ALLOY STEELS*

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Steel can broadly be defined as an alloy of iron and carbon that can be forged and rolled. From expediency and necessities of manufacture, certain impurities beneficial or otherwise are present, but not in sufficient amounts to materially alter the characteristics of the pure alloy of iron and carbon.

Under this definition, steel, or as it is now often referred to, carbon steel, is usually within the following maximum composition: Carbon, 1.50 per cent.; manganese, 1.00 per cent.; silicon, 0.35 per cent.; phosphorus, 0.05 per cent.; sulphur, 0.05 per cent.

An "alloy" steel is steel alloyed with one or more metals, in sufficient amounts to influence or change the characteristics of steel, and still possible of forging or rolling.

The usual steel alloying metals are manganese, silicon, nickel, chromium, tungsten and vanadium. As these metals will all alloy with each other, it is evident that it is possible to obtain a great variety of alloy steels.

Steel containing upwards of 1.50 per cent. manganese is not commonly considered an alloy steel, although this percentage of manganese undoubtedly has some effect on the characteristics of steel. This is due no doubt to the fact that manganese is always present in steel.

The alloy steels are usually divided into two groups: "ternary" steels, with one metal alloyed, and "quarternary" steels, with two metals alloyed. The more complex alloy steels are practically limited to high-speed tool steels.

The general characteristics of alloy steels are high elastic limit and great strength, combined with a high degree of toughness as compared with the carbon steel with which they are alloyed. The strength and hardness can be enormously increased by heat-treatment (quenching and tempering) and still have the steel retain great toughness.

Alloy steels are not as a rule placed in service in the condition as forged or rolled. The forging and rolling temperatures are usually so high that the steel requires heat-treatment to refine the grain and develop the exact combination of strength, hardness and toughness desired. It is frequently necessary to anneal after forging in order to facilitate machining operations. This, of course, necessitates subsequent heat- treatment.

Most of the alloy steels are of medium or low carbon content. The corresponding simple or carbon steels are only slightly or moderately improved in strength by heat-treatment.

The use of alloy steels in cutting tools dates back nearly a hundred years, although it was not until after 1850 or 1860 that alloy steels for this purpose became firmly established.

With the advent of iron clad warships began the struggle for supremacy between projectile and armor plate that has been so fruitful in the development of alloy steels. Chromium, nickel and nickel-chromium steels are largely the result of this struggle.

The publication in 1888 by Hadfield of the results of an extensive research of the alloys of manganese and steel, which resulted in the discovery of a remarkable new alloy steel, marks a period of active investigation into the effect of other metals on steel. The most important of these were the investigations on nickel steels by James Riley in 1889, which demonstrated that a mild open-hearth steel, such as used for structural, general forging and machinery purposes, when alloyed with 3 to 4 per cent. nickel had considerably higher elastic limit and tensile strength, with practically the same or greater ductility. One of the earliest and most extensive applications of nickel steel was for armor plate. For many years nickel steel was the principal alloy steel in use.

During this same period referred to, Hadfield made investigation of the effects of silicon on steel, and also a very complete study of chromium steels, which for some time had been used in a small way for springs and special forgings, but principally for tools and armor piercing projectiles.

The development of high-speed steel about 1900, making it possible to readily machine heat-treated alloy steels, and the advent of the automobile with its demand for superior steel, have brought about the present extensive use and development of alloy steels.

The automobile industry, with its demand for steel of high strength and durability, has been undoubtedly the most important factor in the development of commercial alloy steels, and the largest consumer. Alloy steels are used extensively for transmission gears and shafting, axles, steering levers and spindles, spring chassis frames, crank shaft, cam shaft, connecting rods, valves, and many other parts of automobiles.

They are also extensively employed in forgings for high-speed engines, marine engines, locomotives, electrical machinery, mining machinery and other mechanical engineering structures.

The use of alloy steels in bridge construction has been limited, but there is undoubtedly a field in long-span bridges for an alloy steel of high strength that can be used in the condition as rolled, preferably, or at most with a simple annealing.

Coincident and having a marked influence on the development of alloy steels, was the discovery of large deposits of vanadium ore in Peru, thus assuring a source of supply at a reasonable cost of this rare metal, which is the most powerful yet discovered for alloying with steel, that is, in small amounts.

The most important of the engineering or constructural alloy steels are those containing nickel, chromium and vanadium, singly or in combination. With all these steels it is possible, through heat-treatment, to obtain a tremendous range in strength, in round numbers varying from 100,000 to 250,000 pounds per square inch, depending also, of course, upon the size of the section.

It is not possible nor within the province of this paper to go deeply into the technology of alloy steels, but only to briefly describe the principal alloy steels and their characteristics.

Manganese Steel.—This steel usually contains 10 to 13 per cent. of manganese and approximately 1 per cent. of carbon. It is practically non-magnetic and has a peculiar hardness to which it owes a remarkable resistance to abrasion. It is extremely difficult to machine. It has high strength and toughness, but rela-

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