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Process for the carbonylation of ethylene

The invention relates to the carbonylation of ethylene using carbon monoxide.

The carbonylation of ethylene using carbon monoxide in the presence of an alcohol or water and a catalyst system comprising a Group VIII metal, e.g. palladium, and
5 a phosphine ligand, e.g. an alkyl phosphine, cycloalkyl phosphine, aryl phosphine, pyridyl phosphine or bidentate phosphine, has been described in numerous European patents and patent applications, e.g. EP-A-0055875, EP-A-04489472, EP-A-0106379, EP-A-0235864, EP-A-0274795, EP-A-0499329, EP-A-0386833, EP-A-0441447, EP-A-0489472, EP-A-0282142, EP-A-0227160, EP-A-0495547 and EP-A-0495548. In
10 particular, EP-A-0227160, EP-A-0495547 and EP-A-0495548 disclose that bidentate phosphine ligands provide catalyst systems which enable higher reaction rates to be achieved.

A problem with the previously disclosed catalyst systems is that, although relatively high reaction rates can be achieved, the catalyst dies off quickly which
15 necessitates the frequent replenishment of the catalyst and hence results in a process which is industrially unattractive.

WO 96/19434 discloses a particular group of bidentate phosphine compounds which can provide remarkably stable catalysts which require little or no replenishment and the use of such bidentate catalysts in a process for the carbonylation of ethylene with
20 carbon monoxide.

It has now been found that, when used in the process for the carbonylation of ethylene with carbon monoxide, the activity and life of catalyst systems based on such phosphine compounds are very sensitive to the relative amounts of ethylene and carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase of the reactor. This is counter to the common teaching in
25 the art which generally does not express any preference for the relative amounts of these reactants.

Surprisingly therefore, it has now been found that the activity and the life of the catalyst, when used in a liquid phase carbonylation process, can be significantly improved by using a high molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gas in contact with the
30 liquid phase.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a process for the carbonylation of ethylene in a liquid phase, which process comprises

(i) forming a gaseous phase from an ethylene feed stream and a carbon



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monoxide feed stream;

(ii) contacting the gaseous phase with a catalyst system within the liquid phase containing a source of hydroxyl groups, said catalyst system comprising palladium, or a compound thereof, and a phosphine ligand together with a source of anions; and

- 5 (iii) reacting the ethylene with the carbon monoxide in the presence of the source of hydroxyl groups and of the catalyst system

characterised in that the ethylene feed stream and carbon monoxide feed stream provide a molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase which is greater than 1:1.

- 10 The carbon monoxide may be used in the presence of other gases which are inert in the reaction. Examples of such gases include hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide and the noble gases such as argon.

The molar ratio of the ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase, hereinafter termed the gaseous phase molar ratio, is greater than 1:1, preferably at least
15 3:1, particularly at least 5:1, especially from 5:1 to 50:1 and particularly especially from 7:1 to 15:1. Operating the process of the present invention with a gaseous phase molar ratio of less than 5:1, particularly of less than 3:1 and especially of less than 1:1 leads to a rapid deterioration in the performance of the catalyst.

It is believed that an important factor that influences the life of the catalyst system
20 is the molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide dissolved in the liquid phase, herein after termed the liquid phase molar ratio. The liquid phase molar ratio may differ from the gaseous phase molar ratio due to the different solubilities of ethylene and carbon monoxide in the liquid phase. The solubilities of ethylene and carbon monoxide in the liquid phase are dependent on factors such as the temperature, pressure and composition
25 of the liquid phase. Consequently, in order to achieve the required liquid phase molar ratio, the gaseous phase molar ratio may need to be adjusted to compensate for such factors. Preferably, the gaseous phase molar ratio should be adjusted such that a liquid phase molar ratio of at least 5:1 is maintained.

The ratio of the number of moles of ethylene to the number of moles of carbon
30 monoxide fed to the reactor by the ethylene feed stream and carbon monoxide feed stream in order to maintain the desired molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase will depend on the reactor design. Where the gaseous phase is recycled

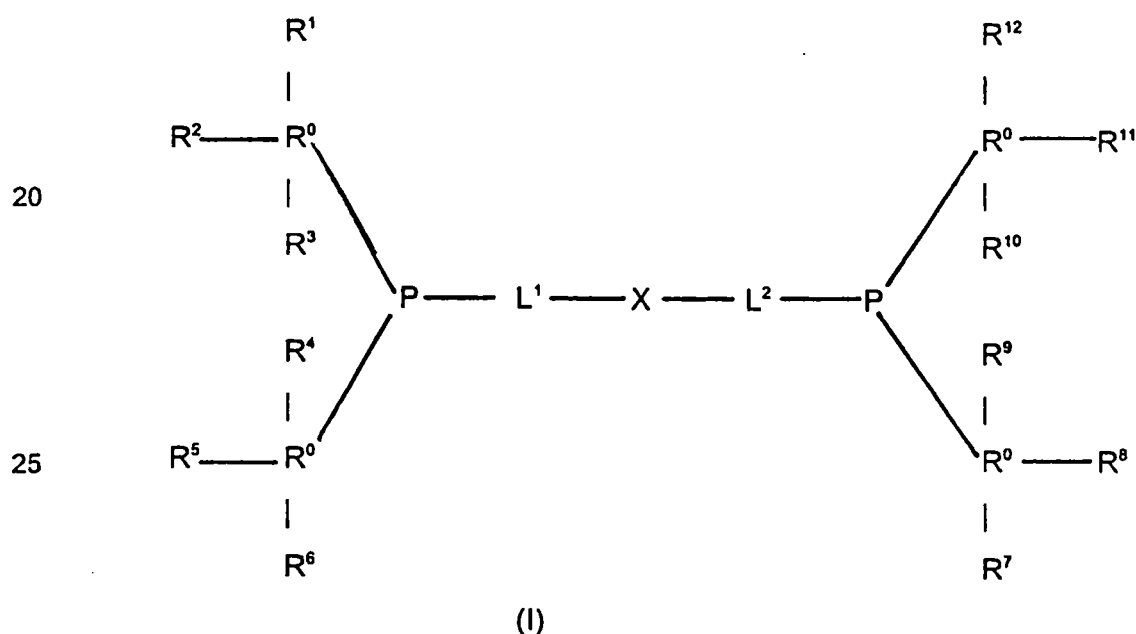
after contact with the liquid phase then the ethylene and carbon monoxide feed streams are used to replenish the ethylene and carbon monoxide consumed during the carbonylation reaction and the ethylene and carbon monoxide that is removed with any offtake from the liquid phase. Thus, the ratio of the number of moles of ethylene to the number of moles of carbon monoxide fed by the feed streams is approximately 1:1. Alternatively, where the gaseous phase is not fully recycled then the ratio of the number of moles of ethylene to the number of moles of carbon monoxide fed by the feed streams will more closely match the desired molar ratio in the gaseous phase.

The feeds of ethylene and carbon monoxide may be continuous, intermittent or batch. Preferably, the initial feed into the reactor is of ethylene. This further reduces the poisoning of the catalyst system by the carbon monoxide.

The process of the present invention is preferably carried out at a temperature from 20 to 250°C, in particular from 40 to 150°C and especially from 70 to 120°C.

The process may be conducted under a total pressure of from 1×10^5 to 100×10^5 N.m⁻² and in particular from 5×10^5 to 50×10^5 N.m⁻².

A preferred phosphine ligand is a bidentate phosphine of general formula (I)



wherein

R^0 is a tertiary carbon atom
each of $\text{R}^1, \text{R}^2, \text{R}^3, \text{R}^4, \text{R}^5, \text{R}^6, \text{R}^7, \text{R}^8, \text{R}^9, \text{R}^{10}, \text{R}^{11}$ and R^{12} is independently a

pendant optionally substituted organic group which carries a carbon atom through which the group is linked to the respective R^0 ;

each of L^1 and L^2 is independently a linking group selected from an optionally substituted lower alkylene chain connecting the respective phosphorus atom to the group
5 X; and

X is a bridging group comprising an optionally substituted aryl moiety to which the phosphorus atoms are linked on available adjacent carbon atoms.

The pendant optionally substituted organic groups of the preferred catalyst system, R^1 , R^2 ,
10 R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} , may be independently selected from a wide range of components. Preferably, the pendant groups are optionally substituted lower alkyl, e.g. C_{1-8} , and may be branched or linear.

Particularly preferred is when the organic groups, R^1 , R^2 , R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} , when associated with their respective R^0 carbon atom, form composite
15 groups which are at least as sterically hindering as t-butyl. Steric hindrance in this context is as discussed at page 14 et seq of "Homogeneous Transition Metal Catalysis - A Gentle Art", by C Masters, published by Chapman and Hall, 1981.

The linking groups, L^1 and L^2 , are independently selected from an optionally substituted, particularly lower alkyl or lower alkylene, e.g. C_1 to C_4 , chain. Especially
20 preferred is when both L^1 and L^2 are methylene.

The bridging group X is an aryl moiety, e.g. a phenyl group, which may be optionally substituted, provided that the two phosphorus atoms are linked to adjacent carbon atoms, e.g. at the 1 and 2 positions on the phenyl group. Optional substitution of the aryl moiety may be by other organic groups, e.g. alkyl, particularly C_{1-8} , aryl, alkoxy,
25 carbalkoxy, halo, nitro, trihalomethyl and cyano. Furthermore, the aryl moiety may be a fused polycyclic group, e.g. naphthalene, biphenylene or indene.

Examples of suitable bidentate ligands are α,α' -bis(di-t-butyl phosphino)-o-xylene (also known as 1,2-bis(di-t-butylphosphinomethyl)benzene), α,α' -bis(dineopentyl phosphino)-o-xylene and 2,3-bis(di-t-butylphosphinomethyl)naphthalene. Additionally, the
30 bidentate phosphine may be bonded to a suitable polymeric or inorganic substrate via at least one of the bridging group X, the linking group L^1 or the linking group L^2 , e.g. α,α' -bis(di-t-butyl phosphino)-o-xylene may be bonded via the xylene group to polystyrene to give an immobile heterogeneous catalyst.

Preferably, the bidentate ligand is present in an amount such that the ratio of the number of moles of the bidentate ligand present to the number of moles of palladium present is from 1 to 50, e.g. 1 to 10 and particularly from 1 to 5 mol per mol.

Suitable compounds of palladium include salts of palladium with, or compounds
5 comprising weakly co-ordinated anions derived from, nitric acid; sulphuric acid; lower alkanolic (up to C₁₂) acids such as acetic acid and propionic acid including halogenated carboxylic acids such as trifluoroacetic acid and trichloroacetic acid; sulfonic acids such as methanesulfonic acid, chlorosulfonic acid, fluorosulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, benzenesulfonic acid, naphthalene sulfonic acid, toluenesulfonic acids, e.g.
10 p-toluenesulfonic acid, t-butylsulfonic acid, and 2-hydroxypropanesulfonic acid; sulfonated ion exchange resins; perhalic acids such as perchloric acid; halogenated carboxylic acids such as trichloroacetic acid and trifluoroacetic acid; orthophosphoric acid; phosphonic acids such as benzenephosphonic acid; and acids derived from interactions between Lewis acids and Brønsted acids. Other sources which may provide suitable anions
15 include the optionally halogenated tetraphenyl borate derivatives, e.g. perfluorotetraphenyl borate. Additionally, zero-valent palladium complexes particularly those with labile ligands, e.g. triphenylphosphine or alkenes such as dibenzylideneacetone or styrene may be used.

The anion may be introduced as one or more of an acid having a pK_a measured
20 in aqueous solution of less than 4, a salt with a cation that does not interfere with the reaction, e.g. metal salts or largely organic salts such as alkyl ammonium, and a precursor, such as an ester, that can break down under reaction conditions to generate the anion in situ. Suitable acids and salts include the acids and salts, other than unsubstituted carboxylates, listed supra.

25 The quantity of anion present is not critical to the catalytic behaviour of the catalyst system. The molar ratio of anion to palladium may be from 1:1 to 500:1, preferably from 2:1 to 100:1 and particularly from 3:1 to 30:1. Where the anion is provided by a combination of acid and salt, the relative proportion of the acid and salt is not critical.

The catalyst system may be used homogeneously or heterogeneously. Preferably
30 the catalyst system is used homogeneously.

The catalyst system is preferably constituted in the liquid phase which may be formed by one or more of the reactants or by the use of a suitable solvent.

Suitable solvents that may be used in conjunction with the catalyst system include

one or more aprotic solvents such as ethers, e.g. diethyl ether, dimethyl ether of diethylene glycol, anisole and diphenyl ether; aromatic compounds, including halo variants of such compounds, e.g. benzene, toluene, ethyl benzene, o-xylene, m-xylene, p-xylene, chlorobenzene, o-dichlorobenzene, m-dichlorobenzene, and p-dichlorobenzene; alkanes, including halo variants of such compounds, e.g. hexane, heptane, 2, 2, 3-trimethylpentane, methylene chloride and carbon tetrachloride; nitriles, e.g. benzonitrile and acetonitrile; esters, e.g. methyl benzoate, methyl acetate, methyl propionate and dimethyl phthalate; sulfones, e.g. diethyl sulfone and tetrahydrothiophene 1, 1-dioxide; carboxylic acids, e.g. propionic acid. It is preferred to use as a solvent a compound which takes part in the reaction either as a reactant or a product, to minimise the number of different compounds present in the liquid phase to facilitate separation of the mixture. Therefore in the example when ethylene and carbon monoxide are carbonylated in the presence of methanol to form methyl propionate, a particularly suitable solvent is methyl propionate.

The end product of the reaction is determined at least in part by the source of hydroxyl groups that is used. The use of water gives rise to the corresponding carboxylic acid whereas the use of an alkanol leads to the corresponding ester. Suitable alkanols include C₁₋₃₀ alkanols, optionally substituted with one or more substituents such as halogen atoms, cyano, carbonyl, alkoxy or aryl groups. Suitable alkanols include one or more of methanol, ethanol, propanol, 2-propanol, 2-butanol, t-butyl alcohol and chlorocapryl alcohol. Particularly useful are methanol and ethanol. Additionally or alternatively, polyhydroxyl compounds, such as diols and sugars, may be used.

The molar ratio of the amount of ethylene used in the reaction to the amount of hydroxyl providing compound is not critical and may vary between wide limits, e.g. from 0.001:1 to 100:1 mol/mol in the liquid phase.

The process of the invention is particularly suitable for the production of methyl propionate. In one preferred embodiment therefore we provide a process for the production of methyl propionate comprising the steps of:

- (i) forming a gaseous phase from an ethylene feed stream and a carbon monoxide feed stream;
- (ii) contacting the gaseous phase with a catalyst system within a liquid phase comprising methanol, a solvent and a catalyst system comprising palladium, or a compound thereof, a phosphine ligand and a source of anions; and

(iii) reacting the ethylene with the carbon monoxide in the presence of the methanol and of the catalyst system;

characterised in that the ethylene feed stream and carbon monoxide feed stream provide a molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase which is
5 greater than 1:1.

Preferred catalyst systems are those described above. Preferably the solvent comprises methanol, methyl propionate or a mixture thereof.

The following Examples further illustrate the present invention.

Example 1

10 A reactant solution for a series of experiments was made up of Pd(L-L)dba (92 mg, 1.25×10^{-4} moles), where L-L is 1,2-bis(di-*t*-butylphosphinomethyl)benzene and dba is dibenzylideneacetone dissolved in methanol (100 mls, 2.47 moles) and methyl propionate (200 mls, 2.08 moles). Methanesulfonic acid was also added in various amounts as shown in the table below.

15 The reaction was conducted in a two-litre Hastelloy B2 autoclave. The autoclave was evacuated and then charged with the reactant solution, before being heated to 80 °C.

When at temperature, ethylene was added to the autoclave to the pressure given in the Table 1 whereupon carbon monoxide was added to make a total pressure of 10^6 N.m⁻². A reservoir of reactant gases containing a 1:1 molar ratio of ethylene to carbon
20 monoxide fed the autoclave via a regulator to maintain the operating pressure within the autoclave constant at a total pressure of 10^6 N.m⁻² (gauge), and to maintain the gaseous molar ratio in the head space above the liquid phase at that set by the initial admission of ethylene and carbon monoxide. The system was therefore operated in a semi-batch manner.

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Table 1

MeSO ₃ H (ml)	Ethylene (bar)	Carbon monoxide (bar)	Ethylene: Carbon Monoxide	Moles of Methyl Propionate after 180 Minutes
0.03	2.5	7.5	1:3	0.42
0.03	7.5	2.5	3:1	0.56
0.1	2.5	7.5	1:3	0.5
0.1	7.5	2.5	3:1	0.77

Example 2

A reactant solution was made up of Pd(L-L)dba (20 mg, 2.7×10^{-5} moles) dissolved in methanol (73 mls, 1.8 moles) and methyl propionate (27 mls, 0.28 moles) with a ten-fold molar excess (to palladium) of methanesulfonic acid (1.75×10^{-2} mls, 2.7×10^{-4} moles).

5 The experiments were conducted in a 300 ml stainless steel autoclave in a similar manner to that described in Example 1. The pressures of carbon monoxide and ethylene at which the reactor was charged before feeding the 1:1 molar mixture from the reservoir together with the amount of methyl propionate produced after 200 minutes is shown in Table 2.

10 It can be seen that increasing the ratio of the partial pressure of ethylene to the partial pressure of carbon monoxide generally increases the amount of methyl propionate produced at a given partial pressure of carbon monoxide.

Table 2

Ethylene (bar)	Carbon monoxide (bar)	Ratio of Ethylene to Carbon Monoxide	Moles of Methyl Propionate after 200 Minutes
10.1	0.5	20:1	0.42
9.5	0.6	16:1	0.45
9.7	3.3	3:1	0.34
9.5	6.3	1.5:1	0.23

Example 3

15 A reactant solution was made up of Pd(L-L)dba (37 mg, 5×10^{-5} moles) dissolved in methanol (219ml, 5.41moles) and methyl propionate (81ml, 0.841moles) with methanesulfonic acid (0.068ml, 1.05×10^{-3} moles) added.

The experiments were conducted in a two-litre stainless steel autoclave in a similar manner to that described in Example 1. The pressures of carbon monoxide and ethylene
 20 at which the reactor was charged before feeding the 1:1 molar mixture from the reservoir together with the mole fraction of the gases in the liquid and the amount of methyl propionate produced after 240 minutes is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Ethylene (barg)	CO (barg)	Mole Fraction ethylene in liquid	Mole Fraction CO in liquid	Moles of Methyl Propionate after 240 minutes
9	1	3.98×10^{-2}	7.1×10^{-4}	1.32
7	3	3.12×10^{-2}	2.14×10^{-4}	1.23
5	5	2.24×10^{-2}	3.59×10^{-4}	0.97
3	7	1.36×10^{-2}	5.06×10^{-4}	0.48
1	9	4.57×10^{-3}	6.56×10^{-4}	0.23

Example 4

The reaction was carried out in an agitated one-litre autoclave which was operated in a continuous manner. That is, the reactor was fed by separate supplies of carbon monoxide, ethylene and methanol and a dilute solution of the catalyst was also continuously added to the autoclave. The flow rate of the gases was controlled using mass flow controllers while both the methanol and catalyst solutions were fed to the solution by a calibrated Gilson pump. The level of liquid within the reactor was controlled at a constant level by a DP cell and any excess liquid (and the corresponding quantity of dissolved gas) was taken from the autoclave and flashed into a column. This column was also controlled to give a constant level within its reboiler. Hence, any excess liquid was purged from the top of the column while a solution containing the high boiling catalyst was recirculated to the reactor. The pressure within the reactor was maintained at a constant level by venting any excess gas, which was not consumed in the reaction or removed in the liquid flow to the column, from the head space of the autoclave. The composition of the reactor head space gas was monitored by on-line GC analysis.

The catalyst used, Pd[L-L].dba (as in Example 1), was continuously fed to the reactor as a dilute solution in methanol without exposure to air. The acid co-catalyst was methanesulfonic acid. A list of the other principal reaction parameters which were used is presented in Table 4.

The inlet ethylene and CO gas flows were varied during the experiment to vary the reactor headspace ratio. Table 5 gives the turnover number (i.e. the moles of methyl propionate produced per mole of catalyst fed at steady state) calculated at each headspace ethylene:CO ratio used.

Table 4

Autoclave Temperature	100°C
Autoclave Pressure	10barg
Agitator Speed	1000rpm
Recirculation Rate	5L/hr
Methanol Feed Rate	0.15L/hr
Catalyst Feed Rate	3×10^{-6} moles/hr
Molar ratio of acid : palladium in feed solution	20
Total Gas Flow into Reactor	200L/hr

Table 5

Reactor headspace ethylene/CO ratio	Turnover number (molesMeP/molePd)
0.72	40000
1.08	53333
1.8	60000
3.6	80000
7	88667

Claims

1. A process for the carbonylation of ethylene in a liquid phase which process comprises:-

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- (i) forming a gaseous phase from an ethylene feed stream and a carbon monoxide feed stream;
- (ii) contacting the gaseous phase with a catalyst system within the liquid phase containing a source of hydroxyl groups, said catalyst system comprising palladium, or a compound thereof, and a bidentate phosphine ligand together with a source of anions; and
- (iii) reacting the ethylene with the carbon monoxide in the presence of the source of hydroxyl groups and of the catalyst system;

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characterised in that the ethylene feed stream and carbon monoxide feed stream provide a molar ratio of ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase of the reactor which is greater than 1:1, and the anion is introduced as one or more of an acid having a pKa measured in aqueous solution of less than 4.

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2. A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of the ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase is at least 3:1.

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3. A process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the molar ratio of the ethylene to carbon monoxide in the gaseous phase is at least 5:1.

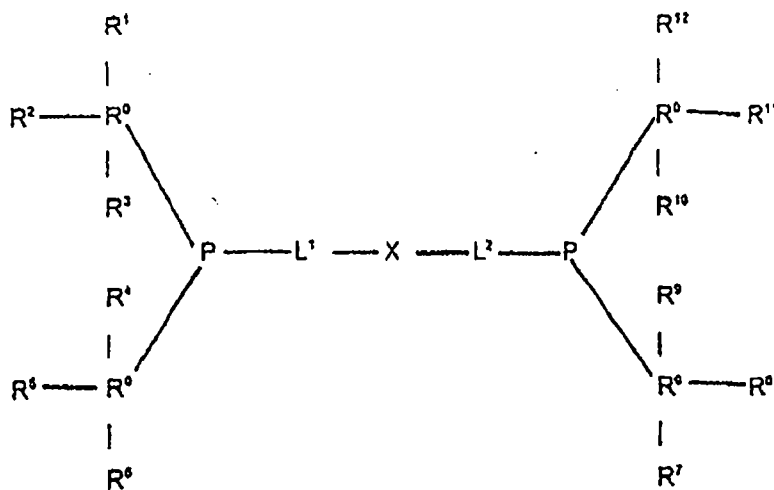
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4. A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of the ethylene to carbon monoxide in the liquid phase is at least 3:1.
5. A process as claimed in claim 4, wherein the molar ratio of the ethylene to carbon monoxide in the liquid phase is at least 5:1.
6. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the temperature at which the reaction is carried out is from 20 to 250°C.
7. A process as claimed in any of the preceding claims wherein said catalyst system comprises a combination of:

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(a) palladium or a compound thereof;

(b) a bidentate phosphine of general formula (I)



(I)

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wherein

R^0 is a tertiary carbon atom

each of R^1 , R^2 , R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11}

5 and R^{12} is independently a pendant optionally substituted organic group which carries a carbon atom through which the group is linked to the respective R^0 ; each of L^1 and L^2 is independently a linking group selected from an optionally substituted lower alkylene chain connecting the

10 respective phosphorus atom to the group X; and

X is a bridging group comprising an optionally substituted aryl moiety to which the phosphorus atoms are linked on available adjacent carbon

15 atoms; and

(c) an anion which is essentially non-coordinating to palladium ions and derivable from an acid with a pK_a measured in aqueous solution of less than 4.

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8. A process as claimed in claim 7, wherein the pendant optionally substituted organic groups, R^1 , R^2 , R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} are optionally substituted lower alkyl.

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9. A process as claimed in either claim 7 or claim 8, wherein the organic groups, R^1 , R^2 , R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} are associated with their respective R^0 carbon atom so as to form composite groups which are at least as sterically hindering as t-butyl.

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10. A process as claimed in any one of claims 7 to 9, wherein the linking groups, L^1 and L^2 , are methylene.

11. A process as claimed in claim 7, wherein the bidentate ligand is selected from α,α' -bis(di-t-butylphosphino)-oxylene, α,α' -bis(dineopentyl phosphino)-o-xylene and 2,3-
5 bis-(di-t-butylphosphinomethyl)naphthalene.

12. A process as claimed in any of claims 1-11 for the production of methyl propionate, wherein the source of hydroxyl groups is methanol and wherein a solvent forms
10 part of the said liquid phase.