

Method and system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a method of reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine when operating at less than full speed. Further, the invention relates to a system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine when operating at less than full speed.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Diesel engines used onboard certain types of vessels and/or used in certain stationary applications are typically of the well known two-stroke type or of the well known four-stroke type.

Two-stroke cross-head engines used in marine and/or stationary applications are equipped with two separate lubricating oil systems. One lubricating system comprises so-called system oil/system lubricant that normally is used for lubrication and cooling of the engine's bearings and e.g. oil-cooled pistons as well as for activation and/or control of various valves or the like. The other lubricating system comprises an all-loss lubricant (cylinder oil/cylinder lubricant) that normally is used for lubrication of the engine's cylinders, piston rings and piston skirt.

In typical two-stroke cross-head engines, the cylinder oil is spent continuously by each turn of the engine whereas the system oil in principle is not spent (except by smaller unintentional leakages). The lubrication system comprising the cylinder oil is also often referred to as an "all-loss" lubrication system as the oil is spent. The use of and various types of both system oil(s) and cylinder oil(s) is very well known in the art.

30 Typical cylinder oils usually have an SAE (Society of Automotive Engineering) viscosity equivalent to about 50 and normally have a total base number (BN) of about 40 to 70 for the neutralisation of acid products produced during the combustion process. Typical system oils usually have an SAE viscosity of about 30 with a relatively low BN content, typically below 10.

35 These exemplary values may vary dependent on the actual application and the specific design of the systems that the oils are used in.

In recent two-stroke cross-head engine designs involving electronic and/or hydraulic control and/or activation of valves, etc., the minimum performance requirements of the system oil has been substantially increased compared to earlier design using traditional mechanical control/activation.

Four-stroke, trunk piston (diesel) engines, however, typically use only a single oil type for lubrication and cooling. Such engines are typically used as secondary/auxiliary or propulsion engines on ships, or in stationary power generation or liquid/gas transmission applications. Such used oils typically have a SAE viscosity of about 30 or 40. While the system oil of two-stroke cross-head engines typically remains within its specified performance limits for an extended period of time, trunk piston engine oils are constantly affected by exposure to the combustion process.

The performance level of lubricants is typically measured periodically and may not go beyond certain limits if the oiled component's condition should not be jeopardized.

Another characteristic of diesel engines is that their mechanical efficiency is reduced significantly for reduced engine power or speed or output (forth only referred to as engine power). This results in an increased specific fuel consumption of the particular engine when the engine is operating at reduced power. An additional characteristic is that the stress of the bearings in the engine is reduced for reduced engine power. Further, the thickness of the oil film on the engine parts is increased at reduced engine power compared to the thickness at full/maximum engine output thereby reducing the load of the engine components. This holds for all types of bearings that is a part of the engine's crank mechanism when the temperature of the lubricating oils is kept substantially constant regardless of the load of the engine, which always is aimed for, by suitable adjustment of the amount of lubricating oil that is fed through the related oil coolers usually using water as a coolant.

The actual power of an engine implicitly defines the actual pressure condition in the engine's cylinders, i.e. maximal pressure, compression pressure and mean pressure, which are the main determining factors for the stress or

strain on the bearings. The number of revolutions is also a known function of the load of the engine for engines that are directly coupled to a propeller.

5 Additionally, the stress or strain of the bearings will at any time be influenced by the specific viscosity of the system oil, which may ongoing be influenced e.g. by pollution of the oil during operation of the engine.

10 A diesel engine's frictional loss is mainly of a viscose character. An increase in the viscosity of the system oil will therefore result in a diminished efficiency, increased fuel consumption and increased emissions.

OBJECT AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of and a corresponding system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine when operating at less than full power that solves the above-mentioned (and other) shortcomings. A further object is to provide this in a simple and efficient way.

20 An additional object of the present invention is to increase the mechanical efficiency and to reduce the fuel consumption of a diesel engine when the engine is operating at less than full power.

Another object is to reduce the emissions of a diesel engine when the engine is operating at less than full power.

25 These objects, among others, are achieved by a method (and a corresponding system) of reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine, the method comprising the step of: adjusting, when the engine is operating at less than full power, a viscosity of a system oil from the engine resulting in a modified system oil, where the viscosity is adjusted so that the mechanical
30 efficiency of the engine is increased when the modified system oil is provided to the engine and wherein the step of adjusting is done on the basis at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine and a viscosity parameter of the system oil.

In this way, the mechanical efficiency of the engine when operating at less than full speed/partial speed is increased since a change of the viscosity of a lubricating oil will influence the mechanical efficiency in such a way that a reduction of the viscosity will increase the mechanical efficiency of an engine.

5 However, the reduced viscosity also causes the stress or strain on the bearings of the engine to be increased and the thickness of the oil film to be reduced.

But, the bearings of the engine are designed taking the highest possible stress or strain of the bearings during operation, i.e. at full load/power/speed, into consideration whereby the bearings are over-dimensioned when the engine is operating at partial or less than full load/power/speed. The specific degree of over-dimensioning is dependent on the specific type of bearing, the purpose of the engine (e.g. whether the engine is operating at constant

10 number of revolutions/constant speed or at a variable number of revolutions/variable speed), etc.

By adjusting the viscosity according to the present invention, taking the actual load into consideration it can be ensured that as large a mechanical efficiency gain as possible in the given situation is obtained without causing

20 excess stress or strain on the bearings of the engine.

The increased mechanical efficiency causes reduced fuel consumption and reduced emissions of the engine.

25 In a preferred embodiment, the step of adjusting the viscosity comprises increasing the temperature of the system oil resulting in decreased viscosity.

In this way, a very simple way of adjusting the viscosity is obtained.

30 In one embodiment, the increasing the temperature of the system oil is done by bypassing an amount of the system oil in an oil cooler and passing the rest of the system oil through the oil cooler, where the amount is dependent of the at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine and in

35 the viscosity parameter. This adjusting of the viscosity may e.g. be done by a valve controlling the amount of system oil that is bypassed in the oil cooler

thereby directing the amount of system oil past the cooler which increases the temperature of the system oil as a whole when introduced back into the engine. The valve is controlled using the mentioned parameters according to the present invention. The more system oil that bypassed the cooler the more the temperature is increased.

In one embodiment, the viscosity parameter is an actually measured viscosity of the system oil. The measured viscosity of the system oil may be measured using standardised equipment such as e.g. viscosirator or the like.

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In this way, the adjustment of the viscosity takes into consideration the actual current viscosity of the system oil. This may be an important aspect since the stress or strain of the bearings will at any time be influenced by the specific viscosity of the system oil, which may ongoing be influenced e.g. by pollution of the oil during operation of the engine. By taking the actual viscosity of the system oil into consideration it may be ensured that viscosity is not increased too much and so ensuring as large a fuel efficiency gain as possible.

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In an alternative embodiment, the viscosity parameter is a nominal or rated viscosity of the system oil. The nominal or rated viscosity of the system oil is the viscosity that the system oil has when new or when introduced into the engine for the first time. The nominal or rated viscosity is recommended by the designer of the specific engine and varies according to make and model of the specific type of engine.

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In this way, the adjustment of the viscosity of the system oil according to the present invention is simplified since the nominal or rated viscosity is used as an estimate of the actual or current viscosity of the system oil. This avoids the need for equipment to measure the actual or current viscosity of the system oil thereby saving costs. The use of the nominal or rated viscosity as an estimate should preferably only be used when the present invention is applied to an engine with an insignificant or negligible amount of pollution of its system oil as such pollution influences the viscosity of the system oil and thereby the stress or strain of the bearings of the engine.

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In one embodiment, the engine has a constant number of revolutions during operation.

5 In an alternative embodiment, the engine has a variable number of revolutions during operation.

In one embodiment, the step of adjusting is further done on the basis of an actual number of revolutions of the engine.

10 In this way, the actual number of revolutions may be used as an indication or an estimate for the actual load of the engine since the number of revolutions is a known indication or function of the load of an engine for engines that are directly coupled to a propeller or the like.

15 In one embodiment, the at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine comprises: a parameter representing stress or strain on the bearings of the engine, and/or a parameter representing a maximum pressure in the cylinders of the engine, and/or a parameter representing a compression pressure in the cylinders of the engine, and/or a parameter
20 representing a mean pressure in the cylinders of the engine.

In this way, even better indications of the actual load of the engine are taken into consideration when determining how the viscosity can be adjusted without compromising the engine, since the actual pressure condition in the
25 engine's cylinders, i.e. maximal pressure, compression pressure and mean pressure, is a main determining factor for the stress or strain on the bearings.

In one embodiment, the step of adjusting is done continuously, near-continuously or intermittently.

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The present invention also relates to a system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine when operating at less than full speed, which corresponds to the method of the present invention and have the same advantages for the same reasons.

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More specifically, the invention relates to a system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine, the system comprising: a viscosity regulating device adapted to adjust, when the engine is operating at less than full speed, a viscosity of a system oil from the engine resulting in a modified system oil, where the viscosity is adjusted so that the mechanical efficiency of the engine is increased when the modified system oil is provided to the engine and wherein the adjustment of the viscosity is done on the basis at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine and a viscosity parameter of the system oil.

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Advantageous embodiments of the system according to the present invention are defined in the sub-claims and described in detail in the following. The embodiments of the system correspond to the embodiments of the method and have the same advantages for the same reasons.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent from and elucidated with reference to the illustrative embodiments shown in the drawing, in which:

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Figure 1 shows a schematic block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 shows a schematic block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention. Shown is a schematic representation of at least one diesel engine (300), e.g. a two-stroke cross-head diesel engine. The exemplary engine comprises one lubricating system comprising so-called system oil (301) that normally is used for lubrication and cooling of the engine's bearings, cylinders and e.g. oil-cooled pistons as well as for activation and/or control of various valves or the like. Another lubricating system comprises an all-loss lubricant or cylinder oil (302) that normally is used for lubrication of the engine's cylinders, piston rings and piston skirt. Other types of diesel engines are four-stroke trunk piston diesel engines (which do not comprise cylinder oil). In principal the invention may be used in all types of reciprocating combustion engines.

The engine (300) corresponds to well-known prior art diesel engines except as explained in the following.

5 Further illustrated is a viscosity modification system (100) comprising a viscosity regulating device (101) according to the present invention which is connected to obtain system oil (301) preferably from the engine(s) (300). Alternatively, the viscosity modification system (101) may receive system oil from a tank (not shown) or the like instead of directly from the engine.

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The viscosity regulating device (101) modifies (at least a part of) the received system oil (301) or more specifically adjust the viscosity of the received system oil (301) in response to a number of parameters resulting in a modified system oil (301'). In a preferred embodiment, the viscosity of the
15 received system oil is modified simply by increasing the temperature of the received system oil resulting in decreased viscosity of the system oil.

The adjusting of the viscosity may in one embodiment be done by a valve controlling an amount of system oil that is bypassed in the oil cooler, thereby
20 directing the amount of system oil past the cooler thereby increasing the temperature. The valve is controlled using the mentioned parameters. The more system oil that bypassed the cooler the more the temperature is increased, which provides a very simple way of regulating the viscosity in dependence on the relevant parameters.

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The adjustment ensures that the mechanical efficiency of the engine (300) is increased when the modified system oil (301') is supplied back into the engine (300).

30 The parameters that the adjustment is made in response to comprises at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine (300) and a viscosity parameter of the system oil (301).

The viscosity parameter may e.g. be a measured actual/current viscosity of
35 the system oil (301), which is useful if the viscosity is likely to have changed due to pollution, etc. as described earlier. Alternatively, the viscosity

parameter is a nominal or rated viscosity of the system oil (301) whereby equipment for measuring the actual/current viscosity does not need to be present, which saves cost and reduces the complexity of the system.

5 The engine may have a constant number of revolutions during operation. Alternatively, the engine may have a variable number of revolutions during operation. In one embodiment, the step of adjusting is further done on the basis of an actual number of revolutions of the engine so that the actual number of revolutions may be used as an additional estimate for the actual
10 load of the engine since the number of revolutions is a known indication or function of the load of an engine for engines that are directly coupled to a propeller or the like. It is also possible to continuously or near-continuously measure the actual load of an engine e.g. by a torsion meter or the like.

15 In one embodiment, the at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine comprises: a parameter representing stress or strain on the bearings of the engine, and/or a parameter representing a maximum pressure in the cylinders of the engine, and/or a parameter representing a compression pressure in the cylinders of the engine, and/or a parameter
20 representing a mean pressure in the cylinders of the engine.

In this way, even better indications of the actual load of the engine are taken into consideration when determining how the viscosity can be adjusted without compromising the engine, since the actual pressure condition in the
25 engine's cylinders, i.e. maximal pressure, compression pressure and mean pressure, is a main determining factor for the stress or strain on the bearings.

It is also possible to continuously or near-continuously measure the above pressures in the engine's cylinders e.g. using well-known commercially avail
30 tools.

In this way reduced fuel consumption (and thereby emissions) for a diesel engine is obtained when the engine is operating at less than full speed.

35 In the claims, any reference signs placed between parentheses shall not be constructed as limiting the claim. The word "comprising" does not exclude the

presence of elements or steps other than those listed in a claim. The word "a" or "an" preceding an element does not exclude the presence of a plurality of such elements.

Patent Claims:

1. A method of reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine (300), the method comprising the step of:
 - 5 • adjusting (101), when the engine (300) is operating at less than full power, a viscosity of a system oil (301) from the engine (300) resulting in a modified system oil (301'), where the viscosity is adjusted so that the mechanical efficiency of the engine (300) is increased when the modified system oil (301') is provided to the engine (300) and wherein
10 the step of adjusting is done on the basis at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine (300) and a viscosity parameter of the system oil (301).
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of adjusting the viscosity
15 comprises increasing the temperature of the system oil (301) resulting in decreased viscosity.
3. A method according to claim 2, wherein increasing the temperature of the system oil (301) is done by bypassing an amount of the system oil in an oil
20 cooler and passing the rest of the system oil through the oil cooler, where the amount is dependent of the at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine and in the viscosity parameter.
4. A method according to claims 1 – 3, wherein said viscosity parameter is a
25 nominal viscosity of the system oil (301).
5. A method according to claims 1 – 3, wherein said viscosity parameter is an actually measured viscosity of the system oil (301).
- 30 6. A method according to claims 1 – 5, wherein the engine (300) has a constant number of revolutions during operation.
7. A method according to claims 1 – 5, wherein the engine (300) has a
35 variable number of revolutions during operation.

8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the step of adjusting is further done on the basis of an actual number of revolutions of the engine (300).

5 9. A method according to claims 1 – 8, wherein said at least one parameter representing an actual power of the engine (300) comprises:

- a parameter representing stress or strain on the bearings of the engine (300), and/or
- a parameter representing a maximum pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300), and/or
- 10 • a parameter representing a compression pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300), and/or
- a parameter representing a mean pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300).

15 10. A method according to claims 1 – 9, wherein the step of adjusting is done continuously, near-continuously or intermittently.

11. A system for reducing fuel consumption in a diesel engine (300), the system (100) comprising:

- 20 • a viscosity regulating device (101) adapted to adjust, when the engine is operating at less than full speed, a viscosity of a system oil (301) from the engine (300) resulting in a modified system oil (301'), where the viscosity is adjusted so that the mechanical efficiency of the engine (300) is increased when the modified system oil (301') is
- 25 provided to the engine (300) and wherein the adjustment of the viscosity is done on the basis at least one parameter representing an actual power of the engine (300) and a viscosity parameter of the system oil (301).

30 12. A system according to claim 11, wherein said viscosity regulating device (101) is adapted to adjust the viscosity by increasing the temperature of the system oil (301) resulting in decreased viscosity.

35 13. A method according to claim 12, wherein said viscosity regulating device (101) is adapted to increasing the temperature of the system oil (301) by bypassing an amount of the system oil in an oil cooler and passing the rest of

the system oil through the oil cooler, where the amount is dependent of the at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine and in the viscosity parameter.

5 14. A system according to claims 11 – 13, wherein said viscosity parameter is a nominal viscosity of the system oil (301).

15. A system according to claims 11 – 13, wherein said viscosity parameter is an actually measured viscosity of the system oil (301).

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16. A system according to claims 11 – 15, wherein the engine (300) has a constant number of revolutions during operation.

15 17. A system according to claims 11 – 15, wherein the engine (300) has a variable number of revolutions during operation.

18. A system according to claim 17, wherein said viscosity regulating device (101) is further adapted to adjust the viscosity on the basis of an actual number of revolutions of the engine (300).

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19. A system according to claims 11 – 18, wherein said at least one parameter representing an actual load of the engine (300) comprises:

- a parameter representing stress or strain on the bearings of the engine (300), and/or
 - 25 • a parameter representing a maximum pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300), and/or
 - a parameter representing a compression pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300), and/or
 - a parameter representing a mean pressure in the cylinders of the engine (300).
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20. A system according to claims 11 – 19, wherein the viscosity regulating device (101) is adapted to adjust the viscosity continuously, near-continuously or intermittently.