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Bevan, Adam, Jaiswal, Jay and Tucker, Gareth J.

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Deployment of Available Rail Steels to Reduce Life Cycle Costs

University of Huddersfield, Institute of Railway Research
Adam Bevan, Jay Jaiswal & Gareth Tucker
Background

• Previous research has focused on investigating vehicle-track characteristics to reduce wheel-rail forces
  – Less effort has been spent on increasing the *materials resistance* to the *imposed forces*

• EN13674-1 defines rail steels with varying hardness, but it is the microstructure that governs damage resistance
  – Rail manufacturers have also recently developed new steels which provide improved resistance to wear and RCF (e.g. HP335)

• Further research is required to understand the *reasons for these improvements* and to provide *guidance on the optimum deployment of rail steels*
Performance of rail steels

- EN13674-1 lists 9 rail steel grades in two categories:
  - **As-rolled**: derive their strength and hardness from the steel composition
  - **Heat treated**: derive their strength from steel composition and the heat treatment process
- Experimental testing undertaken to understand the performance of current rail steels

Despite lower hardness of HP335 wear resistance is similar to harder grades
HP rail shows greater RCF resistance than EN grades with equivalent hardness
To reduce whole life costs, **premium rail steels** should be **considered** for use in critical curves where **RCF** or **wear** causes the premature replacement of the rail.

**Application of HP rail steels**

- **Rolling Contact Fatigue**
- **Wear**

Used in moderate curves to preserve the ground rail profile and increase the **resistance to RCF**

Used in in tight radius curves to increase resistance to wear
**Microstructural characterisation**

- *Metallurgical examination* used to identify contribution of composition and microstructure parameters on wear and RCF resistance

  - Hardness of hypereutectoid steels through accelerated cooling
  - Influence of fragmentation of pearlitic cementite lamellae
  - Finer interlamellar spacing considered to have a second order influence
  - Steels alloyed with Silicon better resist dissolution of cementite and thereby improved RCF resistance
  - Vanadium alloyed steels showed better resistance to plastic deformation
  - Alloying with manganese considered beneficial for RCF resistance
  - Further data required to investigate volume fraction of cementite
Conclusions

• Project has made some key breakthroughs in understanding the influence of alloying elements and hardness on degradation of rail steel microstructures

• Damage susceptibility of track sections has been assessed to formulate guidelines for deployment of rail steels type

• Laboratory twin-disc facility has been developed for future testing of rail steels under more realistic contact conditions

• Further work proposed to undertake controlled testing and microstructural assessment to cover more rail steels
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