

THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

PROCESS AND MOLD FOR PRODUCING A MULTILAYER MOLDED ARTICLE

The present invention relates to a process and a mold for producing a multilayer molded article having good appearance with no wrinkles or breakage of a skin material.

Resin molded articles are widely used in many products including automobiles and household electric appliances, since such molded article is economical and light and has good moldability.

Since the resin molded articles have some drawbacks such that they have poor appearance or cool feeling and that they are easily flawed, it is desired to provide resin molded articles having good surface properties such as decoration and soft feeling.

Although many attempts have been made to provide such desirable resin molded article, it is impossible for a single kind of resin to have satisfactory moldability and strength and also to provide a molded article having good surface properties.

Then, presently, at least two materials having different functions are composited to produce a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

- 2 -

As a method for producing the multilayer molded article, there are proposed a method comprising adhering the skin material to the resin body with an adhesive and a method comprising providing a resin melt and the skin material in a cavity formed in a mold consisting of male and female molds and closing the male and female molds whereby the molding of the resin and covering with the skin material are simultaneously done.

However, by the first method, it is very difficult to adhere the skin material on the molded article having a complicated structure without causing wrinkles of the skin material.

In the second method, the air trapped between the skin material and the mold is compressed by the mold closing action, whereby the skin material is wrinkled as shown in Fig. 1A, or the shape is deformed as shown in Fig. 1B since the resin melt is not sufficiently filled, or the skin material is broken so that the resin flows out as shown in Fig. 1C. Therefore, molded articles having little or no commercial value tend to be produced.

One object of the present invention is to provide a process for producing a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material having no or few wrinkle or breakage in the skin material.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



- 3 -

Another object of the present invention is to provide a mold which is suitable for practicing the method for producing the multilayer molded article according to the present invention.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a process for producing a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which process comprising steps of:

supplying the skin material between a male mold and a female mold,

supplying a resin melt between the skin material and one of the male and female molds, and

closing the molds to mold the resin melt while removing the air trapped between the skin material and at least one of the molds.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein a heat-resistant porous member is embedded in at least a part of an inner wall of at least one of the male and female molds.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein



a slit is provided on an inner wall of at least one of the male and female molds.

According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein a hole is provided on an inner surface of at least one of the male and female molds which contacts the skin material. The invention will be described in detail in connection with the drawings in which

Figs. 1A, 1B and 1C show defects of the multilayer molded articles produced by the conventional methods,

Figs. 2A, 2B and 2C schematically show an embodiment of the process for producing a multilayer molded article according to the present invention,

Figs. 3A through 3E schematically show some embodiments of the molds for producing a multilayer molded article according to the present invention,

Figs. 4A through 4D schematically show a second embodiment of the process for producing a multilayer molded article according to the present invention, and

Figs. 5A through 5D schematically show a third embodiment of the process for producing a multilayer molded article according to the present invention.

In figures, a mold 1 comprises a female mold 2 and a male mold 3, and in the following description, the male



- 5 -

mold 3 is fixed and the female mold is moved vertically with a well known lifting mechanism (not shown).

In Fig. 2, each of the male and female molds has heat-resistant porous members 7 embedded in a wall part 2a and 3a facing the cavity 6 of the mold. The heat-resistant porous member can be produced from sintered metal, ceramics and the like.

In Fig. 2, the heat-resistant porous members are embedded in a part of the inner surface, although they cover the whole area of one or both of the surfaces facing the cavity 6. The heat-resistant porous members should be present at least at parts 8 of the mold where a front line of the resin melt finally reaches during molding or where a weld line is formed when the resin melt is supplied from two or more conduits. Such front line and weld line will be referred to as "front edge line" of the resin melt.

The part of the mold which contacts the front edge line of the resin melt directly or through the skin material depends on designs of the molds, and parts where the heat-resistant porous members 7 are embedded are selected depending on the kinds of molds.

In place of or in addition to the heat-resistant porous members, slits 9 are provided on the inner surfaces of the male and female molds as shown in Figs. 3A and 3B. Preferably, each slit 9 has a width of from 0.05 to 1 mm.



As shown in Fig. 3B, a through hole 10 is communicates with the heat-resistant porous member 7 and/or the slit 9. The through hole 10 connects the heat-resistant member 7 or the slit and the exterior. When the air is trapped in a larger amount, the through hole is preferably provided to remove the air quickly.

Further, an outlet opening of the through hole 10 can be connected to suction means such as a suction pump.

For example, the multilayer molded article is produced by using the mold of Fig. 2, 3A or 3B as follows:

(1) First, the skin material 4 is provided between the female mold 2 and the male molds 3.

(2) A mass of resin melt 5 is supplied between the skin material and one of the male and female molds. In Fig. 2A, the resin melt is supplied on the male mold 3 below the skin material 4.

The resin melt can be supplied by a per se conventional means. For example, the resin melt is supplied through a resin supplying conduit which is formed in the mold (not shown) with means for melting and plasticizing the resin such as an extruder (not shown).

(3) By actuating the lifting mechanism, the female mold is lowered to press the skin material and then the resin melt, whereby the resin melt flows and spreads between the skin material 4 and the surface of the male mold 3. Simultaneously, the skin material is pressed against the inner wall of the female mold.



- 7 -

The air trapped between the skin material and the male mold and between the skin material and the male mold is gathered near the front edge lines of the resin melt (cf. Fig. 2B).

(4) As the female mold is further lowered, the trapped air 12 escapes through the heat-resistant porous members 7 and/or the slits 9, whereby the skin material and the resin melt contact each other intimately. Finally, the male and female molds are completely closed and the molding of the resin is finished to obtain a multilayer resin molded article comprising the resin body and the skin material.

Figs. 3C, 3D and 3E show cross sections of other embodiments of the female mold of the present invention.

The same numerals indicated the same parts as in Figs. 2, 3A and 3B.

In the embodiment of Fig. 3C, the mold has pins 13 on the inner wall of the mold which directly contacts the skin material. Further, the pin may be provided on the heat-resistant porous member 7 as shown in Fig. 3D.

The pins 13 can be provided as independent parts on the molds 2 and/or 3, or integrally formed with the molds 2 and/or 3.

Alternatively, each pin 13 may be movably attached to an expansion means such as a spring 14 (e.g. a steel spring, a polyurethane spring, etc.) as shown in Fig. 3C or a cushioning means such as a hydraulic cylinder and a hydraulic press.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



- 8 -

The pin preferably has a diameter of 0.1 to 2 mm.

The pin is provided at a part of the inner wall of the mold which corresponds to a part of the skin material where it is easily wrinkled or where the pin hole is inconspicuous in the final use.

The length of the pin which extends beyond the inner wall surface level varies with the thickness of the skin material.

By making reference to Fig. 4A through 4D, the production of the multilayer molded article by using the mold of Figs. 3C or 3D is explained:

- (1) First, the skin material 4 is provided between the female mold 2 and the male molds 3.
- (2) A mass of resin melt 5 is supplied between the skin material 4 and one of the male and female molds. Preferably, the resin melt is supplied on the male mold 3 below the skin material 4 (Fig. 4A).
- (3) By actuating the lifting mechanism, the female mold 2 is lowered to press skin material and then the mass of resin melt, whereby the resin melt flows and spreads between the skin material 4 and the surface of the male mold 3. Simultaneously, the skin material is pressed against the inner wall of the female mold.

The air trapped between the skin material and the male mold and between the skin material and the male mold is gathered near the front edge lines of the resin melt (cf. Fig. 4B).

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

- 9 -

(4) As the female mold is further lowered, the skin material is punctured with the pins 13, and the trapped air 12 escapes through the pin holes formed in the skin material, whereby the skin material and the resin melt contact each other intimately. In this step, the resin melt does not flow out through the pin holes, since each pin hole has a very small pore and the resin melt is viscous enough not to flow through the pin hole (cf. Fig. 4C).

Finally, the male and female molds are completely closed and the molding of the resin is finished to obtain a multilayer resin molded article comprising the resin body and the skin material (cf. Fig. 4D).

Figs. 5A through 5D schematically show the production of the multilayer molded resin article by using a further embodiment of the mold according to the present invention.

In this embodiment, the mold has at least one small hole 15 on the inner wall 2a of the mold 2 which directly contacts the skin material 4 as shown in Fig. 5.

Preferably, the small hole has a diameter of 2 to 6 mm and a depth of 11 to 30 mm.

The hole is provided at a part of the inner wall of the mold which directly contacts a part of the skin material, particularly a part of the mold inner wall which corresponds to a part of the skin material where it is easily wrinkled or where the pin hole is inconspicuous in the final use.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



- 10 -

If the number of the holes is more than required or the holes are provided at parts where the puncture is not required, the resin melt flows out through the punctured parts made with the holes.

The hole may be formed across the wall of the mold to communicate with the exterior atmosphere.

The hole 15 may be combined with the heat-resistant porous member as shown in Fig. 3E.

The production of the multilayer molded article by using the mold having the pins is explained by making reference to Figs. 5A through 5D:

(1) First, the skin material 4 is provided between the female mold 2 and the male molds 3.

(2) A mass of resin melt 5 is supplied between the skin material and one of the male and female molds. Preferably, the resin melt is supplied on the male mold 3 below the skin material 4 (Fig. 5B).

(3) By actuating the lifting mechanism, the female mold is lowered to press the mass of skin material and then the resin melt, whereby the resin melt flows and spreads between the skin material 4 and the surface of the male mold 3. Simultaneously, the skin material is pressed against the inner wall of the female mold.

The air trapped between the skin material and the male mold and between the skin material and the male mold is gathered near the front edge lines of the resin melt (cf. Fig. 5B).

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



THIS SHEET HAS BEEN

THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED

- 11 -

(4) As the female mold is further lowered, the trapped air 12 is further compressed and punctures the skin material, whereby the skin material and the resin melt contact each other intimately. Finally, the male and female molds are completely closed and the molding of the resin is finished to obtain a multilayer resin molded article comprising the resin body and the skin material.

In the process of the present invention, the timing of the resin melt supply is not limited to the above described timing. The resin melt can be supplied at any time before the male and female molds are completely closed.

The resin melt can be supplied between the skin material and either of the male and female molds. Therefore, the present process can be applied for inner lining and outer lining.

The relative position of the male and female molds and the closing direction can be freely selected.

Specific examples of the skin material are woven or non-woven fabric, nets made of metals, fibers or thermoplastic resins, paper, metal foils, and a sheet or a film of a thermoplastic resin or elastomer. The skin material may be decorated with uneven patterns such as grain patterns, printing, dying and the like. In addition, the skin material may be made of foamed materials of thermoplastic resins or rubbers. Also, a laminate comprising at least two layers each made of the same material or different materials which

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



- 12 -

are bonded to each other with an adhesive can be used as the skin material. Before the skin material is supplied in the mold, a part or whole of the skin material may be preheated to adjust tensile stress and elongation.

As the resin to be molded by the process of the present invention, any of the conventional resins used in compression molding, injection molding and extrusion molding can be used. Specific examples of the resin are non-expandable or expandable resins of thermoplastic resins (e.g. polypropylene, polyethylene, polystyrene, acrylonitrile-styrene-butadiene copolymer, nylon, etc.), and thermoplastic elastomers (e.g. ethylene-propylene copolymer, styrene-butadiene copolymer, etc.). The resin may contain at least one additive such as fillers (e.g. inorganic fillers and glass fibers), pigments, lubricants, antistatic agents and the like.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced





Claims

1. A process for producing a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which process comprises the steps of:

supplying the skin material between a male mold and a female mold,

supplying a resin melt between the skin material and one of the male and female molds, and

closing the molds to mold the resin melt while removing the air trapped between the skin material and at least one of the molds.

2. The process according to claim 1, wherein the trapped air is removed through a pin hole made in the skin material.

3. The process according to claim 1, wherein the trapped air is removed through a puncture made in the skin material.

4. The process according to claim 1, wherein the trapped air is removed through a heat-resistant porous member embedded in at least one of the male and female molds.

5. The process according to claim 1, wherein the trapped air is removed through a slit formed on an inner wall of at least one of the male and female molds.

6. A mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein a heat-





- 14 -

resistant porous member is embedded in at least a part of an inner wall of at least one of the male and female molds.

7. The mold according to claim 6, which further comprises a through hole which communicates with the heat-resistant porous member.

8. A mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein a slit is provided on an inner wall of at least one of the male and female molds.

9. The mold according to claim 8, which further comprises a through hole which communicates with the slit.

10. A mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein at least one of the male and female molds has a pin on its inner wall surface.

11. The mold according to claim 10, wherein the pin is movably attached to the mold.

12. A mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold, wherein a hole is provided on an inner surface of at least one of the male and female molds which contacts the skin material.

13. The mold according to claim 12, wherein the hole is a through hole communicating with the exterior atmosphere.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced



THIS SHEET HAS BEEN
REPLACED



- 15 -

14. A mold for molding a multilayer molded article comprising a resin body and a skin material, which mold comprises a male mold and a female mold and means for removing the air trapped between the skin material and at least one of the molds while closing the molds to mold the resin melt.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced

