

Controller unit for controlling the speed of a motor driving an oil injected compressor and method of controlling said speed.

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This invention relates to a controller unit for controlling the speed of a motor for driving an oil injected compressor, said controller comprising: a data connection configured to connect the controller unit with measuring means; a first
10 module configured to receive data through said data connection, wherein said data comprises: a measurement of a working pressure of said compressor and a working speed of the motor, said first module further being configured to receive a measured or retrieved ambient temperature value.

15 The condensate formation within an oil injected compressor is a known problem. If such condensate is allowed to form it can damage the quality of oil injected therein or even the casing or the compressor element due to its corrosive effects.

20 One proposed method of avoiding such risks is the control of the temperature within the compressor by adjusting the flow of injected oil through a mixing valve, as proposed in WO 2007/045,052 A, having ATLAS COPCO AIRPOWER NV as applicant. The method described therein aims at maintaining
25 the temperature of the compressed gas above the dew point by setting the temperature of the lubricating and cooling

oil at a desired value and controlling the distribution of such cooling oil through the mixing valve.

While such a proposed method provides a valid solution for overcoming the problem, the piping and the overall structure of the compressor would have to be decided upon its design, such a solution not being feasible for an existing unit without the need of considerable work and costs.

Another aspect worth considering is the complexity of the overall design once such method is implemented, such complexity having an impact on the frequency of the maintenance process and its costs.

Taking the above drawbacks into account it is an object of the present invention to provide a solution for avoiding the formation of condensate within the compressed gas of an oil injected compressor through an easy to implement solution.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a cost efficient solution, able to improve the working principle of existing units without the need of undergoing a significant intervention and without the risk of increasing the maintenance costs once such solution is implemented.

Accordingly, the solution proposed aims at considerably improving the efficiency of the unit while increasing the lifetime of the oil injected compressor and its components as well as of the oil used therein.

The present invention solves at least one of the above and/or other problems by providing a controller unit for controlling the speed of a motor for driving an oil injected compressor, said controller unit comprising:

- 5 - a data connection configured to connect the controller unit with measuring means;
- a first module configured to receive data through said data connection, wherein said data comprises: a measurement of a working pressure of said compressor
- 10 and a working speed of the motor;
- said first module further being configured to receive a measured or retrieved ambient temperature value;

characterised in that the controller unit further comprises

- 15 - a processing unit provided with an algorithm for determining a minimum working speed of the motor on the basis of the measured working pressure, the ambient temperature and a dew point temperature;
- a comparator unit configured to compare the determined minimum working speed with the retrieved working speed
- 20 of the motor;
- said processing unit further comprising a signal generating unit configured to send a signal to said motor for increasing the working speed of the motor to at least the determined minimum working speed, if said
- 25 retrieved working speed is lower than the determined minimum working speed.

Because the controller unit uses the measured values of the working pressure and the working speed of the motor, such a controller can be easily installed on any existing units without the need of major interventions for introducing
5 additional piping or fittings.

Typically, an existing compressor makes use of such measured values to adapt the working pattern in order to meet the demand at a user's network and because of this, the controller unit according to the present invention could
10 simply be connected to an existing controller or simply replace such an existing controller, considerably reducing the complexity of implementation within existing functioning units.

Another benefit of the controller unit according to the
15 present invention is the low impact on the productivity of existing units, since the intervention for connecting a controller unit according to the present invention can be done very fast and the improved existing unit can be up and running in a very short time interval.

20 By maintaining the working speed of the motor at least at the same value as the determined minimum working speed, the controller unit maintains the temperature of the system above or approximately above the condensation point, reducing or even eliminating the risks of condensate to form
25 within the oil injected compressor.

Consequently, the controller unit according to the present invention provides a very easy to implement and cost

effective solution for existing compressors, improving the efficiency of such units and increasing the lifetime of the oil used for cooling and lubricating purposes.

It is further known that if such condensate forms within an oil injected compressor, even the compressor element or its casing can experience damages or can even be destroyed due to the corrosive effects of such condensate. By using a controller unit according to the present invention such risks are being minimized or even avoided and the lifetime of the oil injected compressor is increased.

Yet another benefit of the controller unit according to the present invention is that, by using the measured working pressure, a measured or retrieved ambient temperature and the working speed of the motor, the controller unit is actively customizing the working parameters in such a way that the turndown of the oil injected compressor is reduced. By reducing the turndown, the lifetime of the oil injected compressor is increased and its efficiency is maintained.

In the context of the present invention the turndown should be understood as the performance of the oil injected compressor and can be defined as the ratio between the minimum free air delivery and the maximum free air delivery.

The free air delivery should be understood as the volume of air at the compressed air outlet calculated at a pressure of one bar. The minimum free air delivery being determined at a minimum speed of the motor driving the compressor element at which the demand at the user's network is met;

whereas, the maximum free air delivery is being determined at a maximum speed of the motor driving the compressor element.

The present invention is further directed to a method of
5 controlling the speed of the motor driving an oil injected compressor, the method comprising at least the following steps:

- measuring a working pressure of the oil injected compressor and sending the measured value to a first
10 module of a controller unit;
- sending the speed of the motor and a measured or retrieved ambient temperature to said first module;

characterised in that the method further comprises the steps of:

- 15 - determining a minimum working speed of the motor on the basis of the measured working pressure, ambient temperature and a dew point temperature; and
- comparing the determined minimum working speed with the retrieved working speed of the motor and, if said
20 retrieved working speed is lower than the determined minimum working speed, increasing the working speed of said motor to at least the determined minimum working speed.

Because the method according to the present invention uses
25 standard measurements and applies a relatively simple algorithm, the lifetime of the oil injected compressor and

of the oil used therein is increased through a simple and easy to implement method that does not require additional computational power or non-standard electronic components.

The present invention is further directed to an oil injected
5 compressor configured to apply the method according to the present invention.

In the context of the present invention it should be understood that the benefits presented with respect to the controller unit for controlling the speed of a motor driving
10 an oil injected compressor also apply for the method of controlling the speed of the motor driving an oil injected compressor and to the oil injected compressor applying such a method.

With the intention of better showing the characteristics of
15 the invention, some preferred configurations according to the present invention are described hereinafter by way of an example, without any limiting nature, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

figure 1 schematically represents an oil injected
20 compressor according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

figure 2 schematically represents a controller unit according to an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 1 illustrates an oil injected compressor 1 comprising
25 at least a compressor element 2 driven by a motor 3. The compressor element 2 having an air inlet 4 through which air

at atmospheric pressure is drawn in and a compressed air outlet 5.

The compressed air outlet 5 being further in fluid communication with the inlet 6 of an oil separator 7, wherein
5 the oil is removed from the compressed air.

The oil separator 7 further comprises an outlet conduit 8 through which purified compressed air is supplied to a user's network (not shown).

The oil removed from the compressed air within the oil
10 separator 7 can be further re-injected in the compressor element 2 for lubrication and cooling purposes.

The oil injected compressor 1 further comprises a controller unit 9, receiving measurement data from measurement means 10 and 11, positioned on the compressed air outlet 5.

15 The controller unit 9 preferably further comprises a data connection 12 with the motor 3 for receiving information concerning the working speed, rpm, of said motor 3.

In the context of the present invention it should be understood that the oil injected compressor may comprise
20 additional components with their additional fittings and piping, such as for example filters removing impurities potentially entering the oil injected compressor, a cooler for cooling the oil extracted from the compressed air before redirecting it to the compressor element 2 and, possibly a
25 dryer for drying the compressed air before guiding it to the user's network. For the sake of the present invention only

a minimum number of components have been shown in the accompanying drawing.

Furthermore, in the context of the present invention it should be understood that the functions achieved by the different components included herein, can be also achieved
5 with the help of other components, and the present invention should not be limited to such layout.

In the context of the present invention the oil injected compressor 1 should be understood as the complete compressor
10 installation, including the compressor element 2, all the typical connection pipes and valves, the compressor unit housing and possibly the motor 3 driving the compressor element 2.

In the context of the present invention, the compressor
15 element 2 should be understood as the compressor element casing in which the compression process takes place by means of a rotor or through a reciprocating movement.

In the context of the present invention, said compressor element 2 can be selected from a group comprising: a screw,
20 a tooth, a scroll, a rotary vane, etc.

Returning to the oil injected compressor of figure 1, the controller unit 9 according to the present invention is capable of controlling the speed of the motor 3 driving said oil injected compressor 1 through said data connection 12.

25 Accordingly, it should be understood that said data connection 12 allows a bidirectional data communication: on

one hand, the controller unit 9 receives data concerning the speed of the motor 3 and, on the other hand, the controller unit 9 is able to send data to said motor 3 for subsequently controlling its speed.

5 For receiving measurements from the oil injected compressor 1, the controller unit 9 further comprises at least a first data connection 13 and a second data connection 14, allowing a data exchange between the measurement means 10 and 11 and said controller unit 9.

10 Preferably, through said first data connection 13 and second data connection 14, the measuring means 10 and 11 provide: a measurement of the working pressure, p_w , and of the working temperature, t_w , respectively.

Accordingly, the measurement means 10 and 11 can be in the
15 shape of a pressure sensor 10 and a temperature sensor 11 respectively, preferably positioned on the flow conduit of the compressed air outlet 5.

Further, the controller unit 9 is receiving the working speed, rpm, of the motor 3 through data connection 12.

20 Preferably, the controller unit 9 further makes use of a measured or retrieved ambient temperature, T_{ambient} .

If said ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , is being measured, the controller unit 9 further comprises a third data connection
15 to a second temperature sensor 16 or to a thermometer,
25 positioned in the vicinity of the oil injected compressor

or positioned on the air inlet 4. Said third data connection 15 being a wired or wireless data connection.

In another embodiment according to the present invention, if said third data connection 15 is a wireless data connection, such wireless data connection can be realized through: radio, Bluetooth or through an internet connection, for retrieving the measured or even forecasted ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , of the geographical area where the oil injected compressor 1 is located.

Alternatively, the controller unit 9 can further comprise a user interface (not shown), through which a manual input of the ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , can be performed by a user of the oil injected compressor 1.

Preferably, the controller unit 9 can comprise four main modules: a first module 17 to which data connection 12, the first data connection 13, the second data connection 14 and the third data connection 15 are linked; a second module 18 comprising a processing unit 18a (not shown) for processing the received data, a third module 19 comprising a comparator unit 19a and a fourth module 20 comprising a signal generating unit 20a.

The processing unit 18a is further provided with an algorithm determining a minimum working speed, rpm_{min} , of the motor 3 on the basis of the measured working pressure, p_w , received through the first data connection 13, ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , received through the third data connection 15 and a dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, said dew

point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, being determined on the basis of said measured working pressure, p_w , and the measured working temperature, t_w , said measured working temperature, t_w , being received through the second data connection 14.

5 The comparator unit 19a, part of the third module 19 is comparing the determined minimum working speed, rpm_{min} , with the retrieved working speed, rpm , of the motor 3. Accordingly, the first module 17 is preferably communicating with the second module 18 and the third module 19 in order
10 to send all the relevant needed details.

If, after the comparison, said retrieved working speed, rpm , is lower than the determined minimum working speed, rpm_{min} , the processing unit 18a further communicates with the signal generating unit 20a, part of the fourth module 20, for
15 sending a signal to said motor 3 for increasing the working speed, rpm , of the motor 3 to at least the determined minimum working speed, rpm_{min} .

In the context of the present invention, it should be understood that any of: said data connection 12, the first
20 data connection 13, the second data connection 14 and/or the third data connection 15 can be a wired or a wireless connection.

Further, said motor 3 can be a fixed speed motor, in which case said motor 3 is provided with an inverter or a valve
25 positioned on the air inlet 4, controlling the volume of air reaching the compressor element 2 and consequently modifying the speed of said motor 3.

In a preferred embodiment according to the present invention, for achieving a simpler design with an easier control thereof, the motor 3 is a variable speed motor.

In another embodiment according to the present invention,
5 the controller unit 9 can be part of the oil injected compressor 1 or can be placed in the vicinity of said oil injected compressor 1 and communicate through a wired or wireless connection with the individual components part of said oil injected compressor 1 such as: the measurement
10 means 9 and 10 and the motor 3.

In yet another embodiment according to the present invention, the controller unit 9 can be in wired or wireless communication with an existing controller (not shown), part of the oil injected compressor 1.

15 Further, depending on the requirements of the user of said oil injected compressor 1 and possibly on its aging factor, the sampling rate for the retrieval of: the working speed, rpm, the working pressure, p_w , the measured working temperature, t_w , and of the ambient temperature, $T_{ambient}$, can
20 be any value chosen in the interval between 0.5 μ Hz (microhertz) and 60 kHz (kilohertz).

As an example and not limiting thereto, such sampling rate can be chosen as any value between 10 hertz and 40 hertz, more preferably, such sampling rate can be chosen as any
25 value between 20 hertz and 30 hertz, even more preferably such sampling rate can be chosen as approximately 25 hertz.

It should be understood that such sampling rate can be different for the different measured or retrieved parameters. For example, if we consider the measurement or retrieval of the ambient temperature, since sudden
5 variations of such parameter are not often encountered, the sampling rate can be chosen towards the beginning of the interval, such as for example at 0.5 μ Hz, or can even be performed for a number of times per day, such as for example two times per day.

10 In the context of the present invention, said sampling rate should be understood as the frequency with which the measurements are being performed. In other words it should be understood as the time interval between two subsequent measurements.

15 In a preferred embodiment according to the present invention, the controller unit 9 receives said measurement of the working pressure, p_w , working temperature, t_w , and the working speed, rpm, of the motor 3 in real time.

For a more accurate calculation, the algorithm is further
20 configured to compare the measured working temperature, t_w , with a determined dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$.

Further, the algorithm can be configured to determine the dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, by calculation on the basis of the measured working pressure, p_w , the ambient
25 temperature, T_{ambient} , and a retrieved or determined relative humidity, RH.

The working principle is very simple, and as follows.

During the functioning of the oil injected compressor 1, the working pressure, p_w , and the working temperature, t_w , are being measured at the compressed air outlet 5. The measured
5 values being sent to a first module of a controller unit 9.

The oil injected compressor comprising a first data connection 13 for sending the measured working pressure, p_w , to the controller unit 9; and a second data connection 14, for sending the measured working temperature, t_w , to said
10 controller unit 9.

Further the working speed, rpm, of the motor 3 is also identified and sent to the controller unit 9 through a data connection 12.

For an accurate assessment, the controller unit 9 further
15 receives a measured or retrieved ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , through a third data connection 15.

Preferably, the above identified measured parameters are being sent to a first module 17 part of the controller unit 9.

20 As illustrated in figure 2, the controller unit 9 according to the present invention can comprise a first module 17 receiving the measured parameters, a second module 18 provided with a processing unit 18a for processing the received data, a third module 19 comprising a comparator and
25 a fourth module 20 comprising a signal generating unit 20a.

In the context of the present invention it should not be excluded that the functions performed by said second module 18 and said third module 19 to be integrated in one module.

It should further not be excluded that such controller unit
5 9 can comprise only one module having a processing unit 18a and all needed electronic interfaces for receiving measurements, generating an electrical signal, sending calculated parameters to other components of the oil injected compressor 1 and ultimately possibly influencing
10 their working parameters.

The controller unit 9 is further using the received measured parameters such as the measured working pressure, p_w , and the measured working temperature, t_w , to calculate the dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$.

15 The calculated dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, and the measured or retrieved ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , being further used for determining a minimum working speed, rpm_{min} , of the motor 3.

The controller unit 9 is further comparing the retrieved
20 working speed, rpm , of the motor 3 with the determined working speed, rpm_{min} , and if the retrieved working speed, rpm , is lower than the determined minimum working speed, rpm_{min} , the controller unit will preferably generate an electrical signal through the data connection 12 and will
25 increase the working speed, rpm , of said motor 3 to at least the determined minimum working speed, rpm_{min} .

In another embodiment according to the present invention, for a more accurate determination of the minimum working speed, $\text{rpm}_{\min}$, the controller unit 9 is further considering the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , injected in said oil
5 injected compressor 1. Consequently, in such a case, the minimum working speed, $\text{rpm}_{\min}$, is determined on the basis of the working temperature, t_w , a temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , injected in said oil injected compressor 1 and a retrieved or determined relative humidity, RH, said working
10 temperature, t_w , being retrieved through the temperature sensor 11 positioned on the compressor air outlet 5, or said working temperature, t_w , can be further calculated by applying a known formula. Similarly, the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , being determined through measurements or being
15 calculated through a known formula.

In another embodiment according to the present invention, the controller unit 9 is further comparing the working temperature, t_w , with the calculated dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, and if the working temperature, t_w , is lower than
20 the calculated dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, the controller unit 9 increases the speed of the motor 3, such that condensate is not allowed to form within the oil injected compressor 1.

Furthermore, the oil injected compressor 1 is allowed to
25 function throughout a bigger range of pressures and flow rates measured at the compressed air outlet 5.

As an example, and not limiting thereto, said tolerance can be any value selected between for example approximately -5°C and approximately +5°C. It should be understood that other values can also apply, depending on the requirements of the oil injected compressor 1 and the demand at the user's network.

In another embodiment according to the present invention, the controller unit 9 can comprise the step of increasing the working speed, rpm, of the motor 3 if the working temperature, t_w , is lower than the dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, to which a tolerance is added.

In another embodiment according to the present invention, the dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, can be calculated on the basis of the working pressure, p_w , ambient temperature, T_{ambient} , and the relative humidity, RH.

As an example, and without limiting thereto, one method of calculating said the dew point temperature, $T_{\text{dew point}}$, is by applying the following formula:

$$T_{\text{dew point}} = \frac{T_n}{\left[\frac{m}{\log_{10}\left(\frac{p_{w\text{pres}}}{Q}\right)} - 1 \right]} \quad (\text{equation 1}).$$

Wherein, Q , m and T_n are empirically determined constants and can be chosen from Table 1, according to the specific temperature range at which the oil injected compressor 1 is running.

Table 1:

	Q	m	T _n	max error	Temperature range
water	6.116441	7.591386	240.7263	0.083%	(-20°C to +50°C)
	6.004918	7.337936	229.3975	0.017%	(+50°C to +100°C)
	5.856548	7.27731	225.1033	0.003%	(+100°C to +150°C)
	6.002859	7.290361	227.1704	0.007%	(+150°C to +200°C)
	9.980622	7.388931	263.1239	0.395%	(+200°C to +350°C)
	6.089613	7.33502	230.3921	0.368%	(0°C to +200°C)
ice	6.114742	9.778707	273.1466	0.052%	(-70°C to 0°C)

Such empirically determined constants having the following measurement units: Q for example represents the water vapor pressure at 0°C and has as measurement unit in Table 1: hectopascal (hPa), m is an adjustment constant without a measurement unit, whereas T_n is also an adjustment constant having degrees Celsius (°C) as measurement unit.

P_{wpres} from equation 1 represents the water vapor pressure converted to atmospheric conditions and can be calculated by applying the following formula:

$$P_{wpres} = \frac{P_w}{P_{atm}} \cdot RH \cdot P_{ws} \quad (\text{equation 2});$$

whereby p_{atm} is the atmospheric pressure, RH is the relative humidity either approximated or measured and P_{ws} represents the water vapor saturation pressure.

If the oil injected compressor 1 does not comprise a relative humidity sensor, the approximated relative humidity, RH, can be selected as approximately 100% or lower. On the other hand, if said oil injected compressor 1 comprises such a relative humidity sensor, such sensor would preferably be mounted at the level of the air inlet 4 (not shown) or such

sensor could be mounted in the vicinity of the oil injected compressor 1, sending the measurements to the controller unit 9.

The atmospheric pressure, p_{atm} , can be measured through a pressure sensor (not shown) positioned on the air inlet 4 or such atmospheric pressure, p_{atm} , can be retrieved by the controller unit 9 from a pressure sensor positioned in the vicinity of the oil injected compressor 1, or such atmospheric pressure, p_{atm} , can be approximated.

The water vapor saturation pressure, p_{ws} , can be calculated by applying the following formula:

$$P_{ws} = Q \cdot 10^{\frac{m \cdot T_{ambient}}{T_{ambient} + T_n}} \quad (\text{equation 3});$$

wherein Q , m and T_n are the empirically determined constants found in Table 1.

In the context of the present invention, the above identified method of calculating the dew point temperature, $T_{dew \text{ point}}$, should not be considering limiting and it should be understood that any other method of calculation can be applied without departing from the scope of the present invention.

In yet another embodiment according to the present invention, for a more accurate determination, the controller unit 9 comprises the step of calculating the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , on the basis of the working temperature, t_w , power, P , of the oil injected compressor 1 and oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$.

Preferably, but not limiting thereto, the power, P , of the oil injected compressor 1 is calculated as a function of the working speed, rpm, of the motor 3 and the working pressure, p_w .

5 Further, the oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$, can be calculated as a function of the working pressure, p_w .

Typically, the power of the oil injected compressor 1 can be expressed as a function of the working speed, rpm, and the working pressure, p_w , and can be further defined as the
10 heat that needs to be evacuated. Accordingly, the power of the oil injected compressor can be expressed through the following equation:

$$P = \dot{m} \cdot c_p \cdot (t_w - T_{oil}) \quad (\text{equation 4});$$

wherein, c_p represents the heat capacity of the oil.

15 In the context of the present invention it should be understood that the power, P , and/or the oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$, can be also measured.

In the context of the present invention, the heat capacity should be understood as a measurable physical quantity,
20 equal to the ratio of the heat added to or removed from the oil, to the resulting temperature change. In other words, the heat capacity, c_p , can be expressed as the heat required to raise the temperature of the oil by one degree.

Depending on the oil used, said heat capacity, c_p , can be
25 retrieved from specific tables typically provided by the manufacturing companies.

Further, the oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$, can be expressed as a function of the working pressure, p_w .

In the context of the present invention, the oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$, should be understood as the mass of oil flowing per unit
5 of time, said unit of time preferably being one second.

As an example, and not limiting thereto, the oil mass flow, $\dot{m}$, can be calculated by solving a second degree mathematical expression, expressed as a function of the working pressure, p_w :

$$10 \quad \dot{m} = A_1 + B_1 \cdot p_w + C_1 \cdot p_w^2 \quad (\text{equation 5});$$

whereby A_1 , B_1 and C_1 are empirically determined constants, characteristic of the compressor element 2.

Further, the power, P , of the oil injected compressor 1, can be calculated by solving a second degree mathematical
15 expression, as a function of the working speed, rpm, and working pressure, p_w :

$$P = A_2 + B_2 \cdot \text{rpm} + C_2 \cdot \text{rpm}^2 + p_w \cdot (D_2 + E_2 \cdot \text{rpm} + F_2 \cdot \text{rpm}^2) + p_w^2 \cdot (G_2 + H_2 \cdot \text{rpm} + I_2 \cdot \text{rpm}^2) \quad (\text{equation 6});$$

whereby the parameters A_2 to I_2 are empirically determined
20 constants, characteristic of the compressor element 2.

Consequently, the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , can be determined by rewriting equation 4:

$$T_{oil} = t_w - \frac{P}{\dot{m}} \quad (\text{equation 7});$$

whereby, for further calculation, the expression of P from equation 6 can be used and the expression of $\dot{m}$ from equation 5 can be used.

In another embodiment according to the present invention,
5 the controller unit 9 can further approximate the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , based on the received measurements.

As an example, and not limiting thereto, said controller unit 9 can approximate the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , as
10 being of approximately the same value as the working temperature, t_w , when the oil injected compressor 1 is stopped, or, if said oil injected compressor 1 is running, it can be calculated as a function of the working speed, rpm, and the working pressure, p_w , as previously explained.

15 It should be however understood that any other method of calculating the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , can be implemented, and the present invention should not be limited to the presented example.

In yet another embodiment according to the present
20 invention, the oil separator 7 can further comprise a temperature sensor (not shown) possibly positioned on an oil conduit 21, or within the oil separator 7, in the vicinity of the oil conduit 21. The measurements of such temperature sensor being further sent to the controller unit 9.

Said oil conduit 21 allowing for the oil separated from the compressed air to be re-injected within the compressor element 2.

If said oil separator 7 comprises such a temperature sensor,
5 the controller unit 9 can further consider its measurements as the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} .

In another embodiment according to the present invention, for determining the minimum working speed, the controller unit can further express the working temperature, t_w , as a
10 function of the working speed, rpm, working pressure, p_w , ambient temperature, $T_{ambient}$, the temperature of the oil, T_{oil} , and the relative humidity, RH.

Accordingly, the working temperature, t_w , can have the following mathematical expression:

$$15 \quad t_w = A_3 + B_3 \cdot \text{rpm} + C_3 \cdot p_w + D_3 \cdot T_{ambient} + E_3 \cdot T_{oil} + F_3 \cdot \text{RH} + G_3 \cdot \text{rpm}^2 + H_3 \cdot p_w^2 \quad (\text{equation 8});$$

whereby the parameters A_3 to H_3 are empirically determined constants, characteristic of the compressor element 2.

If we then consider that:

$$20 \quad t_w = T_{\text{dew point}} + \text{tolerance} \quad (\text{equation 9});$$

and introduce equation 9 in equation 8, then equation 8 becomes:

$$G_3 \cdot \text{rpm}^2 + B_3 \cdot \text{rpm} + (A_3 + C_3 \cdot p_w + D_3 \cdot T_{ambient} + E_3 \cdot T_{oil} + F_3 \cdot \text{RH} + H_3 \cdot p_w^2 - T_{\text{dew point}} - \text{tolerance}) = 0 \quad (\text{equation 10}).$$

By solving this equation, two values of the working speed, rpm, would be calculated. Out of these two calculated values, the minimum working speed, $\text{rpm}_{\min}$, is preferably chosen as the lowest value, preferably the lowest positive
5 value.

In the context of the present invention, it should be understood that parameters A_3 to H_3 are constants characteristic of the compressor element 2, such constants having different values for compressor elements of different
10 capacities, or for different compressors of a different type. Such values being typically determined by the designers of such compressor elements 2.

As an example, and not limiting thereto, the constants A_1 to C_1 of equation 5, the constants A_2 to I_2 of equation 6 and
15 the constants A_3 to H_3 of equation 8, for a variable speed oil injected compressor having 120 liters per second free air delivery, can have the following values:

Table 2:

A₁	3*10 ⁻¹⁴
B₁	4
C₁	26
A₂	-6.12
B₂	6.75
C₂	0.004
D₂	0.73
E₂	0.46
F₂	0.034
G₂	0
H₂	0
I₂	0
A₃	-0.68
B₃	5.6
C₃	0
D₃	0
E₃	1
F₃	0
G₃	0
H₃	0

Even if the present invention has been presented as suitable to be implemented within an oil injected compressor 1, the possibility of implementing the method of controlling the speed of the motor within a vacuum pump, or the possibility of integrating the controller unit 9 as defined herein within a vacuum pump, should not be excluded.

In case of a vacuum pump, the system as the one shown in figure 1 would be similar, the only differences would be:

that the compressor element 2 would be replaced by a vacuum element, the air inlet 4 would be connected to a user's network and the outlet conduit 8 would be connected to the atmosphere or to an external network.

- 5 The measurements and the processing would be done in the same way as in the case of an oil injected compressor 1.

The present invention is by no means limited to the embodiments described as an example and shown in the drawings, but such a controller unit 9 can be realized in
10 all kinds of variants, without departing from the scope of the invention. Similarly, the invention is not limited to the method of controlling the speed of the motor 3 driving an oil injected compressor 1 described as an example, however, said method can be realized in different ways while
15 still remaining within the scope of the invention.

Claims.

1. Controller unit for controlling the speed of a motor
(3) for driving an oil injected compressor (1), said
5 controller unit (9) comprising:
- a data connection (12, 13, 14) configured to connect
the controller unit (9) with measuring means (10,
11);
 - a first module (17) configured to receive data
10 through said data connection (12, 13, 14), wherein
said data comprises: a measurement of a working
pressure (p_w) of said compressor (1) and a working
speed (rpm) of the motor (3);
 - said first module (17) further being configured to
15 receive a measured or retrieved ambient temperature
(T_{ambient}) value,
- characterised in that the controller unit (9) further
comprises
- a processing unit (18a) provided with an algorithm
20 for determining a minimum working speed (rpm_{min}) of
the motor (3) on the basis of the measured working
pressure (p_w), the ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) and
a dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$);
 - a comparator unit (19a) configured to compare the
25 determined minimum working speed (rpm_{min}) with the
retrieved working speed (rpm) of the motor (3);

- said processing unit (18a) further comprising a signal generating unit (20a) configured to send a signal to said motor (3) for increasing the working speed (rpm) of the motor (3) to at least the determined minimum working speed ($\text{rpm}_{\min}$), if said retrieved working speed (rpm) is lower than the determined minimum working speed ($\text{rpm}_{\min}$).
- 5
2. Controller unit according to claim 1, characterised in that the data connection (12, 13, 14) is through a wireless connection.
- 10
3. Controller unit according to claim 1 or 2, characterised in that said data further comprises a working temperature (t_w) of said compressor (1), and whereby said algorithm is configured to determine the dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$) on the basis of the measured working pressure (p_w) and temperature (t_w).
- 15
4. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that the controller unit (9) is part of the oil injected compressor (1) or is placed in the vicinity of said oil injected compressor (1).
- 20
5. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that the measuring means (10, 11) comprise a pressure sensor (10) and a temperature sensor (11) positioned at a compressed air outlet (5) of a compressor element (2) part of said oil injected compressor (1), for retrieving said measured working pressure (p_w) and working temperature (t_w).
- 25

6. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that it comprises a data connection (12) with the motor (3) driving said oil injected compressor (1) for retrieving said working speed (rpm) of the motor (3).

7. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that said first module (17) comprise a wired or wireless data connection (15) to a temperature sensor (16) positioned in the vicinity of the oil injected compressor (1) or to an internet network providing the ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) measurement in the geographical area where the oil injected compressor (1) is located.

8. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that the controller unit is configured to receive said measurement of the working pressure (p_w), working temperature (t_w) and the working speed (rpm) of the motor (3) in real time.

9. Controller unit according to any of the previous claims, characterised in that said algorithm is further configured to compare the working temperature (t_w) with a determined dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$).

10. Controller unit according to claim 9, characterized in that it is configured to determine the dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$) by calculation on the basis of the measured working pressure (p_w), the

ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) and a retrieved or determined relative humidity (RH).

11. A method of controlling the speed of a motor (3) driving an oil injected compressor (1), the method comprising at least the following steps:

- measuring a working pressure (p_w) of the oil injected compressor (1) and sending the measured value to a first module (17) of a controller unit (9);
- sending the speed (rpm) of the motor (3) and a measured or retrieved ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) to said first module (17);

characterised in that the method further comprises the steps of:

- determining a minimum working speed (rpm_{min}) of the motor (3) on the basis of the measured working pressure (p_w), ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) and a dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$); and
- comparing the determined minimum working speed (rpm_{min}) with the retrieved working speed (rpm) of the motor (3) and, if said retrieved working speed (rpm) is lower than the determined minimum working speed (rpm_{min}), increasing the working speed (rpm) of said motor (3) to at least the determined minimum working speed (rpm_{min}).

12. Method according to claim 11, characterised in that it further comprises the steps of measuring a

working temperature (t_w) of the oil injected compressor (1), sending the measured value to said first module (17), and determining said dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$) on the basis of the measured working pressure (p_w) and working temperature (t_w).

13. Method according to claim 12, characterised in that it further comprises the step of determining the minimum working speed (rpm_{min}) on the basis of measured working temperature (t_w), a temperature of the oil (T_{oil}) injected in said oil injected compressor (1) and a retrieved or determined relative humidity (RH).

14. Method according to claim 12 or 13, characterised in that it further comprises the step of increasing the working speed (rpm) of the motor (3) if the working temperature (t_w) is lower than the dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$) to which a tolerance is added.

15. Method according to any one of claims 12 to 14, characterised in that the dew point temperature ($T_{\text{dew point}}$) is calculated on the basis of the working pressure (p_w), ambient temperature (T_{ambient}) and the relative humidity (RH).

16. Method according to claim 13, characterised in that it further comprises the step of calculating the temperature of the oil (T_{oil}) on the basis of: the working temperature (t_w), power (P) of the oil injected compressor (1) and oil mass flow ($\dot{m}$).

17. Method according to claim 16, characterised in that the power (P) of the oil injected compressor (1) is calculated as a function of the working speed (rpm) of the motor (3) and the working pressure (p_w).
- 5 18. Method according to claim 16, characterised in that the oil mass flow ($\dot{m}$) is calculated as a function of the working pressure (p_w).
19. Method according to any of the claims 11 to 18, characterised in that the method applies a sampling
10 rate of 25 Hertz for retrieving the measured working pressure (p_w) and/or the working temperature (t_w), and/or the speed (rpm) of the motor (3).
20. An oil injected compressor configured to apply the method of any of the claims 11 to 19.