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New Cathode Material for Air-Plasma Cutting[†]

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KEY WORDS: (Arc Cutting) (Plasma Cutting) (Thermal Cutting) (Air-Plasma Cutting) (Oxygen Cutting) (Oxide Cathode) (Rhenium) (Yttrium-Oxide)

In recent years, a handy air-plasma torch is widely used for cutting thin steel plate on account of its compactness and low running cost. As shown in Fig. 1, the air-plasma

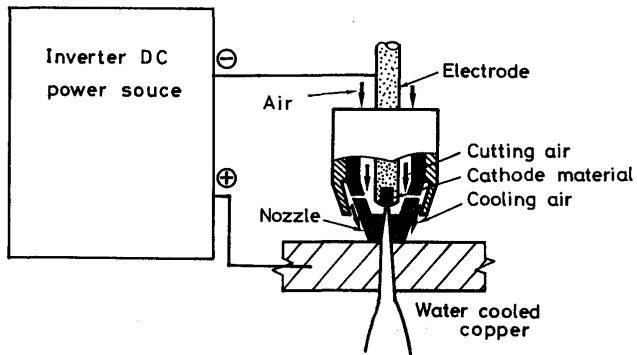


Fig. 1 Schematic drawing of experimental setup.

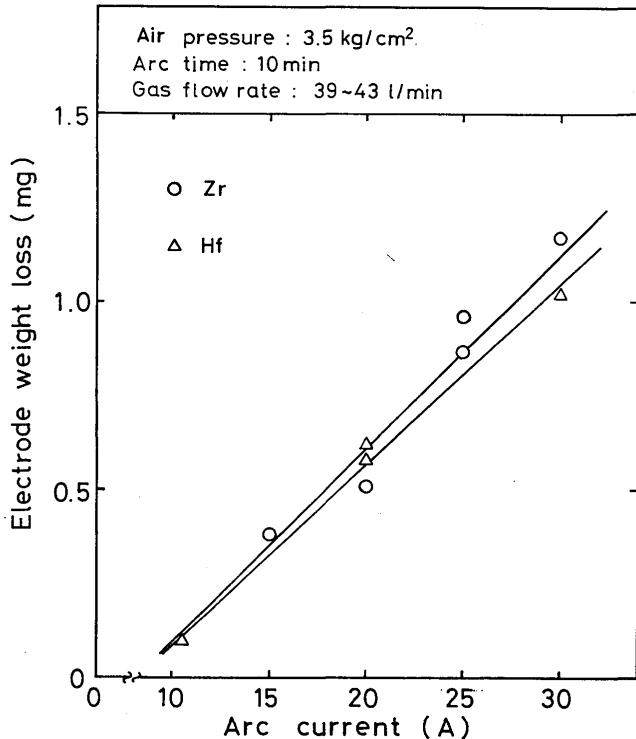


Fig. 2 Relationship between arc current and weight loss of electrode.

cutting technique is very simple and comparatively low current up to 50 A is mainly applied. The cathode is small tip electrode made by Zirconium (Zr) or Hafnium (Hf), tightly mounted in copper sheath. These tip electrode is exposed to oxidizing atmosphere in high temperature, therefore, the durability of the electrode material is a serious problem for this convenient technique. In this paper, it is shown that the new material which is made by sintering of Rhenium (Re) and Yttrium-oxide (Y_2O_3) mixture, has superior durability in air-plasma, compared with Zr and Hf.

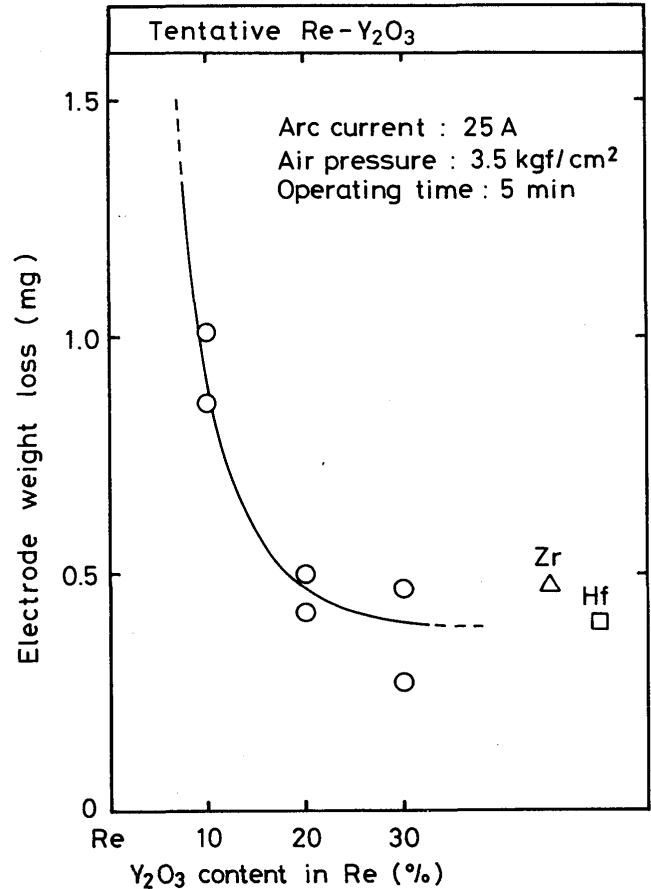


Fig. 3 Relationship between Y_2O_3 content in Re and weight loss of electrode.

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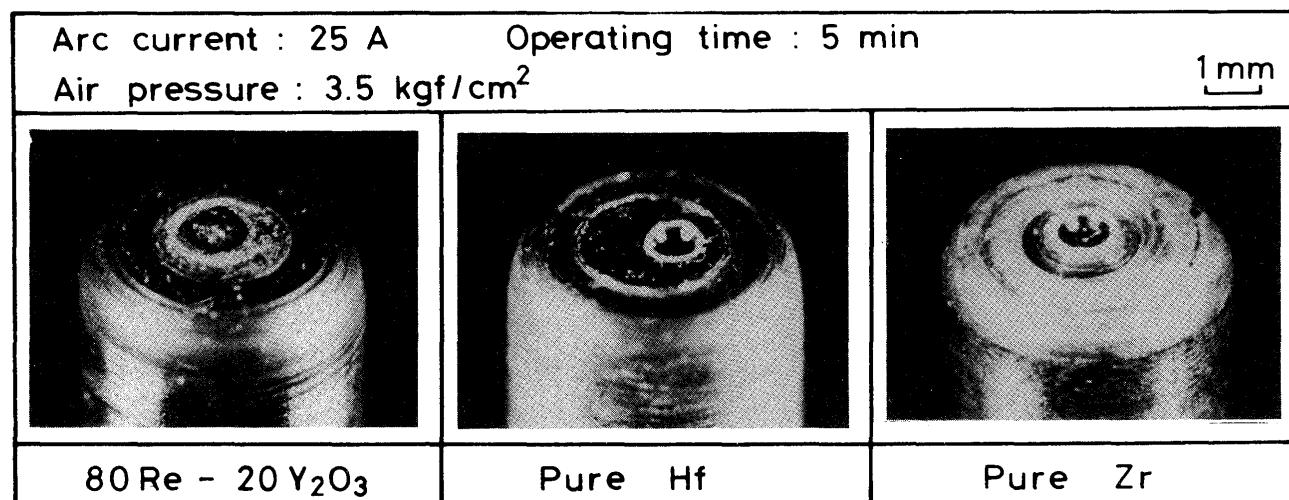


Fig. 4 Phographs of electrode surface after usage.

Table 1 Density of cathode materials

Material	Hf	Zr	Re	Y ₂ O ₃
Density (g/cm ³)	13.1	6.6	21.0	4.8

Figure 1 shows the schematic drawing of experimental setup used for measuring the consumption rate of electrode material due to air-plasma burning. A water cooled copper anode was used instead of thin steel plate.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between arc current and weight loss of tip electrode of Zr and Hf. The weight loss is proportional with the arc current. However due to the difference in density, the volume loss of Zr is about twice as much as one of Hf. Since the volume loss in

electrode causes the unstable behavior of arc, the Hf electrode has better characteristics in durability compared with Zr one.

Figure 3 shows that the electrode loss can be reduced by using the suitably alloyed Re and Y₂O₃. The Re-Y₂O₃ electrode has high density, therefore, the volume loss is very low comparing with Hf electrode.

Figure 4 The photographs in shows the electrode surface consumption after operation at 25A for 5 minutes. The eroded area of Re-Y₂O₃ electrode is rather wide but very shallow, while Hf and Zr electrodes have semispherical cavity after usage.