

MOLDING A FLUID FLOW STRUCTURE

BACKGROUND

[0001] Each printhead die in an inkjet pen or print bar includes tiny channels that carry ink to the ejection chambers. Ink is distributed from the ink supply to the die channels through passages in a structure that supports the printhead die(s) on the pen or print bar. It may be desirable to shrink the size of each printhead die, for example to reduce the cost of the die and, accordingly, to reduce the cost of the pen or print bar. The use of smaller dies, however, can require changes to the larger structures that support the dies, including the passages that distribute ink to the dies.

DRAWINGS

[0002] Figs. 1-5 illustrate an inkjet print bar implementing one example of a new printhead flow structure.

[0003] Figs. 6-11 and 12-15 illustrate example processes for making a printhead flow structure such as might be used in the print bar shown in Figs. 1-5.

[0004] Figs. 16-21 illustrate one example of a wafer level process for making a print bar such as the print bar shown in Figs. 1-5.

[0005] Figs. 22-24 illustrate other examples of a new printhead flow structure.

[0006] Figs. 25-27 and 28-30 illustrate example processes for making a printhead flow structure such as those shown in Figs. 22-24.

[0007] The same part numbers designate the same or similar parts throughout the figures. The figures are not necessarily to scale. The relative size of some parts is exaggerated to more clearly illustrate the example shown.

DESCRIPTION

[0008] Inkjet printers that utilize a substrate wide print bar assembly have been developed to help increase printing speeds and reduce printing costs. Substrate wide print bar assemblies include multiple parts that carry printing fluid from the printing fluid supplies to the small printhead dies from which the printing fluid is ejected on to the paper or other print substrate. While reducing the size and spacing of the printhead dies continues to be important for reducing cost, channeling printing fluid from the larger supply components to ever smaller, more tightly spaced dies requires complex flow structures and fabrication processes that can actually increase cost.

A new process has been developed for making printhead fluid flow structures that help enable the use of smaller printhead dies in substrate wide inkjet printers. In one example, the new process includes forming fluid flow channels in a body of material surrounding multiple printhead dies such that one or more of the channels contacts a flow passage into each of the dies. In one implementation of this example, the channels are molded into the body simultaneously with molding the body around the dies using a transfer molding tool.

Examples of the new process are not limited to making printhead structures, but may be used to make other devices and for other fluid flow applications. Thus, in one example, the new process includes molding a micro device in a monolithic body of material and forming a fluid flow passage in the body through which fluid can pass directly to the micro device. The micro device, for example, could be an electronic device, a mechanical device, or a microelectromechanical system (MEMS) device. The fluid flow, for example, could be a cooling fluid flow into or onto the micro device or fluid flow into a printhead die or other fluid dispensing micro device.

[0009] These and other examples shown in the figures and described below illustrate but do not limit the invention, which is defined in the Claims following this Description.

[0010] As used in this document, a "micro device" means a device having one or more exterior dimensions less than or equal to 30mm; "thin" means a

thickness less than or equal to 650 μ m; a "sliver" means a thin micro device having a ratio of length to width (L/W) of at least three; a "printhead" and a "printhead die" mean that part of an inkjet printer or other inkjet type dispenser for dispensing fluid from one or more openings. A printhead includes one or more printhead dies. "Printhead" and "printhead die" are not limited to printing with ink and other printing fluids but also include inkjet type dispensing of other fluids and/or for uses other than printing.

[0011] Figs. 1-5 illustrate one example of a new, molded inkjet printhead structure 10. In this example, printhead structure 10 is configured as an elongated print bar such as might be used in a single pass substrate wide printer. Figs. 6-21 illustrate examples of a new process for making a print bar 10. Referring first to the plan view of Fig. 1, printheads 12 are embedded in an elongated, monolithic body 14 of plastic or other moldable material and arranged generally end to end in rows 16 in a staggered configuration in which the printheads in each row overlap another printhead in that row. A molded body 14 is also referred to herein as a molding 14. Although four rows 16 of staggered printheads 12 are shown, for printing four different colors for example, other suitable configurations are possible.

[0012] Fig. 2 is a section view taken along the line 2-2 in Fig. 1. Figs. 3 and 4 are detail views from Fig. 2 and Fig. 5 is a plan view diagram showing the layout of some of the features of printheads 12. Referring now to Figs. 1-5, in the example shown, each printhead 12 includes a single printhead die 18 with two rows of ejection chambers 20 and corresponding orifices 22 through which printing fluid is ejected from chambers 20. A channel 24 in molding 14 supplies printing fluid to each printhead die 18. Other suitable configurations for each printhead 12 are possible. For example, more or fewer printhead dies 18 may be used with more or fewer ejection chambers 20 and channels 24. Printing fluid flows into each ejection chamber 20 from a manifold 26 extending lengthwise along each die 18 between the two rows of ejection chambers 20. Printing fluid feeds into manifold 26 through multiple ports 28 that are connected to a printing fluid supply channel 24 at die surface 30.

[0013] The idealized representation of a printhead die 12 in Figs. 1-5 depicts three layers 32, 34, 36 for convenience only to clearly show ejection chambers 20, orifices 22, manifold 26, and ports 28. An actual inkjet printhead die 18 is a typically complex integrated circuit (IC) structure formed on a silicon substrate 32 with layers and elements not shown in Figs. 1-5. For example, a thermal ejector element or a piezoelectric ejector element formed (not shown) on substrate 32 at each ejection chamber 20 is actuated to eject drops or streams of ink or other printing fluid from orifices 22. Conductors 38 covered by a protective layer 40 and attached to electrical terminals 42 on substrate 32 carry electrical signals to ejector and/or other elements of printhead die 18.

[0014] Figs. 6-10 illustrate one example process for making a print bar 10 such as the one shown in Figs. 1-5. Fig. 11 is a flow diagram of the process illustrated in Figs. 6-10. Referring first to Fig. 6, a flex circuit 44 with conductive traces 38 and protective layer 40 is laminated on to a carrier 46 with a thermal release tape 48, or otherwise applied to carrier 46 (step 102 in Fig. 11). Flex circuit 44 may be applied, for example, as a sheet approximately the same size as carrier 46 or in strips connecting multiple dies 18 and bond pads 60 (bond pads 60 are shown in Figs. 16 and 21). As shown in Figs. 7 and 8, printhead dies 18 are placed orifice side down in openings 50 on carrier 46 (step 104 in Fig. 11) and conductors 38 bonded to electrical terminal 42 on dies 18 with solder, conductive adhesive, metal-to-metal compression bond or another suitable technique (step 106 in Fig. 11). In Fig. 9, a transfer molding tool 52 forms a monolithic body 14 around printhead dies 18 (step 108 in Fig. 11). In this example, channels 24 are molded into body 14. After molding, print bar 10 is released from carrier 46 (step 110 in Fig. 11) to form the completed part shown in Fig. 10, in which conductors 38 are covered by layer 40 and surrounded by molding 14.

[0015] Figs. 12-14 illustrate another example process for making a print bar 10. Fig. 15 is a flow diagram of the process illustrated in Figs. 12-14. Referring first to Fig. 12, printhead dies 18 have been placed on carrier 46 over flex circuit 44 as described above with reference to Figs. 6 and 7 (steps 112, 114 and 116 in Fig. 15) and a pre-molding form 54 is glued or otherwise affixed to the

backside of dies 18 in a pattern of the desired configuration for channels 24 (step 118 in Fig. 15). In Fig. 13, a transfer molding tool 52 forms a monolithic molding 56 around printhead dies 18 (step 120 in Fig. 15). In this example, the mold compound 55 flows into the gaps around dies 18 but is blocked from channels 24 by forms 54. Body 14 is thus formed by the combination of pre-molding form 54 and molding 56, with channels 24 defined by form 54. After molding, print bar 10 is released from carrier 46 (step 122 in Fig. 15) to form the completed part shown in Fig. 14.

[0016] Defining channels 24 with a pre-molding form 54 allows a simpler molding tool 52 and greater tolerances. Channels 24 in pre-molding form 54 may be considerably wider than ports 28 to allow for a significant misalignment tolerance for form 54 on dies 18. For example, for printing fluid ports 28 that are about 100µm wide, 300µm wide channels 24 allow pre-molding form misalignment up to 100µm without affecting the flow of printing fluid to ports 28. Form 54 may be an epoxy, polymer, stainless steel, printed circuit board laminate or another suitable body material.

[0017] Figs. 16-21 illustrate one example of a wafer level process for making multiple print bars 10. Referring to Fig. 16, printheads 12 are placed on a glass or other suitable carrier wafer 46 in a pattern of multiple print bars. A "wafer" is sometimes used in industry to denote a round substrate while a "panel" is used to denote a rectangular substrate. However, a "wafer" as used in this document includes any shape carrier. Also, although a carrier wafer is shown, a dicing ring with high temperature tape, a lead frame, or another suitable carrier may be used. Printheads 12 may be placed on to carrier 46 after first applying or forming a pattern of conductors 38 and die openings 50 as described above with reference to Fig. 6 and step 102 in Fig. 11.

[0018] In the example shown in Fig. 16, five sets 58 each having four rows of printheads 12 are laid out on carrier 46 to form five print bars. A substrate wide print bar for printing on Letter or A4 size substrates with four rows of printheads 12, for example, is about 230mm long and 16mm wide. Thus, five printhead sets 58 may be laid out on a single 270mm x 90mm carrier wafer 46 as shown in Fig. 16. Fig. 17 is a close-up section view of one set of four rows of

printheads 12 taken along the line 17-17 in Fig. 16. (Cross hatching is omitted in Fig. 17 for clarity.) In the example shown in Fig. 17, each printhead 12 includes a pair of printhead dies 18. Also, an array of conductors 38 extend to bond pads 60 near the edge of each row of printheads 12, as shown in Figs. 16 and 21. Fig. 18 shows the in-process wafer structure after molding body 14 with channels 24 around printhead dies 18. Individual print bar strips 58 are separated in Fig. 19 and released from carrier 46 in Fig. 20 to form five individual print bars 10.

[0019] Figs. 22-24 illustrate other examples of a new printhead structure 10. In these examples, channels 16 are molded in body 14 along each side of printhead die 12. Referring to Figs. 22-24, printing fluid flows from channels 24 through ports 28 laterally into each ejection chamber 20 directly from channels 24, as indicated by flow arrows 62 in Figs. 23 and 24. In the example of Fig. 23, a cover 64 is formed over orifice plate 36 to close channels 24. In the example of Fig. 24, orifice plate 36 is applied after molding body 14 to close channels 24.

[0020] Figs. 25-27 illustrate one example of a process for making the printhead structure 10 shown in Fig. 23. Referring to Fig. 25, printhead dies 18 are placed orifice side down on a carrier 46 and secured with a thermal release tape 48 or other suitable temporary adhesive. In Fig. 26 a transfer molding tool 52 forms a body 14 around printhead dies 18 and, after molding, printhead structure 10 is released from carrier 46 as shown in Fig. 27. In this example, partially formed channels 66 are molded into body 14. Cover 64 is applied to or formed on the in-process structure of Fig. 27 to complete channels 24, as shown in Fig. 23.

[0021] Figs. 28-30 illustrate one example of a process for making the printhead structure 10 shown in Fig. 24. In this example, and referring to Fig. 28, partially completed printhead dies 68 are placed on carrier 46 and secured with a temporary adhesive 48. In Fig. 29, transfer molding tool 52 forms a body 14 around partial printhead dies 68 with partially formed channels 66 (Fig. 30) molded into body 14. After molding, printhead structure 10 is released from carrier 46, as shown in Fig. 30, and then an orifice plate 36 is applied to or

formed on the in-process structure of Fig. 30 to complete channels 24 and dies 18 as shown in Fig. 24.

[0022] Molding flow structure 10 helps enable the use of long, narrow and very thin printhead dies 18. For example, it has been shown that a 100 μ m thick printhead die 18 that is 25mm long and 500 μ m wide can be molded into a 500 μ m thick body 14 to replace a conventional 500 μ m thick silicon printhead die. Not only is it cheaper and easier to mold channels 24 into body 14 compared to forming the feed channels in a silicon substrate, but it is also cheaper and easier to form printing fluid ports 28 in a thinner die 12. For example, ports 28 in a 100 μ m thick printhead die 12 may be formed by dry etching and other suitable micromachining techniques not practical for thicker substrates. Micromachining a high density array of through ports 28 in a thin silicon, glass or other substrate 32 rather than forming conventional slots leaves a stronger substrate while still providing adequate printing fluid flow. It is expected that current die handling equipment and micro device molding tools and techniques can adapted to mold dies 18 as thin as 50 μ m, with a length/width ratio up to 150, and to mold or otherwise form channels 24 as narrow as 30 μ m. And, the molding 14 provides an effective but inexpensive structure in which multiple rows of such die slivers can be supported in a single, monolithic body.

[0023] As noted at the beginning of this Description, the examples shown in the figures and described above illustrate but do not limit the invention. Other examples are possible. Therefore, the foregoing description should not be construed to limit the scope of the invention, which is defined in the following claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A process for making a print bar, comprising:
arranging multiple printhead die slivers on a carrier in a pattern for a print bar, each die sliver having an inlet through which fluid may enter the die sliver and a front with orifices through which fluid may be dispensed from the die sliver, and the die slivers arranged on the carrier with the front of each die sliver facing the carrier;
molding a body of material around each die sliver without covering the orifices on the front of the die sliver;
forming openings in the body at the inlets;
removing the die slivers from the carrier; and
separating groups of die slivers into print bars.
2. The process of Claim 1, further comprising:
applying a pattern of electrical conductors to the carrier;
connecting an electrical terminal on each die sliver to a conductor; and
molding the body around the conductors simultaneously with molding the body around each die sliver.
3. The process of Claim 1, wherein forming the openings comprises molding the openings into the body simultaneously with molding the body around each die sliver.
4. The process of Claim 1, wherein forming the openings comprises applying a pre-molding form to the die slivers in a pattern defining the openings and then molding the body of material around the die slivers.
5. The process of Claim 1, wherein molding the body comprises molding a monolithic body of material simultaneously around all of the die slivers.

6. The process of Claim 5, wherein molding the body simultaneously around each die sliver comprises transfer molding a monolithic body of material simultaneously around all of the die slivers.

7. The process of Claim 1, wherein removing the die slivers is performed after separating groups of die slivers into print bars.

8. A process for making a printhead structure, comprising forming fluid flow channels in a body of material surrounding multiple printhead dies such that one or more of the channels are along each side of the dies, the one or more channels contacts a lateral flow passage of the dies into each of the dies.

9. The process of Claim 8, wherein forming the channels in a body surrounding the die includes molding partially formed channels in the body simultaneously with molding the body around the dies and then covering the partially formed channels.

10. The process of Claim 9, wherein the printhead dies are partially completed printhead dies and covering the partially formed channels includes covering the partially formed channels with a printhead die orifice plate.

11. The process of Claim 8, wherein forming the channels in a body surrounding the die includes molding the channels into the body simultaneously with molding the body around the dies.

12. The process of Claim 8, wherein forming the channels in a body surrounding the dies includes applying a pre-molding form part of the body to the dies in a pattern defining the channels and then molding another part of the body around the dies.

13. A process for making a structure, the process comprising molding a device having exterior dimensions of less than or equal to 30mm in a monolithic body of material and forming a fluid flow passage in the body along a side of the device, the flow passage through which fluid can pass directly to a lateral flow port of the device.

14. The process of Claim 13, wherein forming the fluid flow passage in the body includes molding a partially formed fluid flow passage in the body and then covering the partially formed fluid flow passage.

15. The process of Claims 13 or 14, wherein the device comprises a printhead die sliver.

16. The process of any one of Claims 13 to 15, wherein the fluid flow passage is formed simultaneously with molding the device in the body.