

AN OPTICAL FIBRE RIBBON STRUCTURE INCORPORATING
ELECTRIC CONDUCTORS

This invention relates to optical fibre ribbon structures for the transmission of the ultra-violet, visible and infra-red regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, which regions, for convenience, will

5 hereinafter all be included in the generic term "light" and especially, but not exclusively, to optical fibre ribbon structures for use in the communications field adapted for transmission of light having a wave length within the range 0.8 to 1.9 micrometres.

10 The invention is particularly concerned with an optical fibre ribbon structure of the kind comprising a plurality of optical fibres arranged side by side and secured to one surface of a tape of plastics material.

It is an object of the present invention to
15 provide an improved optical fibre ribbon structure of the aforesaid kind which, in its preferred form, is especially, but not exclusively, suitable for use in an optical cable or other application where there is a risk that optical fibres will be subjected to a tensile
20 force.

According to the invention, the improved optical fibre ribbon structure comprises a plurality of optical fibres arranged side by side and extending lengthwise on and secured to one surface of a tape of plastics
25 material and at least two plastics insulated conductors,

at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on one side of the plurality of optical fibres and at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on the other side of the plurality of optical fibres, each insulated conductor having an overall diameter substantially greater than the overall diameter of each of the optical fibres.

10 Preferably, the plurality of optical fibres are arranged side by side and embedded in an elongate body of plastics material to form an optical fibre ribbon, which ribbon is secured to said surface of the plastics tape; preferably, also, each insulated conductor has an overall diameter substantially greater than the overall thickness of the optical fibre ribbon.

The optical fibre ribbon and the plastics insulated conductors are preferably secured to said surface of the plastics tape by fusion bonding or by an intermediate layer of resin or other adhesive.

Where the improved optical fibre ribbon structure is to be used in an optical cable or other application where there is a risk that optical fibres will be subjected to a substantial tensile force, preferably each conductor is of a resilient metal or metal alloy and each plastics insulated resilient conductor is set.

in such a form that the ribbon structure follows a path of smoothly curved undulations whose axes of curvature lie transverse to the longitudinal axis of the ribbon structure, the arrangement being such that, when the undulating ribbon structure is subjected to a tensile force, the ribbon structure will tend to straighten in a lengthwise direction against the action of the undulating resilient conductors thereby reducing the tensile force applied to the optical fibres and, when the tensile force is removed, the ribbon structure will return towards its original undulating form.

Preferably, the axes of curvature of the undulations lie parallel to one another and substantially normal to the longitudinal axis of the optical fibre ribbon structure.

For optical fibres having an overall diameter of 250 micrometres, preferably the radius of curvature of each undulation of the undulating optical fibre ribbon structure is not less than 40mm.

The smoothly curved undulations in the improved optical fibre ribbon structure are preferably formed by causing the improved optical fibre ribbon structure to travel in the direction of its length and to be partially wrapped around each of a plurality of transversely extending, longitudinally spaced formers of substantially circular or partially circular

cross-section travelling in the same direction as the
 advancing ribbon structure and preferably at such a
 speed that there is substantially no relative movement
 between the advancing formers and the ribbon structure
 travelling therebetween, the direction of wrap around
 one former being in the opposite circumferential
 direction to the direction of wrap around the or each
 adjacent former and the circumferential extent of wrap
 around each of the formers being such that each
 insulated resilient conductor is set in such a form that
 the optical fibre ribbon structure follows a path of
 smoothly curved undulations whose axes of curvature lie
 transverse to the longitudinal axis of the ribbon
 structure.

Preferably, the transversely extending
 longitudinally spaced formers are carried on a pair of
 advancing endless belts, the formers on one belt
 inter-engaging between the formers on the other belt.

Each of the formers may have a radius of
 curvature substantially less than the desired radius of
 curvature of each undulation of the undulating optical
 fibre ribbon structure but since, during manufacture of
 the undulating optical fibre ribbon structure, the
 ribbon structure is caused to follow a path of smoothly
 curved undulations whose radii of curvature are
 substantially less than the desired minimum value for
 only a very brief period, no permanent damage is caused

to the optical fibres which would affect their light transmission efficiency or their long term strength.

Preferably, the set in the insulated resilient conductors is mechanically formed by causing the advancing optical fibre ribbon structure to be partially wrapped around each of a plurality of formers of such diameter and so spaced apart and staggered with respect to the rectilinear axis of the advancing ribbon structure that the insulated resilient conductors are deformed beyond their elastic limit.

The invention also includes an optical cable having an outer sheath of plastics material and having, extending throughout its length, at least one bore in which is loosely housed at least one improved optical fibre ribbon structure as hereinbefore described.

The sheath may bound a single bore extending along the length of the optical cable or it may surround two or more separately formed tubes of plastics material, the bore of at least one of said tubes having loosely housed therein at least one improved optical fibre ribbon structure as hereinbefore described.

In all cases, the or each bore loosely housing an undulating optical fibre ribbon structure may be substantially filled throughout its length with a greasy water-impermeable medium, such as a water-impermeable medium consisting of, or comprising as a major constituent, petroleum jelly, or with a silicone gel.

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The invention is further illustrated by a description, by way of example, of a preferred optical fibre ribbon structure with reference to the accompanying drawing which shows, on an enlarged scale,
5 a transverse cross-sectional view of the optical fibre ribbon structure.

Referring to the drawing, the preferred optical fibre ribbon structure comprises a tape 1 of plastics material which has a width of 6mm and a thickness of
10 500 micrometres, two plastics insulated copper conductors 2 which extend lengthwise along and are secured by fusion bonding to marginal portions of one surface of the tape and, fusion bonded to said surface of the tape between the insulated conductors, an optical
15 fibre ribbon 3 comprising a plurality of optical fibres 4 arranged side by side and embedded in an elongate body 5 of plastics material. Each plastics insulated conductor 2 has an overall diameter of 1mm and the optical fibre ribbon 3 has an overall thickness of
20 0.4mm. Each plastics insulated copper conductor 2 is set in such a form that the optical fibre ribbon structure follows a path of smoothly curved undulations whose axes of curvature lie transverse to the longitudinal axis of the ribbon structure. When the
25 undulating optical fibre ribbon structure is subjected to a tensile force, the ribbon structure will tend to

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straighten in a lengthwise direction against the action of the undulating copper conductors 2 thereby reducing the tensile force applied to the optical fibres 4 and, when the tensile force is removed, the optical fibre 5 ribbon structure will return towards its original undulating form.



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CLAIMS:

1. An optical fibre ribbon structure comprising a plurality of optical fibres arranged side by side and extending lengthwise on and secured to one surface of a tape of plastics material and at least two plastics insulated conductors, at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on one side of the plurality of optical fibres and at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on the other side of the plurality of optical fibres, each insulated conductor having an overall diameter substantially greater than the overall diameter of each of the optical fibres.

2. An optical fibre ribbon structure comprising an optical fibre ribbon which comprises a plurality of optical fibres arranged side by side and embedded in an elongate body of plastics material and which extends lengthwise on and is secured to one surface of a tape of plastics material and at least two plastics insulated conductors, at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on one side of the optical fibre ribbon and at least one of which insulated conductors extends lengthwise on and is secured to said surface of the tape on the other side of the optical fibre ribbon,



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each insulated conductor having an overall diameter substantially greater than the overall diameter of each of the optical fibres.

3. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in Claim 2, wherein each insulated conductor has an overall diameter substantially greater than the overall thickness of the optical fibre ribbon.

4. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in Claim 2 or 3, wherein the optical fibre ribbon and the plastics insulated conductors are secured to said surface of the plastics tape by fusion bonding.

5. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in Claim 2 or 3, wherein the optical fibre ribbon and the plastics insulated conductors are secured to said surface of the plastics tape by an intermediate layer of resin or other adhesive.

6. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein each conductor is of a resilient metal or metal alloy and each plastics insulated resilient conductor is set in such a form that the ribbon structure follows a path of smoothly curved undulations whose axes of curvature lie transverse to the longitudinal axis of the ribbon structure, the arrangement being such that, when the undulating ribbon structure is subjected to a tensile force, the ribbon structure will tend to straighten in a



lengthwise direction against the action of the undulating resilient conductors thereby reducing the tensile force applied to the optical fibres and, when the tensile force is removed, the ribbon structure will return towards its original undulating form.

7. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in Claim 6, wherein the axes of curvature of the undulations lie parallel to one another and substantially normal to the longitudinal axis of the optical fibre ribbon structure.

8. An optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in Claim 6 or 7, wherein each optical fibre has an overall diameter of 250 micrometres and the radius of curvature of each undulation of the undulating optical fibre ribbon structure is not less than 40mm.

9. An optical cable having an outer sheath of plastics material and having, extending throughout its length, at least one bore in which is loosely housed at least one optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims.

10. An optical cable having an outer sheath of plastics material surrounding two or more separately formed tubes of plastics material, the bore of at least one of said tubes having loosely housed therein at least one optical fibre ribbon structure as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 3.



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11. An optical cable as claimed in Claimed 9 or 10,
wherein the or each bore loosely housing an undulating
optical fibre ribbon structure is substantially filled
throughout its length with a greasy water-impermeable
5 medium or with a silicone gel.

12. An optical fibre ribbon structure substantially as
hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in
the accompanying drawing.
