

DESCRIPTION

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR MELTING AND MOLDING METAL IN VACUUM ENVIRONMENT

5

Technical Field

The present invention generally relates to an apparatus and method for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment. More particularly, the present invention relates to an apparatus and method for melting and forming metal by casting and forging the metal in a vacuum environment.

Background Art

Casting or forging apparatuses for metal include a horizontal die casting machine, a vertical die casting machine, a squeeze casting machine, a low-pressure casting machine, a gravity die casting machine, and the like. These apparatuses melt metal in a melting furnace separately provided for a continuous process in the state in which the metal is openly exposed to air.

When metal is melted in the air, molten metal rapidly oxidizes through contact with the air, and at the same time, impurities intrude into the molten metal, thereby forming dross. Although the dross insignificantly reduces the contact of the molten metal with the air, the dross obstructs continuous

stirring during melting of the metal, thereby making it difficult to continuously supply high-quality molten metal.

In order to overcome this problem, apparatuses and methods for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment were proposed, examples of which include Korean Patent No. 10-1144770 "APPARATUS FOR MELTING LIGHT METAL IN VACUUM USING ELECTROMAGNETIC STIRRING AND VACUUM MELTING METHOD USING THE SAME", Korean Patent No. 10-1123645 "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR DIE CASTING LIGHT METAL IN VACUUM ENVIRONMENT", Korean Patent No. 10-1144767 "APPARATUS FOR MELTING LIGHT METAL IN VACUUM AND VACUUM MELTING METHOD USING THE SAME", Korean Patent No. 10-1013207 "APPARATUS FOR MELTING LIGHT METAL IN VACUUM AND VACUUM MELTING METHOD USING THE SAME", Korean Patent No. 10-0550144 "VACUUM DEVICE OF DIE CASTING APPARATUS", Korean Patent No. 10-0572589 "APPARATUS FOR FORGING MOLTEN METAL IN VERTICAL VACUUM", Korean Patent No. 10-0572581 "DIE CASTING APPARATUS UNDER VACUUM GRAVITY", Korean Patent No. 10-0572583 "PRODUCT FORMING METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR SQUEEZE CASTING MACHINE IN VERTICAL VACUUM", and the like.

20

Disclosure

Technical Problem

Accordingly, the present invention has been made keeping in mind the above problems occurring in the prior art, and an object of the present invention is to further improve an

25

apparatus and method for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment proposed in the related art that can realize a high-level vacuum environment using a simplified structure and melt and form metal in the high-level vacuum environment,
5 thereby producing high-quality precision metal products.

Technical Solution

In order to accomplish the above object, the present invention proposes forming metal by melting the metal within a
10 metal-forming apparatus and filling the molten metal into a mold cavity. The metal is melted and formed in a high-level vacuum environment that is created in the apparatus by drawing air from the apparatus in the state in which atmospheric air is prevented from entering the apparatus.

15

Advantageous Effects

The apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the invention can melt and form metal in a high-level vacuum environment formed therein. It is
20 therefore possible to prevent the properties of molten metal from changing through contact with the air. Debris produced during the process of forming metal is separately accumulated in a space formed in the rear of a pressing plunger. This can consequently prevent the debris from mixing into the metal,
25 thereby forming a high-quality precision metal product.

Description of Drawings

FIG. 1 is an exemplary view conceptually illustrating the schematic configuration of an apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an exemplary view illustrating the operation of loading metal by lowering a melting sleeve according to another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is an exemplary view illustrating a structure of cooling a pressing plunger applied to the present invention;

FIGS. 4 to 7 are exemplary views illustrating the process of melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment using the apparatus according to the present invention; and

FIGS. 8 to 11 are exemplary views conceptually illustrating the schematic configurations of apparatuses for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to other embodiments the present invention.

Mode for Invention

The present invention proposes an apparatus and method for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment in order to create a high-level vacuum environment within a metal-forming mold apparatus and melt and form metal in the high-level vacuum environment. The apparatus includes: a mold having a mold cavity for forming metal; a hollow melting sleeve

disposed below and communicating with the mold cavity, the melting sleeve melting the metal loaded therein; a pressing plunger, wherein the pressing plunger moves forwards within the melting sleeve to push and fill the molten metal into the mold
5 cavity. The interior of the melting sleeve and the interior of the mold cavity are maintained in a sealed state. A space communicating with the melting sleeve is formed in the rear of the pressing plunger such that atmospheric air is prevented from entering the space. The apparatus further includes an
10 exhaust unit that creates a vacuum within the space, the mold cavity, and the melting sleeve.

The present invention will now be described in greater detail with reference to FIGS. 1 to 11.

FIG. 1 is an exemplary view conceptually illustrating the
15 schematic configuration of an apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the present invention, FIG. 2 is an exemplary view illustrating the operation of loading metal by lowering a melting sleeve, and FIG. 3 is an exemplary view illustrating a structure of cooling
20 a pressing plunger applied to the present invention.

As illustrated in the drawings, the apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the present invention includes a mold 300 having a mold cavity 302, which is a space in which metal is formed, a melting
25 sleeve 400 that melts the metal, and a pressing plunger 500

pressing and filling the metal melted by the melting sleeve 400 into the mold 300.

The mold 300 is divided into a movable mold 320 and a fixed mold 340. When the movable mold 320 moves upwards, the mold cavity 302 is opened. Packing is disposed at an area in which the movable mold 320 adjoins the fixed mold 340, and serves to close the mold cavity 302 when the movable mold 320 adjoins the fixed mold 340.

The fixed mold 340 is fixedly disposed on top of a plate-shaped fixed platen 200 having a preset area. The fixed platen 200 is at a preset height from the bottom, supported on a body frame 100.

The movable mold 320 moves upwards and downwards along a tie bar 820, the lower end of which is fixedly erected on the fixed platen 200. A movable platen 800 is disposed on the tie bar 820, and the movable mold 320 is fixed to the movable platen 800. In response to the movable platen 800 moving upwards and downwards along the tie bar 820, the movable mold 320 moves upwards and downwards.

The upward and downward movement of the movable platen 800 is enabled by a mold opening/closing cylinder 900. The mold opening/closing cylinder 900 is fixed to a cylinder support 920 fixed to the upper end of the tie bar 820, and operates the movable platen 800 through the forward and backward movement of a cylinder rod 910.

The movable mold 320 is provided with an ejector plate 700 that removes a formed product out of the mold cavity 302. The ejector plate 700 has ejector pins 710 that extend to the mold cavity 302 through the movable mold 320. The ejector pins 710
5 can detach the product from the movable mold 320, the product being formed in the mold cavity 302, while moving forward.

The melting sleeve 400 is in the shape of a pipe having a hollow interior. In addition, the melting sleeve 400 may be formed of an insulator, such as a ceramic. The melting sleeve
10 400 has an induction heating coil 410 wound on the outer circumference thereof. The induction heating coil 410 can directly heat metal within the melting sleeve 400 by induction heating. The melting sleeve 400 is configured such that the melting sleeve 400 extends through the fixed platen 200, with
15 the upper end thereof adjoining the lower portion of the fixed mold 340. Thus, the interior of the melting sleeve 400 communicates with the mold cavity 302. Here, the packing must, of course, be disposed in order to close the area in which the melting sleeve 400 adjoins the underlying mold 300.

20 The melting sleeve 400 may be configured such that the melting sleeve 400 moves upwards and downwards as illustrated in FIG. 2. A sleeve support 460 is provided to support the lower end of the melting sleeve 400, and is configured such that the upward and downward movement of the upper end of the
25 sleeve support 460 following a support rod 470 fixed to the

fixed platen 200 causes the melting sleeve 400 to move upwards and downwards. According to this configuration, it is possible to load metal to be melted into the melting sleeve 400 by lowering the melting sleeve 400.

5 The lower end of the melting sleeve 400 is closed. The sleeve support 460 has a recess into which the lower end of the melting sleeve 400 can be fitted. The lower end of the melting sleeve 400 is stuck into the recess of the sleeve support 460. A hole communicating with the interior of the melting sleeve
10 400 extends through the sleeve support 460. As the lower end of this hole is closed, the lower end of the melting sleeve 400 is closed. Accordingly, in the state in which the upper end of the melting sleeve 400 adjoining the fixed mold 340 is closed, the melting sleeve 400 can be closed such that air does not
15 enter the interior of the melting sleeve 400.

It is preferable that the size of the hole be identical to the inner diameter of the melting sleeve 400, but this is not intended to be limiting.

The hole can be closed using a closing flange 480. The
20 closing flange 480 is fixed to close the lower end of the hole formed in the sleeve support 460. Here, a plunger rod 510, which will be described later, extends through the closing flange 480. The packing is disposed on the portion in which the sleeve support 460 adjoins the closing flange 480 and the
25 portion in which the plunger rod 510 extends through the

closing flange 480, thereby maximizing closing performance.

The pressing plunger 500 is in a piston shape that moves forwards and backwards within the melting sleeve 400. The pressing plunger 500 is disposed on the upper end of the
5 plunger rod 510 such that the pressing plunger 500 moves forwards and backwards. The plunger rod 510 can be connected to the cylinder rod by means of a coupling, the cylinder rod being moved forwards and backwards by a cylinder.

When metal loaded into the melting sleeve 400 melts, the
10 pressing plunger 500 moves forwards to push the molten metal into the mold cavity 302, thereby filling the mold cavity 302 with the molten metal. A space 402 having a preset volume is formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500. The space 402 is formed such that the pressing plunger 500 does not touch the
15 closing flange 480 even if the pressing plunger 500 moves backwards to the rearmost position. Metal debris dropping through the gap between the pressing plunger 500 and the inner wall surface of the melting sleeve 400 accumulates in the space 402 during the process of forming the metal. Consequently, the
20 metal debris does not mix into the metal that is being formed.

A cooling means is provided to cool the pressing plunger 500. For this, a cooling configuration as illustrated in FIG. 3 can be employed. According to the cooling configuration, both the interior of the plunger rod 510 and the interior of
25 the pressing plunger 500 are formed hollow, and a pipe extends

through the hollow interiors, such that coolant can be input through the pipe. However, this is not intended to be limiting, and any other means can be employed as required.

According to the present invention, an exhaust unit 600
5 for evacuating the interior of the above-described apparatus for forming metal is provided. The exhaust unit 600 draws air from the interior of the mold cavity 302, the interior of the melting sleeve 400, and the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500 through a plurality of exhaust pipes 610.
10 Since the mold cavity 302 and the melting sleeve 400 communicates with each other, the air is drawn from the interior of the mold cavity 302 and the interior of the melting sleeve 400 through one of the exhaust pipes 610 communicating with the mold cavity 302, and the air is drawn from the space
15 402 through the other one of the exhaust pipes 610 communicating with the space 402. Since air is simultaneously drawn in this manner, according to the present invention, it is possible to rapidly evacuate the interior of the apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment.

20 Since it is possible to completely close the interior of the apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the present invention as described above, metal is melted and formed in the state in which a high level of vacuum is created in the interior of the apparatus.
25 In addition, it is possible to collect metal debris by forming

the space 402 in the rear of the pressing plunger 500. It is therefore possible to repeat the operation of forming metal while preventing the metal debris from mixing into the metal.

Reference will now made to a process of melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment using the above-described apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to the present invention. FIGS. 4 to 7 are exemplary views illustrating the process of melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment using the apparatus according to the present invention.

First, metal to be melted is loaded into the melting sleeve 400. The mold cavity 302 is opened by moving upwards the movable mold 320 illustrated in FIG. 4, the interior of the mold cavity 302 is cleaned by blowing high-pressure air thereinto, and a releasing agent and a lubricant are subsequently injected thereinto. Afterwards, the pressing plunger 500 is moved upwards to a position slightly lower than the entrance of the melting sleeve 400, and the metal to be melted is placed on the pressing plunger 500. Since the pressing plunger 500 is moved upwards, it is possible to prevent the pressing plunger 500 from being damaged by softly placing the metal on the top surface of the pressing plunger 500.

Thereafter, as illustrated in FIG. 5, the pressing plunger 500 is moved downwards, and the loaded metal starts to be

heated. At the same time, the movable mold 320 is moved downwards and is assembled with the fixed mold 340, thereby closing the mold cavity 302. The pressing plunger 500 is moved downwards to a position in which electromagnetic induction
5 force is easily transferred to the metal. At the same time, air is drawn simultaneously from the mold cavity 302, the melting sleeve 400, and the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500 through the exhaust pipes 610 by operating the exhaust unit 600.

10 Since the air is drawn in this manner, there is no pressure difference or a very insignificant pressure difference between the interiors of the mold cavity 302 and the melting sleeve 400 and the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500. This consequently prevents metal debris including
15 impurities that would otherwise accumulate in the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500 from being sucked in the direction of the melting sleeve 400 through the gap between the inner wall surface of the melting sleeve 400 and the pressing plunger 500. Accordingly, the metal debris
20 including impurities is prevented from mixing into the metal that will be melted within the melting sleeve 400, thereby producing high-quality molten metal.

When the loaded metal is sufficiently heated to melt, as illustrated in FIG. 6, the pressing plunger 500 is moved
25 upwards, thereby filling the molten metal into the mold cavity

302. Afterwards, the molten metal is left to cool in this state for a preset time, such that a metal product is formed in the shape of the mold cavity 302.

When the cooling is completed, as illustrated in FIG. 7,
5 the movable mold 320 is moved upwards. At this time, the formed product is moved upwards, attached to the movable mold 320. The formed product is removed from the movable mold 320 through the ejector pins 710 by moving the pressing plunger 500 backwards and subsequently moving the ejector plate 700
10 downwards. Afterwards, the product is finished through a post treatment process, such as polishing or painting.

Metal is melted and formed by repeating the above-described process, during which metal debris dropping through the gap between the pressing plunger 500 and the inner wall
15 surface of the melting sleeve 400 accumulates in the space 402. Accordingly, the space 402 is periodically cleaned to remove the accumulated metal debris.

Reference will now made to a variety of embodiments according to the principle of the present invention. FIGS. 8
20 to 11 are exemplary views conceptually illustrating the schematic configurations of apparatuses for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment according to other embodiments the present invention.

In the state in which the mold 300 is assembled as
25 illustrated in FIG. 2, the melting sleeve 400 is moved

downwards to be separated from the mold 300, and metal to be melted is loaded into the melting sleeve 400. Afterwards, the melting sleeve 400 is moved upwards to be close to the mold 300. A high-level vacuum environment is created in the mold cavity 302, the melting sleeve 400, and the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500 by drawing air therefrom, and the metal is simultaneously heated. Afterwards, the pressing plunger 500 is moved upwards, thereby filling the molten metal into the mold cavity 302.

10 As illustrated in FIG. 8, the mold cavity 302 and the melting sleeve 400 are disposed upper and lower positions on a line inclined with respect to a horizon. That is, the line on which the mold cavity 302 and the melting sleeve 400 are disposed is inclined with respect to the horizon. This configuration is employed in order to fill molten metal along the inclined line into the mold cavity 302.

As illustrated in FIG. 9, a plurality of molting sleeves 400 is provided. Each of the plurality of melting sleeves 400 is provided with a pressing plunger 500. This configuration makes it possible to melt metal using the plurality of melting sleeves 400 and subsequently fill the molten metal into the mold cavity 302, thereby increasing the rate at which the metal is formed. In addition, when the size of a product to be formed is large, it is possible to simultaneously fill a greater amount of metal. Accordingly, a variety of products

20
25

can be conveniently formed.

As illustrated in FIG. 10, the space 402 formed in the rear of the pressing plunger 500 may be implemented as a bellows 420. The bellows 420 is in the shape of a corrugated pipe, with the upper end thereof being firmly and closely fastened to the sleeve support 460, and the lower end thereof being closed. The plunger rod 510 extends through the lower end of the bellows 420. Since the bellows 420 forms the space 402, the space 402 has a sufficient size able to contain a significant amount of metal debris. Since the bellows 420 expands and contracts in response to the plunger rod 510 moving upwards and downwards, the friction between the bellows 420 and the outer circumference of the plunger rod 510 can be minimized.

As illustrated in FIG. 11, the present invention is applicable to an apparatus for melting and forging metal in a vacuum environment. In this case, the movable mold 320 is provided with a punching part 322. When molten metal is moved upwards on the pressing plunger 500, the movable mold 320 moves downwards such that the punching part 322 forms the molten metal by applying pressure thereto. At this time, the pressing plunger 500 is subjected to a significant amount of pressure, which causes force of pushing the pressing plunger 500 backwards. A support block 520 is employed as a means for firmly supporting the pressing plunger 500.

For example, the plunger rod 510 can be connected to the

cylinder rod by means of a coupling, the cylinder rod being moved forwards and backwards by a cylinder, such that the plunger rod 510 can move forwards and backwards. The support block 520 has a U-shaped recess that supports the lower portion
5 of the coupling while covering the cylinder rod.

When metal is forged as above, the punching part 322 and the pressing plunger 500 may simultaneously press the molten metal.

CLAIMS

1. An apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment, comprising:

5 a mold having a mold cavity (302) for forming metal;

a hollow melting sleeve (400) disposed below and communicating with the mold cavity (302), the melting sleeve (400) melting the metal loaded thereinto;

a pressing plunger (500), wherein the pressing plunger
10 (500) is pushed by a plunger rod (510) to move forwards within the melting sleeve 400 such that the pressing plunger (500) pushes and fills the molten metal into the mold cavity (302);

wherein a space (402) communicating with the melting sleeve (400) is formed in a rear of the pressing plunger (500),
15 such that metal debris dropping through a gap between the pressing plunger (500) and an inner wall surface of the melting sleeve (400) accumulates in the space (402) during a process of forming the metal;

wherein an interior of the melting sleeve (400) and the
20 mold cavity (302) are maintained in a sealed state, and air is prevented from entering the space (402); and

an exhaust unit (600) having exhaust pipes (610) respectively communicating with the mold cavity (302) and the space (402), wherein the exhaust unit (600) draws air from the
25 mold cavity (302), the melting sleeve (400), and the space

(402).

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the mold cavity (302) and the melting sleeve (400) are disposed on upper and lower positions on a line inclined with respect to a horizon.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the melting sleeve (400) comprises a plurality of melting sleeves (400) each of which melts the metal, which is then filled into the mold cavity (302).

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the space (402) comprises a bellows (420).

15

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the melting sleeve (400) is provided separable from the mold (300), wherein the metal to be melted is loaded into the melting sleeve (400) in a state in which the melting sleeve (400) is separated from the mold (300).

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the movable mold (320) is provided with a punching part (322) that forges the molten metal by applying pressure thereto,
the apparatus further comprising a support block (520)

25

supporting the plunger rod (510), wherein a load is supported by the support block (520).

7. The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein, when the
5 punching part (322) applies pressure to the molten metal, the pressing plunger (500) moves upwards and applies pressure to the molten metal together with the punching part (322).

8. A method of melting and forming metal in a vacuum
10 environment, comprising:

preparing an apparatus for melting and forming metal in a vacuum environment, wherein the apparatus includes: a mold having a mold cavity (302) for forming metal; a hollow melting sleeve (400) disposed below and communicating with the mold
15 cavity (302), the melting sleeve (400) melting the metal loaded thereinto; a pressing plunger (500), wherein the pressing plunger (500) is pushed by a plunger rod (510) to move forwards within the melting sleeve 400 such that the pressing plunger (500) pushes and fills the molten metal into the mold cavity
20 (302); and a space (402) formed in a rear of the pressing plunger (500) to communicate with the melting sleeve (400), such that metal debris dropping through a gap between the pressing plunger (500) and an inner wall surface of the melting sleeve (400) accumulates in the space (402) during a process of
25 forming the metal;

loading the metal to be melted into the melting sleeve (400) by opening the melting sleeve (400);

assembling the mold (300) after completing the operation of loading the metal to be melted into the melting sleeve (400); and

creating a vacuum within the mold cavity (302), the melting sleeve (400), and the space (402) by simultaneously drawing air therefrom.

9. The method according to claim 8, wherein the metal to be melted into the melting sleeve (400) comprises moving the pressing plunger (500) forwards to a position close to an entrance of the melting sleeve (400), placing the metal to be melted on top of the pressing plunger (500), and moving the pressing plunger (500) backwards.