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PROCESS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF HIGH-OCTANE HYDROCARBON COM-
POUNDS BY THE SELECTIVE DIMERIZATION OF ISOBUTENE CONTAINED
IN A STREAM WHICH ALSO CONTAINS C₅ HYDROCARBONS.

10 The present invention relates to a process for the
production of high-octane hydrocarbon compounds by means of
the selective dimerization of isobutene and, to a lesser
extent, of possible linear olefins, in the presence of C₅
hydrocarbons and oxygenated compounds, which favour the
15 formation of higher selectivities on the part of the cata-
lyst.

The mixture obtained can then be hydrogenated with
conventional methods to obtain a product with further en-
hanced octane characteristics.

20 For mainly environmental reasons, the composition of
gasolines is being reformulated and the general tendency is
towards the production of fuels which burn better and have
lower evaporative emissions. The main measures for achiev-
ing this objective are listed below (D. Sanfilippo, F. An-
25 cillotti, M. Marchionna, Chim. & Ind., 76, (1994), 32):

- reduction in the content of aromatic compounds and elimination of benzene;
- reduction in the volatility of gasolines to minimize evaporative losses;
- 5 - reduction in the content of light olefins, photochemically extremely reactive;
- reduction in the sulfur content and final boiling point of the gasolines.

All these measures consequently create the necessity
10 of projecting new production processes of purely hydrocarbon compounds capable of positively contributing to the above demands.

Among these, alkylated products are extremely important as they have a high octane number, a low volatility
15 and are practically free of olefins and aromatic compounds. The alkylation process in liquid phase is a reaction between isoparaffinic hydrocarbons, such as isobutane, and olefins, for example propylene, butenes, pentenes and relative mixtures, in the presence of an acid catalyst for the
20 production of C₇-C₉ hydrocarbons with a high octane number to be used in gasolines (A. Corma, A. Martinez, Catal.Rev.-Sci.Eng., 35, (1993), 483).

The main problem of alkylation processes is due to the fact that, with growing environmental regulations, both of
25 the traditional processes (with hydrofluoric and sulfuric

acid) are encountering considerable difficulties, which create uncertainties for the future; the process with hydrofluoric acid due to the toxicity of this acid, especially in populated areas, and that using sulfuric acid, as
5 a result of the large production of acid sludge as well as the considerably corrosive nature of the catalyst.

Alternative processes with solid acid catalysts are being developed but their commercial applicability has yet to be demonstrated.

10 A hydrocarbon product of this type, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly more requested due to its octane characteristics (both the Research Octane Number (RON) and the Motor Octane Number (MON) are high) and those relating to the boiling point (limited volatility but low end-point)
15 which position it in the group of compositions of great interest for obtaining gasolines which are more compatible with current environmental requirements.

An alternative refinery process for obtaining products with characteristics similar to those of alkylated products
20 can be offered by the hydrogenation of so-called "polymer" gasoline.

Oligomerization processes (often inaccurately called polymerization in the refining industry) were widely used in the '30s' and '40s' for converting low-boiling C_3 - C_4
25 olefins into gasolines. The process leads to the production

of a gasoline with a high octane number (RON about 97) but with a high sensitivity (difference between RON and MON) due to the purely olefinic nature of the product (J.H.Gary, G.E. Handwerk, "Petroleum Refining : Technology and Economics", 3rd Ed., M. Dekker, New York, (1994), 250).

Typical olefins which are oligomerized are mainly propylene, which gives dimers or slightly higher oligomers depending on the process used, and isobutene which mainly gives dimers but is always accompanied by a considerable quantity of higher oligomers.

With particular attention to the oligomerization of isobutene, it is known that this reaction can be carried out either batchwise, semi-batchwise or in continuous, either in gas or liquid phase, generally at temperatures ranging from 50 to 300°C and at atmospheric pressure or such pressures as to maintain the reagents in liquid phase, if necessary.

Typical catalysts for the industrial oligomerization process of isobutene are represented by phosphoric acid, generally supported on a solid (for example kieselguhr), or cation-exchange acid resins. The latter allow blander conditions to be used compared with supported phosphoric acid both in terms of temperature and pressure (50-100°C and 0.2-3 MPa with respect to 200-220°C and 3-10 MPa).

Other catalysts are also claimed in literature, both

liquid acids such as H_2SO_4 and derivatives of sulfonic acids, and solids such as silico-aluminas, mixed oxides, zeolites, fluorinated or chlorinated aluminas, etc.; none of these catalysts however has so far enabled an industrial
5 process to be set up, as in the case of supported phosphoric acid (F. Asinger, "Mono-olefins: Chemistry and Technology", Pergamon Press, Oxford, pages 435-456) and that of cation resins (G. Scharfe, Hydrocarbon Proc., April 1973, 171).

10 From the product point of view, the main problem of this process lies in the fact that excessive percentages of heavy oligomers such as trimers (selectivity of 20-40%) and tetramers (selectivity of 1-5%) of isobutene, are produced in the oligomerization phase. Tetramers are completely out-
15 side the gasoline fraction as they are too high-boiling and therefore represent a net loss in yield to gasoline; as far as trimers are concerned, their concentration should be greatly reduced as they have a boiling point (170-180°C) at the limit of future specifications on the final point of
20 reformulated gasolines.

The problem of reducing the formation of oligomers higher than dimers to percentages lower than 15% is, on the other hand, a problem typical of the oligomerization of isobutene, as also indicated in literature (C.T.O'Connor,
25 M. Kojima, K.W. Shcumann, Appl.Catal., 16, (1985), 193). This

level of heavy compounds is slightly higher than that of an alkylated product and is still tolerated in the gasoline pool.

From what is specified above, there is evidently great interest in obtaining a new dimerization process of isobutene which allows the synthesis of a higher-quality product, through reaching greater selectivities.

By carrying out the selective dimerization reaction of isobutene in the presence of moderate quantities of oxygenated products, the production of a fraction of oligomers is selectively obtained, which is particular rich in dimers (>85%) and practically free of tetramers and higher oligomers (<0.5%).

The reaction product is then preferably hydrogenated to give a completely saturated end-product with a high octane number and low sensitivity.

The hydrogenation can be carried out with conventional methods as described, for example, in F. Asinger, "Monoolefins: Chemistry and Technology", Pergamon Press, Oxford, page 455.

For illustrative purposes, Table 1 indicates the octane number and relative boiling points of some of the products obtained, by means of the process, aim of the present disclosure.

TABLE 1

Product	RON	MON	b.p. (°C)
Diisobutenes	100	89	100-105
Iso-octane	100	100	99
Tri-isobutenes	100	89	175-185
Hydrogenated tri-isobutenes	101	102	170-180

Summary

In a first aspect, there is provided a process for the production of high-octane hydrocarbon compounds by the selective dimerization of isobutene contained in a stream also containing C₅ hydrocarbons, characterized in that:

- the reaction is carried out in two distinct steps,
- a catalytic distillation is used as second step,
- the reaction is carried out in the presence of oxygenated compounds selected from a branched alcohol alone or in a blend with linear alcohols and alkyl ethers, where branched alcohols form azeotropic mixtures with the C₅ hydrocarbons, in such a quantity as to have in the feeding, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol alone, a molar ratio of oxygenated compound/isobutene higher than 0.005, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol in a blend, a molar ratio of oxygenated compound/isobutene higher than 0.01;
- a C₅ hydrocarbons/branched alcohol azeotropic separation step is carried out.

The process, aim of the present disclosure, for the production of high-octane hydrocarbon compounds by the se-

lective dimerization of isobutene contained in a stream also containing C₅ hydrocarbons, is characterized in that:

- the reaction is carried out ^{with acid catalysts} in two distinct steps,
- a catalytic distillation is used as second step,
- the reaction is carried out in the presence of oxygenated products selected from a branched alcohol alone or in a blend with linear alcohols and alkyl ethers, in such a quantity as to have in the feeding, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol alone, a molar ratio oxygenated product/isobutene higher than 0.005, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol in a blend, a molar ratio oxygenated product/isobutene higher than 0.01;
- a C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic separation step is carried out.

It should also be pointed out that in the case of hydrocarbon streams also comprising other olefins, it has been observed that at least a part of the latter can be converted by reaction with isobutene into the hydrocarbon

product without altering the octane value. It is therefore preferable to effect an enriching treatment, by means of pre-isomerization, of the internal linear olefins, in order to favour the overall octane number of the mixture.

5 The process claimed herein can be applied to cuts mainly containing isobutane, isobutene, n-butane, n-butenes and saturated and olefinic C₅ hydrocarbons.

Although a wide variety of sources are available for the supply of these streams, the most common are those deriving from Dehydrogenation processes of iso-paraffins, from FCC units, Steam Cracking or processes for the production of pure isobutene such as the dehydration of tert-butyl alcohol (TBA) or the Cracking of MTBE and/or ETBE; these streams differ from each other in the content of isobutene and linear butenes, as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2

	Steam Cracking	FCC	Dehydrogenation	Pure isobutene
Isobutene	30-50	10-25	45-55	> 90
20 n-butenes	35-60	25-50	1-2	< 10
Saturated C ₄	4-10	30-60	45-55	< 1

Should streams from Steam Cracking contain diolefins in addition to the desired mono-olefins, they must be eliminated by means of typical removal treatment (for exam-

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ple solvent extraction or selective hydrogenation).

Saturated and olefinic C_5 hydrocarbons can be present in these streams, in various amounts (0.2 - 20%), depending on the efficiency of the C_4 - C_5 separation step. The C_5 olefins possibly present can be involved in dimerization reactions.

The stream sent to the reaction steps can contain branched alcohols or a blend of alcohols and alkyl ethers, in addition to the hydrocarbon components. *The branched alcohol can also be formed by feeding water in the stream sent to the reaction steps, which is **

10 The linear alcohols used contain a number of carbon atoms ranging from 1 to 6 and those preferred are methanol and/or ethanol. The branched alcohols have from 3 to 6 carbon atoms and those preferred are tert-butyl alcohol (TBA) and/or tert-amyl alcohol (TAA).

15 The alkyl ether used can be selected from those containing a number of carbon atoms ranging from 5 to 10: MTBE (methyl tert-butyl ether), ETBE (ethyl tert-butyl ether), MSBE (methyl sec-butyl ether), ESBE (ethyl sec-butyl ether), TAME (methyl tert-amyl ether), TAAE (ethyl tert-
20 amyl ether) or mixtures thereof are preferred.

Isobutene, together with the hydrocarbon stream in which it is contained, is sent with the oxygenated products, in stoichiometric defect, into contact with the acid catalyst where the dimerization takes place. The linear
25 primary alcohol, possibly present, in addition to interact-
* capable of forming the branched alcohol by reacting with the tertiary olefin under the reaction conditions.

ing with the catalysts, also helps to limit the possible cracking of the alkyl ether and can possibly react with the dimers and linear C₄ olefins, whereas the branched alcohol (tertiary) does not react with the olefins due to its
5 steric hindrance.

In order to obtain the dimerization product with the desired selectivity to dimers, it is essential to maintain a constant level of oxygenated products in the reaction environment to form the catalytic species with the correct
10 activity and stability. The optimal level of oxygenated products present in the reaction environment, to obtain selectivities to dimers close to 85% by weight, depends on the composition of the hydrocarbon charge. The higher the olefin content in the charge, the lower the amount of oxy-
15 genated products to be used.

A wide variety of acid catalysts can be used for this process, but those preferred are styrene-divinyl benzene polymeric resins having sulphonic groups as catalytic centres.

20 A large range of operative conditions can be used to produce high-octane hydrocarbons from isobutene in the desired selectivities. It is possible to operate in vapour or liquid-vapour phase, but operating conditions in liquid phase are preferred.

25 The pressure is preferably higher than the atmospheric

value, in order to maintain the reagents in liquid phase, generally below 5 MPa, more preferably between 0.2 - 2.5 MPa. The reaction temperature preferably ranges from 30 to 120°C.

The feeding space velocities of the oxygenated-hydrocarbon stream are preferably lower than 30 h⁻¹, more preferably ranging from 1 and 15 h⁻¹.

Isobutene is mainly converted in the reaction zone, however portions of the other paraffins which are present can also be converted to useful product; in principle, there are no limits to the concentration of iso-olefin in the hydrocarbon fraction, even if concentrations ranging from 2 to 60% are preferred; in case of streams having a high isobutene concentration (dehydration or cracking) it is therefore convenient to dilute the charge with C₄-C₇ hydrocarbons. There are no limits, on the contrary, for the ratio between isobutene and linear olefins.

The process, aim of the present disclosure, can be effected batchwise or in continuous, bearing in mind however that the latter is much more advantageous in industrial practice.

The reactor configuration selected includes a first reaction step (one or more fixed bed reactors) and a second step consisting of a catalytic distillation which avoids the use of a reactor and a distillation column, as in a

conventional plant.

The presence of C₅ hydrocarbons in the feed, however, complicates the process schemes, as these compounds have intermediate boiling temperatures between C₄ and oxygenated products, and they also form azeotropic mixtures with the branched alcohols as shown in Table 3, which indicates the boiling points of the most representative low-boiling components present in the streams

Table 3

10	Compound	Boiling point, °C
	C ₄ /Methanol azeotropic product	-5
	C ₄ products	-12/1
	Isopentane/TBA azeotropic product	25
	Isopentane	28
15	1-pentene	30
	2-methyl-1-butene	31
	n-pentane	36
	2-methyl-2-butene	39
	cyclopentane	49
20	MTBE	55
	Methanol	65
	Dimers/TBA azeotropic product	78
	TBA	82
	Dimers	100 - 105

25 The C₅ products cannot therefore be removed from the

plant together with the C₄ products, as they would introduce oxygenated products (branched alcohols) into the stream, which are difficult to remove by means of the traditional techniques used for removing methanol (water washing) and which are poisonous for the subsequent treatment processes of the streams (polymerization, alkylation and metathesis).

The C₅ products, on the other hand, cannot be maintained in the oxygenated stream as they would rapidly accumulate. With respect to the schemes shown in literature (US 6,011,191), it is therefore necessary to introduce a C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic separation step, which can be inserted in several positions of the plant, in relation to the C₅ content in the charge and also the relative concentration of the C₅ products present.

When the oxygenated product is a branched alcohol alone, the process is, in particular, preferably effected with a molar ratio of oxygenated product/isobutene lower than 0.6, through the following essential steps:

- a) feeding the C₄-C₅ hydrocarbon cut containing isobutene to the first reaction step (consisting of one or more reactors), together with one or more streams containing oxygenated products;
- b) using a catalytic distillation column as second reaction step, wherein the isobutene conversion is com-

pleted, in addition to the separation of the reagents/products;

- c) recovering the C₅ hydrocarbon/branched alcohol azeotropic product, in one or more fractionation columns, also catalytic, as head stream, side cut or bottom stream;
- d) recycling the stream containing the oxygenated products and possibly the reintegrated oxygenated products, to the two reaction steps;
- 10 e) possibly recycling part of the C₄ products to the first reaction step, in order to maximize the isobutene conversion.

The first reaction step can consist of one or more fixed bed, tubular and/or adiabatic reactors.

- 15 The separation of the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product of step (c) is preferably effected starting from blends:

- a) C₅ - oxygenated products - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol, as head effluent, using a scheme based on one or two fractionation columns;
- b) C₄ - C₅ - oxygenated products - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as side
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cut of a catalytic distillation column from whose head the C₄ products are recovered and at the bottom a blend containing the oxygenated products and the reaction product;

- 5 c) C₄ - C₅ - oxygenated products, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as the bottom effluent of a fractionation column from whose head the C₄ products are recovered.

10 When the oxygenated product is a branched alcohol in a mixture with linear alcohols and alkyl ethers, the process is preferably effected, in particular, with a molar ratio of oxygenated product/isobutene lower than 0.7, by means of the following essential steps:

- 15 a) feeding the C₄-C₅ hydrocarbon cut containing isobutene to the first reaction step (consisting of one or more reactors), together with one or more streams containing oxygenated products (linear and branched alcohols, ethers and water);
- 20 b) using a catalytic distillation column as second reaction step, wherein the isobutene conversion is completed, in addition to the separation of the reagents/products;
- 25 c) separating the C₄/linear alcohol azeotropic product and possibly C₄ products from the remaining oxygenated

- compounds and from the hydrocarbon product, in one or more distillation columns, also catalytic;
- d) recovering the linear alcohol from the azeotropic product with the C₄ compounds, by means of conventional processes such as water washing or adsorption on inorganic solids;
- e) recovering the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product, in one or more fractionation columns, also catalytic, as head stream, side cut or bottom stream;
- f) recycling the stream containing the oxygenated products (branched alcohol and ether) and possibly the re-integrated oxygenated products and recovered linear alcohol, to the two reaction steps;
- g) possibly recycling part of the C₄ products to the first reaction step, in order to maximize the isobutene conversion.

The first reaction step can consist of one or more adiabatic reactors, such as traditional, boiling point, expanded bed reactors.

The separation of the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product of step (e) is preferably effected starting from blends of:

- a) C₅ - oxygenated products (ethers and branched alcohols) - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the

branched alcohol, as head effluent, using a scheme based on one (recovery of the remaining oxygenated products as side cut) or two fractionation columns;

- 5 b) C_5 - oxygenated products (ethers and branched alcohols - dimers, in which the C_5 hydrocarbons are recovered as azeotropic product with the branched alcohol as head effluent of a fractionation column;
- 10 c) C_4 - C_5 - oxygenated products (ethers and linear and branched alcohols) - reaction product, effluent from a reaction step, wherein the C_5 hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as side cut of a fractionation column from whose head the C_4 /linear alcohol azeotropic product and possibly the C_4 products are recovered, whereas a mixture
- 15 containing the oxygenated products and the reaction product is recovered at the bottom;
- d) C_4 - C_5 - oxygenated products (linear and branched alcohols) wherein the C_5 hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as bottom effluent of a fractionation column from whose head
- 20 the C_4 /linear alcohol azeotropic product and possibly C_4 products are recovered.

For the two processes comprising the essential steps the C_5 /branched alcohol azeotropic product is mixed with the reaction product or specified above (a-e and a-g) the C_5 products are present

25 in the streams prevalently containing C_4 products in a

quantity preferably ranging from 0.5 to 10% by weight.

Seven process schemes are shown in figures 1-7, in order to clearly illustrate the present disclosure.

Figure 1 shows a process scheme with catalytic distillation, when C₅ products are not present in the charge and the oxygenated product is a branched alcohol (TBA).

The stream (1) containing isobutene, together with the reintegration feeding of TA (or possibly water) (2) and the recycled stream of oxygenated products (9), is sent to a first reaction step (R1), which can consist of one or more fixed bed reactors, in which the C₄ iso-olefin is selectively converted to dimers.

The effluent (4) from the first reaction step, is sent to a catalytic distillation (C1) in which the isobutene conversion is completed. A stream (5) essentially containing C₄ hydrocarbons is removed from the head of this column, whereas a stream (6) essentially containing the reaction product and the oxygenated compounds, is collected at the bottom.

This stream (6) is sent to a further separation column (C2) wherein a stream (8) is collected at the head, containing the dimers/TBA azeotropic product which is recycled to the two reaction steps (streams 9 and 10), whereas the reaction product (7) essentially consisting of dimers and trimers, is collected from the bottom.

The introduction of catalytic distillation allows a considerable simplification of the plant scheme, which is instead based on two reaction steps (fixed bed reactors) and three fractionation columns, as shown in figure 2.

5 When C₅ hydrocarbons are present in the charge, different plant configurations can be used to recover the C₅/TBA azeotropic product, depending on the quantity of C₅ products present and the required purity of the streams.

Figure 3 shows a possible process scheme which differs
10 from that of figure 1 due to the fact that the C₅/TBA azeotropic product (11) is recovered from the head of the column C2, which can possibly be joined to the reaction product, whereas the stream containing the oxygenated products to be recycled (TBA/dimers azeotropic product) is removed
15 from the column C2 as side cut (8).

The process scheme is more complex when a more efficient separation of the two C₅/TBA and dimers/TBA azeotropic products is to be effected, as a new fractionation column (C3) must be inserted, as shown in figure 4. In this new
20 scheme, the head stream of the column C2 (8) is sent to a new column (C3) wherein the C₅/TBA azeotropic product (11) is separated at the head and the dimers/TBA azeotropic product (12) which is recycled to the two reaction steps (streams 9 and 10), is separated at the bottom.

25 Alternatively, the C₅/TBA azeotropic product can be re-

covered as side cut (11) in the column reactor C1 (figure 5).

A further option, shown in figure 6, consists in sending this azeotropic product to the head stream of the catalytic distillation column together with the C₄ products and in using a new column (C3) to recover the C₅/TBA azeotropic product at the bottom (11) and C₄ products at the head (12).

Figure 7 shows a possible process scheme when a mixture of oxygenated products, consisting of alkyl ether (MTBE), linear alcohol (Methanol) and branched alcohol (TBA), is used. In this case, the stream (1) containing isobutene, together with the reintegration feeding of methanol and TBA (or water) (2) and the recycled streams of oxygenated products (MTBE and TBA) (9) and methanol (14), is sent to the first reaction step (R1), which can consist of one or more reactors, in which the C₄ iso-olefin is selectively converted to dimers.

The effluent (4) from the first reaction step is sent to catalytic distillation (C1), which represents the second reaction step, together, possibly, with the recycled streams of oxygenated products (10) and methanol (13). A stream (5) is collected from the head of this column, essentially containing C₄ hydrocarbons and methanol, which is fed to a unit for the recovery of the alcohol (MR) which

can consist, for example, of an adsorption system on molecular sieves, or a water washing column. In both cases, the alcohol recovered (12) can be sent back to the two reaction steps (streams 13 and 14), whereas the hydrocarbon stream (11) can be used in subsequent operations.

The bottom stream (6) of the column C1 is sent to a further separation column (C3) wherein a stream (15) containing the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product is collected at the head, a stream (8) essentially containing MTBE, TBA and dimers, as side cut, which is recycled to the two reaction steps (streams 9 and 10), whereas the reaction product (7), essentially consisting of dimers, trimers and small quantities of oligomers is recovered from the bottom.

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CLAIMS

1. Process for the production of high-octane hydrocarbon compounds by the selective dimerization of isobutene contained in a stream also containing C₅ hydrocarbons, characterized in that:
 - the reaction is carried out in two distinct steps,
 - a catalytic distillation is used as second step,
 - the reaction is carried out in the presence of oxygenated compounds selected from a branched alcohol alone or in a blend with linear alcohols and alkyl ethers, where branched alcohols form azeotropic mixtures with the C₅ hydrocarbons, in such a quantity as to have in the feeding, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol alone, a molar ratio of oxygenated compound/isobutene higher than 0.005, in the case of the presence of a branched alcohol in a blend, a molar ratio of oxygenated compound/isobutene higher than 0.01;
 - a C₅ hydrocarbons/branched alcohol azeotropic separation step is carried out.
2. The process according to claim 1, wherein the first reaction step is carried out at a reaction temperature ranging from 30 to 120°C, at a pressure lower than 5 MPa and feeding space velocities lower than 30 h⁻¹.
3. The process according to claim 2, wherein the feeding space velocities range from 1 to 15 h⁻¹.
4. The process according to claim 1, wherein the branched alcohol has a number of carbon atoms ranging from 4 to 7.
5. The process according to claim 4, wherein the branched alcohol is selected from tert-butyl alcohol or tert-amyl

alcohol.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein water is fed, which is capable of forming the branched alcohol by reacting with the tertiary olefin under the reaction conditions.

7. The process according to claim 1, wherein the linear alcohol has a number of carbon atoms ranging from 1 to 6.

8. The process according to claim 7, wherein the linear alcohol is selected from methanol and/or ethanol.

9. The process according to claim 1, wherein the alkyl ether has a number of carbon atoms ranging from 5 to 10.

10. The process according to claim 9, wherein the alkyl ether is selected from MTBE, ETBE, MSBE, ESBE, TAME, TAAE or mixtures thereof.

11. The process according to claim 1, wherein other C₄ and C₅ olefins also possibly present in the charge react to form high-octane products.

12. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxygenated compound is the branched alcohol alone, comprising the following steps:

a) feeding the C₄-C₅ hydrocarbon cut containing isobutene to the first reaction step (consisting of one or more reactors), together with one or more streams containing oxygenated compounds;

b) using a catalytic distillation column as second reac-

tion step, wherein the isobutene conversion is completed, in addition to the separation of the reagents/products;

c) recovering the C₅ hydrocarbon/branched alcohol azeotropic product, in one or more fractionation columns, also catalytic, as head stream, side cut or bottom stream;

d) recycling the stream containing the oxygenated compounds and possibly the reintegrated oxygenated compounds, to the two reaction steps;

e) possibly recycling part of the C₄ compounds to the first reaction step, in order to maximize the isobutene conversion.

13. The process according to claim 12, wherein the separation of the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product is effected starting from blends of:

- a. C₅ - oxygenated compounds - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol, as head effluent, using a scheme based on one or two fractionation columns;
- b. C₄ - C₅ - oxygenated compounds - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as side cut of a catalytic distillation column from whose head C₄ compounds are recovered and from the bottom a blend con-

taining the oxygenated compounds and the reaction product;

c) C₄ - C₅ - oxygenated compounds, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol, as bottom effluent of a fractionation column from whose head the C₄ compounds are recovered.

14. The process according to claim 12, wherein the first reaction step consists of one or more fixed bed, tubular and/or adiabatic reactors.

15. The process according to claim 12, wherein the molar ratio of oxygenated compound/isobutene is lower than 0.6.

16. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxygenated compound is the branched alcohol in a blend with linear alcohols and alkyl ethers, comprising the following essential steps:

- a) feeding the C₄-C₅ hydrocarbon cut containing isobutene to the first reaction step (consisting of one or more reactors), together with one or more streams containing oxygenated compounds (linear and branched alcohols, ethers and water);
- b) using a catalytic distillation column as second reaction step, wherein the isobutene conversion is completed in addition to the separation of the reagents/products;
- c) separating the C₄ compounds and C₄/linear alcohol azeo-

tropic product from the C₅ hydrocarbons, from the remaining oxygenated compounds and from the hydrocarbon product, in one or more distillation columns, also catalytic;

d) recovering the linear alcohol from the azeotropic product with the C₄ compounds, by means of conventional processes such as water washing or adsorption on inorganic solids;

e) recovering the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product, in one or more fractionation columns, also catalytic, as head stream, side cut or bottom stream;

f) recycling the stream containing the oxygenated products (branched alcohol and ether) and possibly the reintegrated oxygenated compounds and the linear alcohol recovered, to the two reaction steps;

g) possibly recycling part of the C₄ compounds to the first reaction step, on order to maximize the isobutene conversion.

17. The process according to claim 16, wherein the separation of the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product can be effected starting from blends of:

a) C₅ - oxygenated compounds (ethers and branched alcohols) - reaction product, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol, as head effluent, using a scheme

based on one (recovery of the remaining oxygenated products as side cut) or two fractionation columns;

b) C₅ - oxygenated compounds (ethers and branched alcohols) - dimers, in which the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic product with branched alcohol as head effluent of a fractionation column;

c) C₄-C₅ - oxygenated compounds (ethers and linear and branched alcohols) - reaction product, effluent from a reaction step, wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as side cut of a fractionation column from whose head the C₄/linear alcohol azeotropic product and possibly the C₄ compounds are recovered, whereas a mixture containing the oxygenated compounds and the reaction product is recovered at the bottom;

d) C₄-C₅ - oxygenated compounds (linear and branched alcohols) wherein the C₅ hydrocarbons are recovered as an azeotropic compound with the branched alcohol as bottom effluent of a fractionation column from whose head the azeotropic product C₄/linear alcohol and possibly C₄ compounds are recovered.

18. The process according to claim 16, wherein the first reaction step consists of one or more adiabatic reactors such as traditional, boiling point, expanded bed reactors.

19. The process according to claim 16, wherein the molar

ratio oxygenated compound/isobutene is lower than 0.7.

20. The process according to claim 12 or 16, wherein the C₅/branched alcohol azeotropic product is mixed with the reaction product.

21. The process according to claim 1, wherein, in the case of concentrated isobutene streams, the charge is diluted with C₄-C₇ hydrocarbons.