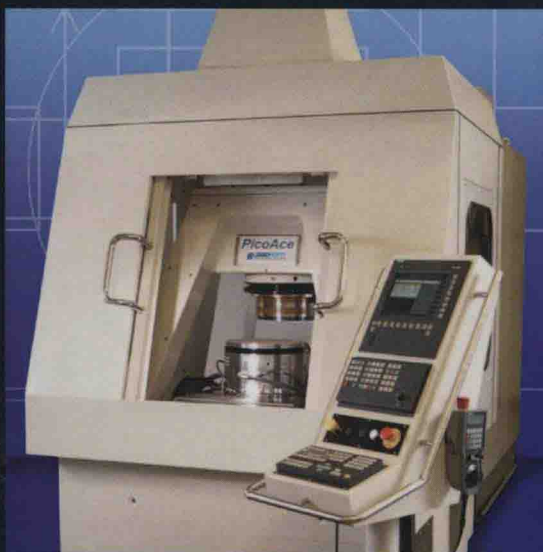


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Ultra-precision Bearings

Frank Wardle



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Preface

The material presented in this book is based on the author's past experience, initially in the ball bearing industry and later in the air bearing and machine tool industries. In developing high- and ultra-precision bearings and machinery it became clear there was very little in the way of guidance for machine designers needing to achieve extreme precision or low motion errors. Yet over the last four or five decades this has become an increasingly important aspect of performance relevant to a growing number of new bearing applications in the computer, electronics and optical industries.

Traditionally, books on bearings have tended to emphasise the load carrying capacity and/or life aspect of performance where the failure criteria are generally related to wear, fatigue or seizure mechanisms. In ultra precision machinery, running accuracy, stiffness, damping and heat generation are more relevant bearing performance parameters, and bearing life may be limited by deterioration in any of these. As a result, this book primarily aims to provide a basic understanding of the mechanisms upon which these parameters depend for a range of ultra precision bearing types. The mechanisms identify most, if not all, of the influencing variables and at worst, enable the machine designer to make an informed judgement about a particular design scenario. But in many cases the mechanisms are used to develop reasonably accurate analytical formulae that enable the bearing or machine performance to be determined and optimised at the design stage.

In real machinery the freedom to select or design bearings is usually restricted by practical constraints such as, for example, space, aspect ratio, ease of assembly and access. In addition, the bearing design process is often a compromise requiring a trade off between dissimilar parameters such as stiffness and heat generation. Thus, in many applications, the challenge is to find the most suitable bearing rather than a mathematically optimised design. For this reason the preferred approach, adopted in this book, is to provide the designer with a calculation that they can use for their situation rather than standardised design charts.

A running accuracy of $0.1\mu\text{m}$ peak-peak is used as a criterion to distinguish ultra precision bearings from other types. Effectively this limits the book to the rolling bearings – single-row radial and angular contact ball bearings; hydrostatic and aerostatic externally pressurised fluid film bearings; hydrodynamic and aerodynamic herringbone and spiral groove fluid film bearings. For the fluid film bearings, the analysis is focused on the simple geometries, circular or annular pad and cylindrical journal that are most easily manufactured to high precision and are hence most widely used. But the basic principles apply equally to conical and spherical bearing forms.

Encouragement to write the book has come from colleagues in the precision machining industry, friends and family, particular thanks go to Professor Eric Marsh of Penn State University for many helpful comments and suggestions. Acknowledgements also go to my son David, who has programmed many of the bearing calculations and my daughter Amanda who has helped with illustrations and diagrams. Last but not least is my wife Vivien, without whose patience and understanding, the book would not have been completed.

About the author

Frank has 40 years experience in an industrial research environment, gained in the ball bearing, air bearing and precision machine tool industries.

Twenty years was spent as a research manager in the ball bearing industry, focusing on the development of special purpose bearing products, such as silent running bearings for military applications, high speed bearings for aircraft engines and high precision bearings for machine tools. Reduction in bearing noise and motion errors resulted from wide ranging improvements to manufacturing processes and control over application conditions, where he gained first-hand experience of manufacturing machinery and test equipment alike. He was given a best paper award by the I. Mech. E in 1988, for his work on quiet running bearings and another best paper award by the I. Mech. E's Tribology Group in 1989, for pioneering the use of ceramic balls in machine tool bearings.

Twelve years was spent as Technical Director with Loadpoint Ltd, developing air bearing products, manufacturing processes and precision machinery. Air bearing developments covered both aerostatic and aerodynamic bearing types. The former was related to diamond turning, grinding and disc verification applications, where low motion error was an important requirement, whilst the latter was aimed at optical scanning applications. He developed a novel electrochemical micro-machining process to machine the helical and spiral grooves in aerodynamic bearings and in the mid-1990s this was used to support hydrodynamic bearing developments in the computer hard disc drive industry. The process is now widely used by the hard disc drive and medical industries for fluid film bearing manufacture. Machine tool developments included a diamond turning lathe and a silicon wafer grinding machine.

Frank started Ultraprecision Motion Ltd in 2006, continuing industrial research and development in machine tool systems. Developments to date include Ultramill, an ultra precision five-axis micro-milling machine, micro-recessed air bearings for improving the stiffness and accuracy of ultra precision machine tool slideways and rotary tables, and Tempconet, an intelligent and adaptable machine tool control system.



Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xix</i>
<i>About the author</i>	<i>xxi</i>
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Benefits of ultra precision bearings	1
1.2 A systems approach	5
1.3 Bearing motion error	7
1.4 Static stiffness	18
1.5 Damping	23
1.6 The bearing as a dynamic machine element	28
1.7 Thermal characteristics	31
1.8 Closure	34
1.9 References	34
1.10 Notation	34
2 Ball bearings	37
2.1 Scope	37
2.2 Bearing sections	40
2.3 Bearing arrangements	41
2.4 Bearing tolerances	44
2.5 Ring fits and mounting parameters	44
2.6 Ball bearing load–deflection characteristics	53
2.7 Static stiffness characteristics of ball bearings	67
2.8 Damping in ball bearings	79
2.9 Motion error	88
2.10 Power consumption and thermal distortion	113
2.11 Life and reliability	125

2.12	Closing remarks	128
2.13	Appendix 2A, Vibration forces generated by waviness on the rolling surfaces of thrust bearing ball bearings	128
2.14	References	141
2.15	Notation	144
3	Hydrostatic bearings	147
3.1	Introduction	147
3.2	Bearing description	149
3.3	Basic operating principles	150
3.4	Pocket geometries	152
3.5	Hydrostatic bearing arrangements	155
3.6	Types of compensation	157
3.7	Approximate load capacity and static stiffness	163
3.8	Oil flow through a narrow gap	164
3.9	Temperature dependence of oil viscosity	168
3.10	Bearing load and deflection characteristics	169
3.11	Damping	187
3.12	Motion error	201
3.13	Power consumption and heat generation	214
3.14	Reliability	222
3.15	References	222
3.16	Notation	223
4	Aerostatic bearings	227
4.1	Introduction	227
4.2	Bearing geometries and arrangements	229
4.3	Principle of operation	231
4.4	Types of compensation	233
4.5	Approximate load capacity and static stiffness	240
4.6	Load-deflection analysis	241
4.7	Mass flow rate of air through an orifice	256
4.8	Mass flow rate of air through a porous insert	262
4.9	Grooved and recessed bearings	265
4.10	Porous air bearings	267
4.11	Air bearing static stiffness characteristics	268

4.12 Damping and dynamic stability	271
4.13 Motion error	283
4.14 Thermal characteristics	298
4.15 Reliability	301
4.16 References	303
4.17 Notation	304
5 Hydrodynamic herringbone grooved and spiral grooved bearings	307
5.1 Introduction	308
5.2 Bearing types	309
5.3 Operating principles	314
5.4 Past developments	314
5.5 Load–deflection analysis of annular thrust bearings	317
5.6 Annular thrust bearing design examples	325
5.7 Radial load–deflection analysis of herringbone grooved journal bearings	332
5.8 Load capacity and static stiffness characteristics of herringbone grooved journal bearings	342
5.9 Damping and dynamic stability	345
5.10 Motion error	362
5.11 Thermal characteristics	375
5.12 Overview	380
5.13 References	380
5.14 Notation	382
6 Aerodynamic herringbone grooved and spiral grooved bearings	385
6.1 Introduction	385
6.2 Bearing types	387
6.3 Past developments	388
6.4 Static load capacity and stiffness of aerodynamic annular thrust bearings	390
6.5 Design example	391
6.6 Static load capacity and stiffness of aerodynamic herringbone grooved journal bearings	393
6.7 Example of static stiffness and load capacity	395

6.8 Damping and dynamic stability	398
6.9 Thermal characteristics	407
6.10 Overview	409
6.11 References	410
6.12 Notation	411
<i>Index</i>	413

List of figures and tables

Figures

1.1	Micro-milled upstand – 15 μm wide	4
1.2	Ultra precision bearing system	6
1.3	Effect of (a) synchronous, and (b) asynchronous motion error on surface form	9
1.4	Notation and components of motion error produced by rotating bearings	10
1.5	Measurement of ball bearing motion error	11
1.6	Total motion error	12
1.7	(a) Synchronous motion error; and (b) asynchronous motion error	13
1.8	(a) Fundamental error motion; and (b) residual synchronous error motion	15
1.9	Displacement time history and frequency analysis	16
1.10	Hypothetical bearing load-deflection characteristics	19
1.11	Notation and coordinate system used to define static stiffness	20
1.12	Deflections produced by radial load applied to preloaded ball bearing	21
1.13	Hydrodynamic bearing subject to radial load	21
1.14	Notation and coordinate system for linear bearings	23
1.15	Types of damping associated with bearings	24
1.16	Dynamic response of a bearing-shaft system	26
1.17	Effect of damping ratio on magnification factor	27
1.18	FEA of machine tool modes of vibration	30

1.19 Thermal distortion of machining spindle	32
1.20 Thermal model of bearing	33
2.1 (a) Single-row radial ball bearing; and (b) angular contact ball bearing	38
2.2 Sections available on precision angular contact bearings of nominally 50 mm pitch circle diameter	40
2.3 Example of single-row radial ball bearing arrangements	41
2.4 Popular angular contact ball bearing arrangements: (a) face-face; (b) back-back; (c) triple; and (d) quadruple bearing sets	42
2.5 Spring preloaded angular contact bearing arrangements	43
2.6 Example of shaft geometry and roughness parameters	50
2.7 Example of housing geometry and roughness parameters	52
2.8 Geometrical parameters	54
2.9 Rolling speeds	57
2.10 Contact geometry	60
2.11 Loads and deflections for a single ball	64
2.12 Relative approach of inner and outer rings	66
2.13 Relative ring movements for spring loaded controlled alignment bearing subject to axial and radial loads	70
2.14 Axial load-deflection characteristics of 7006 angular contact ball bearing	70
2.15 Dependence of bearing stiffness on preload for a 7006 angular contact ball bearing	71
2.16 Comparison of spring and springbox preloaded bearing arrangements	72
2.17 The effect of mounting on the radial stiffness of a preloaded 7006 15-degree angular contact ball bearing	73
2.18 Spring preloaded angular contact bearing mounted in a linear bearing	73
2.19 Back-back angular contact bearing preloaded with spacers	75
2.20 Radial load-deflection relationships for 2007 spring preloaded and back-back mounted bearings subject to 50 N preload	75

2.21 Angular stiffness of spring preloaded and back-back mounted 7006 angular contact bearing	76
2.22 Effect of bearing speed on stiffness for a 7006 15-degree angular contact bearing subject to 200 N axial preload	77
2.23 Force equilibrium of ball in a high-speed bearing	78
2.24 Sources of damping associated with precision ball bearings	80
2.25 Model of ball-race contacts	82
2.26 Axial damping coefficient for preloaded 7006 15-degree angular contact bearing	85
2.27 Experimental and theoretical radial load deflection curves for preloaded 7210 angular contact bearing	86
2.28 Ball bearing with imperfections on ball, inner and outer ring surfaces	90
2.29 Relationship between dynamic force and displacement	91
2.30 Arrangement for measuring bearing vibration	96
2.31 Spectral analysis of outer raceway surface	97
2.32 Comparison of measured and theoretical axial acceleration spectra	98
2.33 Examples of the effect of axial preload on the low frequency vibration of a single-row radial ball bearing	100
2.34 Suggested minimum axial preload to prevent cage instability in grease lubricated single-row radial ball bearings	101
2.35 Ball load distribution in a radially loaded ball bearing	102
2.36 Variable compliance vibration produced by radially loaded bearing	103
2.37 Variable compliance produced by axially preloaded ball bearing	104
2.38 Dynamic component of variable compliance force due to misalignment	104
2.39 Lobing, waviness and roughness of rolling surfaces	106
2.40 Example of ball load variation due to 2-point lobing	107
2.41 Dynamic force produced by 2-point lobing in a preloaded ball bearing	108

2.42	Effect of one large ball on bearing motion error	109
2.43	Effect of random ball size variation on motion error	109
2.44	Example of axial dynamic force due to waviness	110
2.45	Example of radial dynamic force due to waviness	110
2.46	Surface roughness in relation to a ball–raceway contact	112
2.47	Major sources of power loss in ball bearing	114
2.48	Typical lubricant traction characteristics	116
2.49	Characteristic effect of oil flow rate on torque and temperature	120
2.50	Bearing temperature and torque versus oil flow rate for air–oil lubrication	121
2.51	Characteristic temperature–time relationship for grease lubricated ball bearing	122
2.52	Thermally induced preload in a back–back bearing arrangement	123
2.53	Running temperature versus speed for the back–back arrangement of Figure 2.52	124
2.54	Thermal model of ball bearing	124
2A.1	Dynamic model of ball bearing	129
2A.2	Relationship between contact deformations and ball–raceway geometry	131
2A.3	Waviness model	132
3.1	Schematic arrangement of a hydrostatic bearing	149
3.2	Operating principle of a basic design of hydrostatic bearing	151
3.3	Circular pockets: (a) circular pad; (b) annular pad; (c) annular pad with radial lands; and (d) annular pad with radial lands and drainage channel	152
3.4	Rectangular pockets	153
3.5	Cylindrical journal pockets	154
3.6	Examples of hydrostatic bearing arrangements	156
3.7	Examples of fixed compensation elements	158
3.8	Example of constant flow rate compensation	159
3.9	Diaphragm compensation element	160
3.10	Diaphragm compensation element	161