

Welding Thin Plates of Aluminum Alloys— A Quantitative Heat-Flow Analysis

*Experimentally observed thermal cycles are in agreement
with computer heat-flow model calculations*

BY S. KOU, T. KANEVSKY AND S. FYFITCH

ABSTRACT. Bead-on-plate, full-penetration, gas tungsten-arc welding was carried out in thin plates of commercial aluminum alloys, including 6061, 5052, 2014 and 7075. The workpiece was thermally insulated from specially designed fixtures to avoid heat sinks during welding. An automatic arc voltage controller, capable of maintaining arc voltages within ± 0.1 volt of the desired values, was employed, and the arc heat input was accurately controlled.

Thermal measurements inside, as well as outside, the fusion zone were conducted, and information regarding the degree of liquid pool convection was obtained. A computer heat flow model, which takes into account the heat of fusion, the convection of the weld pool, the size and distribution of the heat source, the temperature dependence of thermal properties and the heat loss from the surface of the workpiece, was developed. The experimentally observed thermal cycles, widths of the fusion zone and weld microstructures agreed very well with the calculated results, thus verifying the validity of such a welding heat flow model.

In order to make the results of welding heat flow studies more general, dimensionless variables were introduced. Also, the results of this study were presented and discussed using such dimensionless variables.

Introduction

The fusion welding of thin plates has

Paper presented at the 62nd AWS Annual Meeting held in Cleveland, Ohio, during April 5-10, 1981.

S. KOU is Assistant Professor and T. KANEVSKY is a Graduate Student, Department of Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Science, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and S. FYFITCH, a former graduate student, is with Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

been used frequently as a simple tool for studying the effects of welding heat input on the structure and properties of engineering materials. The understanding of the heat flow during thin-plate welding can make such studies both more quantitative and more systematic.

The analytical solution to the steady state, 2-dimensional heat flow problem involving the bead-on-plate, full-penetration welding of thin plates was first derived by Rosenthal (Ref. 1) in 1941. The major assumptions made were:

1. A point heat source.
2. No heat of fusion.
3. No surface heat loss due to convection or radiation.
4. Constant thermal properties of the workpiece material.

Many subsequent investigators (Ref. 2-10) have tried either to modify or to verify such an analytical solution. However, major improvements over Rosenthal's original theory have not been achieved until the recent application of numerical methods in the simulation of heat flow during thin-plate welding (Ref. 11-13).

In the present study, attempts were made to verify, under carefully controlled heat flow conditions during welding, the validity of the heat flow model developed. Such a model takes into account the size and distribution of the heat

source, the heat of fusion, the convection of the weld pool, the surface heat loss due to convection and radiation, and the temperature dependence of thermal properties.

Commercial aluminum alloys of practical welding applications, such as 6061 and 5052, were employed. Alloys 2014 and 7075, although less weldable in practical situations, were also included due to their readily available information on weld microstructures.

Theory

The theory of the steady-state, 2-dimensional welding heat flow has been described in details elsewhere (Ref. 13) and thus is mentioned only very briefly here. In short, the heat flow equation can be written in terms of a coordinate system (x, y) , which moves with the heat source at the same velocity (see Fig. 1). In other words:

$$0 = \frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left(k \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial y} \left(k \frac{\partial T}{\partial y} \right) + Q_v + U \frac{\partial(\rho H)}{\partial x}$$

where T is temperature, k the thermal conductivity, Q_v the volumetric heat source or sink, U the welding velocity, ρ the density and H the specific enthalpy of the workpiece material. The boundary

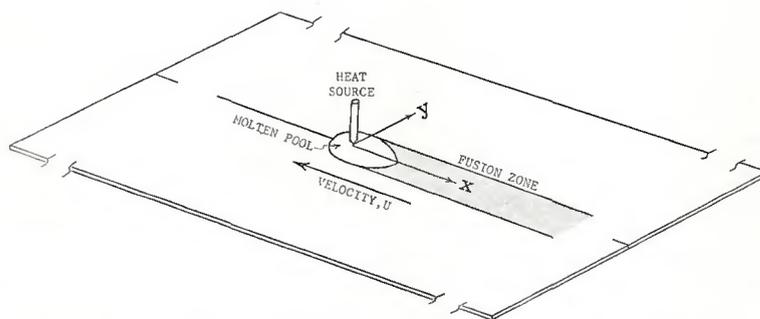


Fig. 1—The schematic illustration of a pair of thin plates being butt welded with a heat source of constant velocity U

