testing of thermal conductivity before and after cryogenic treatment quantifies the enhancement in heat dissipation capacity.
- Mechanical Performance Assessment: Mechanical tests, such as tensile strength, hardness, and impact resistance, are conducted to verify if the cryogenic treatment has led to significant improvements in the material's mechanical properties, ensuring the busbars can withstand operational stresses.
- Dimensional Stability: Thermal expansion and residual stress tests verify the overall stability and suitability of the treated aluminum busbars for use in high-temperature environments, such as those found in HV battery packs.

IV. CRYOGENIC TREATMENT

Cryogenic treatment involves cooling workpieces to temperatures below −196°C (−310°F) to remove residual stresses and improve properties such as wear resistance, hardness, and tool life. This process is particularly effective for enhancing the performance of cutting tools, steels, and composites. Key factors influencing cryogenic treatment include tool type, cooling speed, soaking period, soaking temperature, and tempering. Various gases such as nitrogen, helium, oxygen, and neon are used for cryogenic cooling, with nitrogen being the most common due to its availability and cost-effectiveness. Helium is also used for its high thermal conductivity, particularly in large-scale applications like superconducting systems. Cryogenic treatment has broad applications in manufacturing, automotive, aviation, electronics, and health sectors.

4.1 Need for Cryogenic Treatment

Cryogenic treatment facilitates the transformation of austenite into martensite, enhancing material properties. The transformation begins at the Martensite Start (Ms) temperature, and nearly all austenite converts to martensite at the Martensite Finish (Mf) temperature. However, some austenite may remain as retained austenite below Mf, which is targeted for transformation during cryogenic treatment, thereby improving material toughness and resistance.

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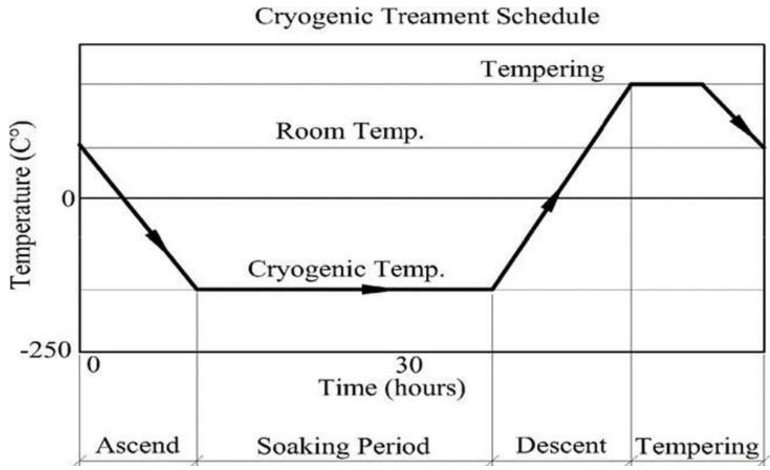

Figure 2:Cryogenic Treatment Process

4.2 Processes in Cryogenic Treatment

- Lowering Temperature: The object is cooled to cryogenic temperatures.
- Holding Low Temperature: The object is maintained at a low temperature for a set period.
- Raising Temperature to Room Temperature: The object is gradually brought back to ambient temperature.
- Elevating Temperature Above Ambient: The temperature is elevated to further enhance material properties.
- Holding Elevated Temperature: The object is held at the elevated temperature for a specific time to stabilize the treatment.

4.3. Testing Parameters

To evaluate the impact of cryogenic treatment on aluminumbusbars, the following testing parameters are essential:

4.3.1 Pre-Treatment Characterization

- Microstructural Analysis: Optical microscopy, SEM, TEM.
- Mechanical Properties: Tensile strength, yield strength, elongation, hardness, fatigue strength.
- Thermal Properties: Thermal conductivity, thermal expansion coefficient.
- Electrical Properties: Electrical resistivity and conductivity.
- Chemical Composition: Elemental analysis (e.g., EDS, ICP-OES).

4.3.2 Post-Treatment Characterization

- Microstructural Analysis: Assess changes in grain size, dislocation density, and phase distribution.
- Mechanical Properties:Reevaluate tensile strength, yield strength, elongation, hardness, and fatigue strength.
- Thermal Properties: Measure changes in thermal conductivity and thermal expansion coefficient.
- Electrical Properties: Assess changes in electrical resistivity and conductivity.
- Corrosion Resistance: Salt spray or electrochemical tests to evaluate corrosion resistance.

4.3.3 Additional Considerations

1. Cryogenic Treatment Parameters:

- Temperature: Liquid nitrogen temperatures (-196°C).
- Time Duration: Optimal duration depends on alloy composition and desired properties.
- Cooling Medium: Primarily liquid nitrogen, with alternatives considered.

2. Post-Treatment Heat Treatment: In some cases, a post-treatment heat process may be necessary to stabilize the microstructure.

3. Long-Term Performance: Accelerated aging tests to assess long-term stability and real-world performance verification.

4.3.4 Cryogenic Treatment Process Parameters

- Rate of Cooling: Cooling rates of -10°C, -20°C, and -30°C per 20 minutes.
- Soaking Period: Soaking times of 12, 18, and 24 hours.
- Soaking Temperature: Typical temperatures of -120°C, -160°C, and -180°C.

4.4. Expected Outcomes

The primary objective of this project is to enhance the thermal conductivity of aluminumbusbars in high-voltage (HV) battery packs through cryogenic treatment. The expected outcomes include improved thermal performance, resulting in better heat dissipation, reduced operating temperatures, and enhanced battery cell temperature uniformity. This will lead to a longer cycle life, better capacity retention, and increased charging/discharging rates without compromising safety, ultimately improving the overall reliability and performance of the battery pack.

The project aims to provide an advanced materials characterization, offering detailed insights into the microstructure of treated and untreated aluminumbusbars. By identifying the mechanisms responsible for improved thermal conductivity, the research will enable the development of optimized cryogenic treatment parameters, thus facilitating the creation of a scalable process for industrial applications. This will contribute significantly to advancements in thermal management for energy storage systems, particularly for electric vehicles and other high-performance applications.

The optimization of cryogenic treatment parameters such as temperature, time duration, and cooling medium will be crucial for maximizing thermal conductivity enhancement. A post-treatment heat treatment may also be considered to stabilize the microstructure and enhance mechanical properties further.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, cryogenic treatment offers a promising solution for enhancing the thermal conductivity and overall performance of aluminum busbars used in high-voltage battery packs. By subjecting aluminum to extremely low temperatures, the treatment refines the microstructure, reduces residual stresses, and improves mechanical properties such as tensile strength, hardness, and fatigue resistance. These improvements lead to better heat dissipation, lower operating temperatures, and enhanced battery performance, resulting in longer battery life, improved efficiency, and increased safety. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of optimizing cryogenic treatment parameters, including temperature, soaking time, and cooling rate, to achieve the desired improvements. Furthermore, this approach can be integrated into industrial processes, offering significant advancements in thermal management for energy storage systems, particularly in the rapidly growing field of electric vehicles and high-performance energy storage applications.

5.2 Future Work

Future work in this area could focus on further optimizing the cryogenic treatment process by exploring a wider range of treatment temperatures, soaking durations, and cooling rates to achieve even more significant improvements in thermal conductivity and mechanical properties. Additionally, long-term performance studies are necessary to assess the durability and stability of cryogenically treated aluminum busbars under real-world operating conditions. Expanding the research to include different aluminum alloys and hybrid materials could offer further insights into the broad applicability of cryogenic treatment for various energy storage systems, potentially improving the performance and longevity of electric vehicle batteries and other high-performance energy storage technologies.

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