

DESCRIPTION

Contact Element System

The invention relates to a contact element system having a plurality of pin-type or needle-type
5 and electrically conductive contact elements of equal length, each having two end regions for
electrically contacting contact positions and each having an intermediate region located between
the end regions, wherein the contact elements can be elastically deflected in an arc in the
intermediate region under longitudinal loading, overcoming their bending rigidity, and are
designed with lamellar sections in the intermediate region such that they have at least two strips
10 which are substantially parallel to each other and run at a distance from one another.

Contact element systems of the type mentioned above are known from prior art. With regard to
the performance of an electrical test of an electrical test item, prior art teaches the establishment
of a physical contact between the electrically conductive contact positions of the test item and
the application of an electrical current and/or an electrical voltage for the detection of the
15 functional capability of the test item. The use of a contact head, in which a plurality of contact
elements is held, which are in contact with the contact positions of the test item at one end is
known for the establishment of the physical contact. In order to ensure that all contact positions
of the test item can safely come into physical contact, the contact elements are designed so that
they can compress in order to compensate for height differences between the contact positions
20 and thus ensure that all contact positions are in physical contact. In addition to the provision of
spring contact pins, which are made from several parts, it is also known to use integral contact
elements in the form of so-called contact or bending needles, which are characterized in that they
can be laterally - with respect to their longitudinal extension - deflected when a force (contact
force) is applied in the direction of their longitudinal extension. Optionally, these types of
25 contact elements have an arched or S-shaped portion even in the non-loaded state, so that a
deflection is always possible under load in the longitudinal direction. Because a large number of
physical contacts take place during the test operation, i.e. the contact elements are frequently
loaded and deflected, the durability and load capacity of the contact elements is of great interest.
In order to ensure a secure physical contact and at the same time a secure deflection of the
30 contact elements, contact elements are now known, for example, from the published patent

application DE 10 2008 023 761 A1, which have an intermediate region between the end regions of the respective contact element which has a lamellar shape. For this purpose, this intermediate region has two or more strips, which extend in the longitudinal direction of the contact element and run at least substantially parallel to one another. The strips are laterally spaced from each other. This type of contact element reduces the force required to deflect the respective contact element without affecting the function of the contact element.

It should be noted that the surface of the contact positions is not or only slightly damaged to ensure that no reliability problems are experienced after the installation of the test item. Therefore, the goal is to apply the lowest possible contact force, that is, the force acting perpendicularly on the contact position, which acts in the longitudinal direction of the contact element. A more reliable contact can, however, be achieved if a higher contact force is used. A compromise and/or the best-possible contact force is determined when test arrangements are configured, which, on the one hand, result in damage that is still acceptable but, on the other hand, allow for a reliable execution of the test. This contact force should act on all the contacts used in the contact arrangement or all contact positions of the test item in the same way to achieve an advantageous result.

The types of the contact positions differ from each other, however. A first group of contact positions may be used to transmit analog or digital signals and other contact positions may be used to power the test item. Thus, there are different requirements for the contact elements, which themselves act as an electrical conductor or are used as such. It is therefore advantageous if the contact elements can be optimized for their respective electrical function, for example for a power supply with a large cable cross-section or for a signal transmission with a small cable cross-section, to also optionally exploit an existing space.

The invention is therefore based on the object of creating a contact system, which, on the one hand, allows for an advantageous mechanical, physical contact between the contact positions of the test item, and, on the other hand, is optimally adapted to the electrical requirements of the test item.

The object of the invention is achieved by a contact element system with the features of claim 1. This has the advantage that the contact elements have the same mechanical properties in relation to the contact force or bending rigidity but offer different electrical resistances or different electrical properties. The contact elements are advantageously made of the same material, so that

the differences do not arise from the choice of material, which would also be possible in principle. Rather, the invention provides that at least two of the contact elements have different cross-sectional areas and differently shaped strips in the intermediate region, with the shapes of the strips being selected such that the at least two contact elements have the same bending
5 rigidity. Because the contact elements have the same bending rigidity, the contact forces acting on the respective contact positions of the test item are the same. Due to the different-sized cross-sectional areas of the contact elements in the intermediate region, however, the contact elements offer different electrical properties due to the total electrical resistance resulting in each case due to the cross-sectional area. When mounting a test arrangement consisting of this contact element
10 system, a selection of contact elements can be made, which are electrically configured for the respective test task in the best possible way and also have the same bending rigidity and thus the same contact force when contact is made.

In particular, the strips of the at least two contact elements may be of different lengths, which means that the shapes of the strips of the at least two contact elements thus differ in the length of
15 the strips. As the length of the strips increases, the bending rigidity of the contact elements decreases. Therefore, the contact element with the longer strips preferably has a cross-sectional shape in the intermediate region, which increases the bending rigidity and thereby compensates for the greater length of the strips. Conversely, for example, a smaller overall cross-sectional area may be selected in the one contact element, which reduces the bending rigidity of the
20 contact element as well, and the strips are extended to achieve the same bending rigidity in another contact element. As a result, the same bending rigidity can be achieved for both contact elements with different electrical properties.

Furthermore, it is preferably provided that the strips of the at least two contact elements have different depths. The term depth is understood to be the extension of the strips or of the contact
25 elements perpendicular to the longitudinal extension and perpendicular to the bending direction. Since the strips have different depths, the respective bending rigidity is different as well, with the bending rigidity increasing due to the increase in material.

Furthermore, it is preferably provided that the strips of the at least two contact elements have different widths. In this case, the width of the strips means the extension of the strips
30 perpendicular to the longitudinal extension and perpendicular to the depth, i.e. the extension which lies in the plane in which the strips are deflected in the event of a contact. As the width increases, the bending rigidity of the strips and thus of the respective contact element increases

as well. In this case, for example, the wide strips of one contact element may be compensated by the shorter strips of the other contact element to achieve the same or almost the same bending rigidity, to obtain the same bending rigidity in both contact elements.

5 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, at least two of the strips of the at least two contact elements may have different cross-sectional shapes. The cross-sectional shape of the respective lamella also influences the bending rigidity. Thus, the strips may, for example, have a triangular, rectangular, circular, oval or generally polygonal cross-section.

10 The at least two contact elements preferably have a different number of strips. Thus, for example, the bending rigidity of the one contact element increased by an increased depth is compensated by an additional lamella of the further contact element, in order to obtain the same bending rigidity.

15 Preferably, a first of the contact elements has a first number of strips with a first total cross-sectional area (=sum of the cross-sectional areas of all strips of the contact element), and a second of the contact elements has a second number of lamellas with a second total cross-sectional area, with the first number being greater than that second number and the first total cross-sectional area being larger than the second. This ultimately causes both contact elements to have the same bending rigidity, although they have different electrical resistances or line cross sections due to the reduced total cross-sectional area of the second contact element.

20 Particularly preferably, the depth of the strips of the first contact element is greater than that of the second, in order to keep the number of strips of the first contact element low but maintain the same bending rigidity. Furthermore, it is preferably provided that the length of the strips in this embodiment is longer than the length of the strips of the second contact element in order to keep the bending rigidity the same, with the result that, for example, the cross-sectional area of the first strips can be increased in return.

25 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the contact element system may have a plurality of the first and the second contact elements. Optionally, the contact element system has more than two different contact elements that meet the above requirements.

Further advantages and preferred features and combinations of features result from the description above and from the claims.

Below, the invention will be explained in more detail with reference to the drawing.

Figure 1 shows a simplified representation of a contact pattern of a contact arrangement,

Figure 2 shows a contact head of a test device in a sectional view,

5 Figure 3 shows a detailed sectional view of the test head and

Figure 4 shows a further detailed sectional view of the test head.

Figure 1 shows, in a simplified plan view, the pattern of a contact arrangement 1 for an electrical test item having a plurality of electrically conductive contact positions which are to be contacted by a test device and which are shown here as boxes. In a central region, which is characterized
10 hereby by a box 2, contact positions are provided, which are subjected to a high current to carry out the test or to supply the test item with electricity (larger boxes), while contact positions are present in the region outside of the box 2, which are subjected to a comparatively lower current, in particular for the transmission of signals (smaller boxes). This results for example from the
15 fact that the inner contact positions are current-carrying contact positions, while the outer contact positions are only signal contact positions for the transmission of analog or digital signals.

To be able to contact the different contact positions, the test device 1 advantageously has a contact head 3, which carries different types of contact elements 4, 5, which were optimized for establishing an electrical contact between the different contact positions.

Figure 2 shows the contact head 3 in a simplified sectional view. It has two guide plates 6, 7,
20 which run parallel to each other and are spaced apart from each other, and in which a plurality of guide openings 8 and 9 are formed. The guide openings 8, 9 are distributed in the guide plates 6, 7 in the form of a matrix, for example according to the contact arrangement 1 of the contact positions, as shown in Figure 1.

The guide openings 8, 9 of the two guide plates 6, 7 are arranged either in alignment or laterally
25 offset from one another, with one contact element of one of the guide openings of the two plates 6, 7 being guided.

The contact elements 4, 5 are designed as pin-shaped or needle-shaped contact elements 4, 5, which have the same length l . Their end regions serve as contact positions for the contacting of the contact elements of the test item or the superordinate test device, which carries out the test and applies a current or a voltage to the contact elements 4, 5 or receives current signals, for example. At their upper end region 4' or 5', the contact elements 4, 5 optionally each have a lateral projection 10 or 11, which prevents the contact elements 4, 5 from slipping through the respective guide opening 8 of the guide plate 6. In an intermediate region 12 or 13 located between the end regions 4', 5' and 4'', 5'', the contact elements 4, 5 are lamellar.

In this case, the left contact element 4 in Figure 2 has two strips 14, which run parallel to each other and are spaced from each other by a slot 15. The strips 14 and the slot 15 extend in the longitudinal direction of the contact element 4.

In contrast, the contact element 5 has three strips 16, which are separated by two slots 17. These strips 16 also run parallel to one another in the longitudinal direction of the contact element 5.

Figure 3A shows a cross section through the contact element 4 in the intermediate region according to line A-A. It can be seen here that the strips 14 have a depth t_1 which is greater than their respective width b_1 .

Figure 4 shows a cross section through the contact element 5 along the B-B line from Figure 2. The contact element 5 and thus its strips 16 have a greater depth t_2 compared to the depth t_1 of the contact element 4. At the same time, the individual strips 16 have a smaller width b_2 . In addition, the strips 16 and the slots 17, as shown in Figure 2, are longer and have a greater length l_5 than the strips 14 and the slot 15, which have a correspondingly smaller length l_4 .

Overall, however, the advantageous embodiment of the strips 14, 16 and the intermediate regions 12 and 13 causes both contact elements 4, 5, to have the same bending rigidity, but different total cross-sectional areas, which form the cross-sectional areas of the individual strips 14, 16.

In a contacting operation, the contact elements 4, 5 are axially subjected to a contact force along their longitudinal extension. As a result, the contact elements 5 may be deflected laterally in the intermediate region 12, 13 so that the contact ends 4'' and 5'' can deflect in the direction of the contact ends 4' and 5'. The bending rigidity defines the axial force to be applied which is necessary to cause the deflection. Due to the advantageous embodiment and the same bending

rigidity, the same contact force is necessary to achieve a deflection/compression. As a result, the force exerted by the contact elements 4, 5 on the contact positions of the test item, is also equal or nearly equal and leads to no or negligible damage to the contact positions but provides a sufficiently guaranteed contact at the same time.

- 5 Since, in addition, the cross-sectional areas of the strips 14, 16 are selected differently due to the different width, depth and number of strips 14, 16, different electrical conductor cross-sections or resistances of the contact elements 4, 5 result, which means that, for example, different currents run through the contact elements 4, 5, even if the same voltage is applied. As a result, an advantageous performance of the contacting and the testing of the test item is guaranteed.
- 10 In this case one contact element 4 each is provided for each of the outer contact positions according to the contact pattern 1 of Figure 1, and one contact element 5 each for each of the respective inner contact positions. Accordingly, a contact element system comprised of different contact elements 4, 5 is offered, which have the same or almost the same bending rigidity and thus the same contact force but provide different line cross-sections or total cross-sectional areas.
- 15 Optionally, the contact element system may also comprise further contact elements, which offer a different line cross-section with the same bending rigidity/contact force, so that the contact element system may comprise, for example, three or more different contact elements, which ensure the same or almost the same contact force/bending rigidity.

CLAIMS

1. Contact element system having a plurality of identically long, pin-shaped or needle-shaped
5 and electrically conductive contact elements (4,5), each having two end regions (4', 5', 4'', 5'') for electrically contacting contact positions and each having an intermediate region (12,13) between the end regions, wherein the contact elements (4,5) are formed so that they are elastically bendable in the intermediate region (12,13) in their longitudinal extension when a load is applied, overcoming their bending rigidity, and to this purpose, they have a lamellar shape in the
10 intermediate region (12,13) that allows them to have at least two strips (14,16) that run substantially parallel to each other and are spaced from each other, **characterized in that** at least two of the contact elements comprise different cross-section areas and differently shaped strips in the intermediate area (12,13), with the shapes of the strips (14,16) being chosen so that the contact elements (4,5) have the same or almost the same bending rigidity.
- 15 2. Contact element system according to claim 1, **characterized in that** the strips (14,16) of the at least two contact elements (4,5) are of a different length.
3. Contact element system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the strips (14,16) of the at least two contact elements (4,5) are of a different depth.
4. Contact element system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that**
20 the strips (14,16) of the at least two contact elements are of a different width.
5. Contact element system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** at least two of the strips (14,16) of the at least two contact elements have different cross-sectional shapes.
6. Contact element system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that**
25 the at least two contact elements (4,5) have a different number of strips (14,16).
7. Contact element system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** a first of the contact elements (5) has a first number of strips (16) with a first total cross-

sectional area, and a second of the contact elements (4) has a second number of strips (14) with a second total cross-sectional area, wherein the first number is greater than the second number and the first total cross-sectional area is greater than the second.

5 8. Contact element system according to claim 7, **characterized in that** the depth (t_2) of the strips (16) of the first contact element (4) is greater than that of the second.

9. Contact element system according to any one of claims 7 or 8, **characterized in that** the length (l_5) of the strips (16) of the first contact element (5) is greater than the length (l_4) of the strips (14) of the second contact element (4).

10 10. Contact element system according to one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** a plurality of first contact elements (5) and a plurality of second contact elements (4) are present.