

Power cable, method for production and use thereof.Technical Field

5 The present application relates to power cables, their method of production and their use in subsea applications.

Background

10 Over the last decades, unexpected breakdowns of subsea high-voltage (HV) power cables have increased. In most cases such breakdowns seem to be caused by the use of crosslinked polyethylene (PEX), a high-complexity material. PEX was first introduced as a HV cable manufacturing material in response to a change in design requirements for onshore cables, accommodating conductor operating temperatures up to 90°C, instead of temperatures up to 70°C. This temperature requirement seems to be irrelevant in the generally cold subsea ocean
15 environments, where ambient temperatures hardly reach more than a few degrees above 0°C.

From a materials perspective, there is no reason why non-crosslinked polymers such as ethylene, polyethylene and ethylene propene rubber cannot be used in
20 HV cables operating up to 66 kilo Volt, especially when conductor electric field stresses are maintained at a reduced level. However, in order to reduce electric field stresses in HV cables to an acceptable level, the outer diameter of the conductor must be increased, which, in turn, increases the costs of the external cable armoring to prohibitive levels and comes at a severe weight penalty, while
25 further reducing the ease of handling of the HV cable.

Summary of the invention

30 The present invention concerns a power cable, comprising a tension member, placed in the centre of said power cable; a first insulation layer, the tension member being embedded in the first insulation layer; and an outer protective sheath; wherein said power cable further comprises one or more first aluminum conductors, embedded within the first insulation layer.

The present invention also concerns a process for producing the inventive power cable, the process comprising the step of extruding a first polymeric insulation layer onto the tension member and the one or more conductors in one single step.

- 5 Finally, the present invention concerns the use of the inventive power cable, in medium-voltage to high-voltage subsea applications, such as an offshore windmill cable infrastructure or driving of subsea pumps.

The present invention utilizes aluminum based conductors, which demand an
10 increased conductor diameter compared to conventional copper based conductors. Furthermore, the present invention replaces the conventional outer armoring with an internal tension member placed in the center of the power cable. By utilizing an internal tension member, the outer diameter of the conductor is further increased, in that it is now radially extended to accommodate the tension
15 member. With this set-up, the electrical field stress is significantly decreased, as compared to conventional power cables and the expensive external armoring can safely be omitted. Furthermore, because of the reduced electrical field stress, insulation thickness can be reduced and a solid, non-crosslinked ethylene, polyethylene or ethylene propene rubber material may be used as an insulator,
20 thereby replacing PEX and solving the aforementioned problems.

A further advantage of providing an internal tension member and omitting the conventional external armor, is that the overall cable diameter, the overall cable weight and the cable bending stiffness are reduced. The low specific gravity of the
25 power cable according to the present invention, when submerged in water, as well as its decreased stiffness, allow for low clamping forces and improved handling when installing the power cable, such as during caterpillar installation. The power cable according to the invention is therefore more flexible than conventional cables and consequently, easier to strap.

- 30 Finally, omitting the conventional external armor results in a significant cost reduction, as external armor typically comprises 40% of the total materials cost of a power cable.

A further advantage of the power cable according to the invention is that the aluminum conductor renders semi-conductor insulation unnecessary, thereby reducing the number of elements required to form the power cable, as well as reducing the overall diameter of the power cable itself.

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Finally, the solid insulation material renders the power cable unusually crush resistant, as compared to conventional power cables. The solid design and the consequent lack of any voids, such as present in PEX foam, ensures that the power cable according to the invention is of the so-called super dry design. A
10 super dry design implies a true dry construction, in which there is no potential risk for voids present in the cable material to fill up with water at any one point in the service lifetime of the cable.

Figures

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Figure 1 is a schematic cross-section of a power cable according to a first embodiment of the invention.

Figure 2 is a schematic cross-section of a power cable according to a second embodiment of the invention.

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Figure 3 is a schematic cross-section of a power cable according to a third embodiment of the invention.

Figures 4A and B show two multi-core power cable configurations.

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Detailed description

Figure 1 is a schematic cross-section of a power cable according to a first embodiment of the invention. The power cable comprises a tension member 1, placed in the centre of said power cable, a first insulation layer 3 surrounding the
30 tension member 1, and is protected from the environment by an outer sheath 9. Embedded within the first insulation layer 3 are one or more, preferably three, first aluminum conductors 4. Each first aluminum conductor may have a circular cross-section, where the diameter is the same for each conductor. The conductor

diameter may be chosen according to the desired application for the power cable.

Furthermore, the power cable may comprise a first semi-conducting outer screen 2 surrounding the tension member 1, and a second semi-conducting outer screen 5, surrounding the insulation layer 3. The power cable may optionally comprise a first metallic screen 6 and/or a second metallic screen 7, wherein the first and/or second metallic screens may have various functions, such as facilitating failure search. The first and/or second metallic screens are wrapped by a semi-conductive tape wrapping 8.

For a power cable with a circular cross-section and two or more first aluminum conductors 4, the conductors are preferably arranged in a circumferentially equidistant manner. This is shown in figure 1 for an embodiment with three conductors. In medium-voltage (up to 1 kV) to high-voltage (above 1kV) applications, three or more phases are usually required; the power cable comprises a corresponding number of conductors.

Typical mechanical properties for an exemplary power cable according to the first embodiment are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Parameter	Value	Unit
Outer Diameter	90.3	[mm]
Mass Empty	7.6	[kg/m]
Mass Filled	7.6	[kg/m]
Mass Filled And Flooded	7.6	[kg/m]
Submerged Weight Empty	1.1	[kg f/m]
Submerged Weight Filled	1.1	[kg f/m]
Submerged Weight Filled And Flooded	1.1	[kg f/m]
Specific Weight Ratio	1.2	[-]
Subm. Weight Dia. Ratio	11.7	[kg f/m ²]
Axial Stiffness	69.7	[MN]
Bending Stiffness	2.5	[kNm ²]
Bending Stiffness (friction free)	2.3	[kNm ²]
Torsion Stiffness	1.9	[kNm ²]
Tension/Torsion Factor	-0.05	[deg/m/kN]

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of a power cable cross-section according to a second embodiment of the invention. Features corresponding to the first embodiment are designated by the same reference signs. The second embodiment differs from the first embodiment in that additionally a second insulation layer 3', preferably surrounded by a third semi-conducting outer screen 5', is provided. Said second insulation layer 3' surrounds the first insulation layer 3 and, if present, the second semi-conducting outer screen 5. Embedded within the second insulation layer 3' are one or more second aluminum conductors 4'. Each second aluminum conductor may have a circular cross-section, the diameters of the first aluminum conductors 4 and the second aluminum conductors 4' preferably being the same.

For a power cable with a circular cross-section and two or more second aluminum conductors 4', the conductors are preferably arranged in a circumferentially equidistant manner. This is shown in figure 2 for an embodiment with three conductors.

Figure 2 displays a power cable comprising three first and three second aluminum conductors 4, 4', configured such that the mid-point of each one first aluminum

conductor 4 lies on a straight line through the mid-point of the power cable and the mid-point of exactly one second aluminum conductor 4'. The configuration of figure 2 may instead comprise two, four or more first and second aluminum conductors. This configuration allows the power cable to be utilized in operating two medium-
5 voltage to high-voltage applications simultaneously. For example, when the power cable is utilized in an AC application, two subsea pumps may be operated at the same time, each provided with power by its own set of aluminum conductors 4 and 4'. Alternatively, when the power cable is used as a DC export cable, the three first aluminum conductors 4 may function as a DC conductor phase, whereas the three
10 second aluminum conductors 4' may function as earth lines. The latter use is of specific relevance for export of power from sea-based windmills.

The tension member 1 comprises a high-tensile material, such as steel, preferably high-tensile steel, a composite material or an aramid (Kevlar) material.
15 Furthermore, the tension member 1 may be solid, e.g., in the form of a rod, a wire or a wire-bundle. Alternatively, the tension member may be hollow, e.g., in the form of a tube. The tension member 1 may comprise a further element, such as a temperature sensor, located in its center.

20 A schematic cross-section of a power cable according to a third embodiment of the invention is shown in figure 3. In this embodiment, a tension member 1 in the form of a wire-bundle is surrounded by one or more first aluminum conductors 4, in the form of one or more rings of wires, both of which are embedded in the first insulation layer 3. A second insulation layer 5 is provided, separated from the first
25 insulation layer 3 by a first semi-conductive outer sheet 2.

One or more power cables according to the third embodiment may be bundled into a multi-core power cable, variations of which are shown in figure 4A and B. A multi-core power cable may comprise one or more power cables 10 according to the
30 third embodiment, optionally one or more weight elements 11 and optionally a further functional element 12. The functional element may comprise, e.g., a fiber-optic cable or a signal cable. The weight elements 11 may comprise zinc or lead. The one or more power cables 10, weight elements 11 and functional element 12

are embedded in an extruded insulation layer 13. An outer semi-conductive screen is provided, surrounding the insulation layer 13. The multi-core power cable is protected from the environment by an outer sheath, surrounding the outer semi-conductive screen.

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Figures 4A and B show a configuration with three power cables 10 and one further functional element 12. In Figure 4A two weight elements 11 are provided, in figure 4C a large number of weight elements 11 are provided.

10 Typical mechanical properties for an exemplary power cable according to the embodiment of figure 4A are provided in Table 2; the various cable mass, submerged weight, specific weight ratio and stiffness values listed in Table 1 may, naturally be varied depending on the amount and type of weight elements present.

15 **Table 2**

Parameter	Value	Unit
Outer Diameter	96.1	[mm]
Mass Empty	14.3	[kg/m]
Mass Filled	14.3	[kg/m]
Mass Filled And Flooded	15.1	[kg/m]
Submerged Weight Empty	6.8	[kgf/m]
Submerged Weight Filled	6.9	[kgf/m]
Submerged Weight Filled And Flooded	7.7	[kgf/m]
Specific Weight Ratio	2.0	[-]
Subm. Weight. Dia. Ratio	79.7	[kgf/m ²]
Axial Stiffness	150.3	[MN]
Bending Stiffness	3.4	[kNm ²]
Bending Stiffness (friction free)	2.3	[kNm ²]
Torsion Stiffness	4.5	[kNm ²]
Tension/Torsion Factor	-0.09	[deg/m/kN]

20 A process for producing the power cable according to the invention, comprises the step of extruding the first insulation layer 3 onto the tension member 1 and the one

or more first aluminum conductors 4. Consequently, the tension member 1 and the one or more first aluminum conductors 4 become embedded within the first insulation layer 3. Furthermore, all of the one or more second aluminum conductors 4' are embedded within the second insulation layer 3. In order to
5 produce a power cable according to the second embodiment, the second insulation layer 3' is extruded onto the one or more second aluminum conductors 4' in a further process step. The first and second process steps may be executed in sequence, extruding the second insulation layer 3' onto an already extruded first insulation layer 3, or simultaneously, by means of a co-extrusion.

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The process according to the invention is contrary to production methods for conventional power cables, where each conductor is first embedded within its own insulation layer, upon which the desired number of thus insulated conductors are bundled together and held in place by a separate outer layer. Consequently, the
15 process according to the present invention achieves considerable cost-savings and is much simpler to implement as compared to conventional power cable production processes.

The first, second and third semi-conducting outer screens 2, 5, 5' comprise a
20 polymer, preferably polyethylene, polystyrene or polyamide.

The first and second insulation layers 3, 3' comprise a non-crosslinked polymer, preferably ethylene, polyethylene or ethylene propene rubber.

The optional first and second metallic screens 6, 7 comprise copper, preferably annealed copper, or lead. The metallic screens are preferably provided in the form
25 of a tape or sheath. The semi-conductive tape wrapping 8 comprises a polyamide (nylon). Finally, the outer sheath 9 comprises a high-density polyethylene, which may have been extruded onto the underlying layers or may have been wrapped, in the form of a tape, around the underlying layers.

30 Although the power cable in figures 1, 2 and 3 is presented as having a circular cross-section, this is merely for illustrative purposes and by no means limiting; other cross-section geometries could be used, such as elliptical or rectangular.

The power cable according to the invention may further be provided with a lead jacket, surrounding the outer sheath. Such a lead jacket adds weight, which may be desirable for subsea applications. Furthermore, the lead jacket increases the service life expectancy of the power cable considerably, up to 50 years.

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The foregoing embodiments and examples are by no means limiting, the scope of the invention being defined by the appended claims.